EC/United States agreement: energy efficient labelling programmes for office equipment, Energy Star

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This is a Commission Report into the effect of the ENERGY STAR programme on office equipment sold in the EU. The ENERGY STAR programme is owned by the US EPA and is applied on a global basis. In 2000, the EU signed an “Agreement between the United States of America and the European Community on the coordination of energy-efficient labelling programs for office equipment”. The Agreement expires in June 2006.

The programme itself establishes a framework for fostering energy efficient office equipment. Mostly enacted through the co-ordination of labelling schemes, the ENERGY STAR programme allows manufacturers of office equipment to register their products voluntarily on the basis that their products comply with certain energy efficiency requirements as defined by the programme.

In this Report the Commission firstly examines current efforts to renew the technical specifications in the field of energy saving measures, secondly gives an overview of activities promoting the ENERGY STAR programme and thirdly summarises the results of discussions within the European Energy Star Board or ECESB.

The Report finds that there is a continuing need to promote and continue with the ENERGY STAR programme. The Commission, therefore, suggests that the Agreement be continued for a further five years. In summary, the Commission argues for a renewal of the Agreement based on the following findings:

- The efficient use of energy is vital for a sustainable EU energy supply.

- Office equipment accounts for a significant share of EU energy consumption. If current trends continue the increased use of office equipment for longer periods of time will require further energy saving measures.

- The ENERGY STAR programme provides a useful framework for the co-ordination of Member State and Community efforts to improve office equipment efficiency.

- The programme acts as a global platform for the co-ordination of international actions to improve office equipment energy gains in countries such as the USA, Japan, Korea and other key markets.

- The ENERGY STAR programme has the support of manufacturers. Indeed, in the USA any public procurement contracts must respect the technical specifications relating to the programme.

- The input of EU experts vis-à-vis technical specifications contributes towards the development of consistent and demanding standards.

- Rapid technological developments require voluntary, flexible instruments such as the ENERGY STAR programme as opposed to the use of compulsory provisions.

- The ENERGY STAR programme, and its database in particular, may be used by national, regional and local authorities for the promotion of energy efficient goals.

The ECESB held a meeting with the Commission in December 2005 at which it broadly supported the assessments and analysis laid out in this Report. Based on these findings it too endorses the principle of concluding a new Agreement with the USA.