

Article 2

The Council shall appoint at a later date the members not yet nominated from Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal.

Article 3

This Decision shall be published, for information, in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Done at Brussels, 6 March 2003.

For the Council

The President

D. REPPAS

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS**of 3 March 2003****on the promotion of entrepreneurship and small firms****(2003/C 64/04)**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

and the Council Conclusions of 30 September 2002 on simpler legislation;

1. RECALLING:

— the Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council on the strategy for making the EU the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion by 2010 and the further elaboration of this strategy by the Stockholm, Gothenburg and Barcelona European Councils;

— the European Charter for Small Enterprises, which calls for the creation of the best possible environment for small enterprises;

— the Maribor Declaration, which commits the candidate countries to implementing the European Charter for Small Enterprises;

— the Conclusions of the Barcelona European Council, inviting Member States to speed up the implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises and to learn from best practice, stating that the Council will meet before every Spring European Council to assess progress in creating a more favourable environment for entrepreneurship and the competitiveness of small enterprises;

— the Conclusions of the Seville European Council which welcomed the communications from the Commission on better lawmaking and, in particular, the Action Plan for simplifying and improving the regulatory environment;

— the Council Decision on a Multiannual Programme for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship, and in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (2001-2005) ⁽¹⁾;

— the Council Conclusions of 26 November 2002 on a more competitive environment for enterprises.

2. WELCOMES:

— the Green Paper 'Entrepreneurship in Europe';

— the 2003 Report from the Commission on the implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises;

— the Communication from the Commission 'Thinking small in an enlarging Europe' and related Staff Working Papers, which point to the need for providing a constantly improving environment for small businesses and exploiting the entrepreneurial potential in an enlarging Europe.

3. EMPHASISES:

— that the Green Paper on 'Entrepreneurship in Europe' is the starting point for an important, wide-ranging debate on the future of entrepreneurship policy;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 333, 29.12.2000, p. 84.

- the need for the European Union, in order to preserve its job creating potential, its competitive position and its economic future, to promote entrepreneurship, thus creating more new firms, making them grow and become more innovative and competitive. Particular attention should be paid to fostering women entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs in disadvantaged areas and socially excluded groups;
 - the need for a coordinated approach to entrepreneurship policy, that involves all relevant policy-makers at European, national and regional level, to provide a coherent and consistent response to the needs of entrepreneurs and that concentrates on three pillars for action:
 - bringing down barriers to business development and growth,
 - balancing the risks and rewards of entrepreneurship,
 - fostering a society that values entrepreneurship;
 - that learning from good practices can effectively improve Member States and candidate countries' small business policies;
 - the need to improve opportunities for small firms to express their concerns in policy and law making;
 - that education, in particular for the young, training and life-long learning can play a determinant role in fulfilling the Lisbon strategy, by promoting entrepreneurial culture, thus providing Europe with more successful entrepreneurs;
 - that reducing administrative burdens for small firms, improving legislation and facilitating access to finance, information and knowledge is of utmost importance to foster a favourable business environment;
 - that facilitating the transfer of business to new owners is essential, since one third of European enterprises will need successors in the next 10 years.
4. INVITES THE MEMBER STATES TO:
- actively consider the Green Paper 'Entrepreneurship in Europe' and formulate their responses as a positive contribution to furthering the entrepreneurship agenda in Europe;
 - speed up implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises and give strong consideration to good practices, in particular those identified in the course of the Best
- Procedure and the annual report on the Charter implementation; close performance gaps between different Member States; and include information in Member States' contribution to this report on the practical measures taken and envisaged as a consequence, in particular to:
- improve opportunities for small enterprises to express their concerns and opinions at all levels by developing consultation mechanisms, for example advisory/consultative groups to the government,
 - promote education in entrepreneurial skills at all stages of the educational cycle taking inspiration from good practices identified,
 - improve the quality of legislation, through the introduction of systematic regulatory impact assessment, taking into account national practices and legal systems,
 - further simplify and reduce the cost and time of company registration for start-up, in particular through on-line registration and building on other good practices,
 - improve access to risk and seed capital finance for small firms, such as guarantee schemes, venture capital funds and bank sector micro loans, in areas with financial market failures by increasingly focussing on incentives and risk-sharing,
 - stimulate innovation and technology transfer, through promoting cooperation between universities, research and development centres and institutes and small firms, also through the use of intermediaries,
 - remove barriers to the Internal Market by addressing the fragmentation of the internal market for services and complying with the targets set for transposing Directives and ensure that new barriers are not created by legal and administrative measures,
 - further develop quantitative and qualitative targets on a voluntary basis in Charter areas where Member States consider it relevant and with due consideration to structural differences.
5. INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:
- as a follow-up to the public debate on entrepreneurship policy propose an appropriate Action Plan on entrepreneurship by the end of 2003, taking full account of the reactions received and of existing instruments and programmes;

- establish projects, monitor developments and stimulate policy implementation, by applying the Best Procedure and other instruments, to help Member States improve their performance, in particular in the fields of:
 - better involvement and consultation of small businesses in policy and law making,
 - education and training for entrepreneurship,
 - improved access to risk and seed capital finance for small firms, such as guarantee schemes, venture capital funds and bank sector micro loans, to address financial market failures by increasingly focussing on incentives and risk-sharing,
 - innovation and technology transfer to small businesses,
 - small firms' access to the internal market, in particular with regard to services, as well as to international markets,
 - transfer of business;
 - provide the means for a continuous dialogue with small businesses, *inter alia*, through the activities of the SME Envoy, and to keep small and also medium-sized enterprises at the forefront of relevant Community policies;
 - continue progress on the effective implementation of the Action Plan for simplifying and improving the regulatory environment.
6. INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION TO:
- continue the work on a voluntary basis on quantitative and qualitative targets with the aim of further integrating their use in the implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises;
 - continue to involve candidate countries in the Charter process and to encourage them to exploit good practices and voluntary quantitative and qualitative targets as instruments to build up an enterprise culture;
 - strengthen the review of national developments by prioritising a selected number of Charter areas each year and, in the framework of the European Charter requirements, report on progress made in creating a more favourable environment for entrepreneurship and the competitiveness of small enterprises, using, *inter alia*, appropriate and effective indicators, in order to allow the Council, meeting before the Spring European Council, to assess progress over time and discuss future strategy on entrepreneurship and small firms policy;
 - continue and reinforce their work on identifying, benchmarking and exchanging best practices on entrepreneurship and in all areas of the Charter in a more coordinated and consistent approach, establishing synergies with other relevant Community and related international policies;
 - intensify diffusion of and discussions on small business policies in all areas of the Charter developed in the Member States by organising, from 2003 onwards, annual exchanges of experiences among Member States and by also giving consideration to the possibilities of organising, on a voluntary basis, peer reviews as a process of learning together.
-