

## COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

of 13 May 2003

## on 'adapting e-business policies in a changing environment'

(2003/C 149/03)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

efficient use of ICT, both in internal and external processes of companies.

## 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;
- previous Council conclusions and resolutions on entrepreneurship, ICT and e-business as factors for competitiveness, the impact of the e-economy on the competitiveness of European enterprises, a more competitive environment for enterprises, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and e-business skills in Europe, and the implementation of the 2005 eEurope Action Plan <sup>(1)</sup>;
- the conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council concerning enlargement;
- the conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 20 and 21 March 2003, which stressed the need for exchanging experience and best practice in the field of e-business.

## 2. NOTING THAT:

- the European Union and the Member States must fulfil their commitments to the timely and effective delivery of reforms across the three pillars of sustainable development — economic, social and environmental, all essential for the Lisbon strategy;
- coordinated actions in support of improved usage of information and communication technologies (ICT) in business processes are among the main elements for increasing EU performance in productivity growth;
- the policy focus is shifting from promoting e-commerce to a more holistic view of e-business, deepening the

## 3. WELCOMES:

- the Commission's communication on 'Adapting e-business policies in a changing environment: The lessons of the Go Digital initiative and the challenges ahead', calling upon Member States and regions to review their e-business strategies, notably in support of SMEs, to help them adapt to a continuously changing e-business environment, and to adopt voluntary e-business policy targets to accelerate the shift from e-commerce to e-business;
- the Commission's intention to set up a 'European e-business support network for SMEs' in order to bring together e-business policy makers at European, national and regional levels to foster the exchange of experience and information;
- the fact that the Commission, in line with the eEurope 2005 Action Plan, is reviewing, in close collaboration with the Member States and in liaison with business representatives, relevant legislation, with the aim of identifying and, where appropriate, removing factors that hinder e-business.

## 4. RECOGNISES THAT:

- widespread take-up and efficient use of ICT in all industries and services, notably SMEs, is critical for the competitiveness of the whole EU economy;
- SMEs face particular difficulties in integrating new technologies and reorganising their business processes, due, *inter alia*, to a lack of e-business knowledge, especially at managerial level, relatively higher ICT and human capital investment costs compared to larger enterprises and a lack of common e-business standards;
- SMEs differ in their e-business readiness across Member States, acceding countries, regions, and business sectors; and policy actions therefore should be based on sound economic analysis and a clear identification of the challenges to be addressed;

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 48, 28.2.2003, p. 2.

- advanced e-business policies should facilitate SMEs in taking full advantage of ICT in order to re-engineer, automate and streamline business processes;
- e-business policies, wherever appropriate, should be based on clear objectives and a mix of quantitative and/or qualitative targets in order to ensure that they meet the needs of SMEs and facilitate evaluation;
- efficiency of e-business policies would benefit from a better networking, exchange of experience and learning from good practices among Member States and regions;
- the overall e-business environment is changing constantly, setting new e-business policy challenges, such as:
  - to improve the managerial understanding and skills for e-business in SMEs;
  - to promote the availability of SME-friendly e-business solutions;
  - to facilitate effective participation of SMEs in electronic marketplaces and business networks.

#### 5. UNDERLINES:

- enterprises' own responsibility for implementing and adopting electronic business processes;
  - that economic growth can be increased through development of business-related e-government applications, *inter alia*, for public procurement;
  - that it is important to facilitate the re-orientation of e-business policies, thus responding to the changing needs of enterprises;
  - the need to assist SMEs, in particular, to identify e-business opportunities and to implement successfully their transformation towards e-business by reorganising their business processes in order to make efficient and productive use of ICT;
  - the importance of setting ambitious targets at policy level, to facilitate and promote restructuring towards the knowledge economy, as well as specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-related (SMART) targets at operational level, for specific SME policies in support of e-business;
- the need to foster dialogue and the exchange of good practice between policy makers in the area of e-business for SMEs;
  - the need to narrow and close the e-skills gaps and the need for inclusiveness of the entire available potential labour pool addressing in particular the severe under-representation of women and older employees in the ICT workforce.

#### 6. INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND ACCEDING COUNTRIES TO:

- further complete, on a voluntary basis, at general policy level, the Enterprise Policy Scoreboard, building upon the elements of the 'e-business index', as included in the list of eEurope 2005 benchmarking indicators;
- base specific e-business initiatives in favour of SMEs, at operational level, wherever appropriate, on clear quantitative and/or qualitative targets that serve to measure their practical impact;
- enhance the e-business skills by encouraging SMEs to participate in e-skills related training activities;
- make further efforts to stimulate networking and facilitate a constructive dialogue between SMEs and ICT service providers;
- further facilitate the take-up of ICT and e-business by SMEs, with special emphasis on cross border electronic transactions and a wider usage of broadband and the facilitation of electronic business processes;
- facilitate the participation of SMEs in Internet trading platforms and public electronic procurement by taking appropriate actions to raise awareness and trust in these new trading forms and by increasing the public sector usage of ICT and e-business;
- promote interoperable e-business solutions and e-payment services for cross border transactions, by supporting transnational interoperability test-beds, preferably based on open source software.

#### 7. INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:

- facilitate cross border electronic transactions by further supporting the development of European standards for interoperable e-business solutions and multilingual exchange of data and by improving legal information for enterprises through European portals;

- ensure the full implementation of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan, in particular with respect to the needs of SMEs and their broadband access and use;
  - report outcomes of the European e-business support network for SMEs on a regular basis to the eEurope Steering Group;
  - promote the development of SME-friendly ICT and e-business solutions, *inter alia*, by facilitating access of SMEs to the sixth RTD framework programme;
  - consider the possibility to establish an EU network for the information and support to women entrepreneurs in the ICT sector, and promote an EU level awareness initiative;
  - report to the Council by end 2004 on the progress made in the various initiatives to support e-business for SMEs
- and on remaining obstacles for using ICT and e-business services.
8. INVITES THE COMMISSION, MEMBER STATES AND ACCEDING COUNTRIES TO:
- further analyse and benchmark the progress made in the field of ICT and e-business, based upon the eEurope 2005 benchmarking indicators;
  - actively engage in the European e-business support network for SMEs, as part of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan, bringing together regional, national and European e-business initiatives, with a view to facilitating exchange of experience and agreeing, on a voluntary basis, future policy priorities and targets.

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## COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

of 13 May 2003

**‘European defence — industrial and market issues: towards an EU defence equipment policy’**

(2003/C 149/04)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

WELCOMES the communication of the Commission ‘Towards an EU defence equipment policy’ as a valuable contribution towards creating the necessary conditions for strengthening the industrial and market situation of European businesses, which are directly or indirectly connected with the defence equipment market, enhancing defence related research and improving international competitiveness of the industries concerned;

RECALLS that the Brussels European Council of 20-21 March 2003 recognised the role that defence and security-related R&D could play in promoting leading-edge technologies and thereby stimulating innovation and competitiveness;

RECOGNISES in particular the importance of putting in place arrangements, which could lead to greater cost-effectiveness, improved harmonisation of standards, and more efficient planning and procurement of defence equipment and RTD based on technological innovation;

NOTES the Commission's intention to further develop the initiatives identified in pursuit of these objectives and will examine the specific issues raised in the communication in the appropriate bodies of the Council; WELCOMES the Commission's identification of themes for further reflection and stresses the importance that this analysis takes into consideration the contribution that entrepreneurial researchers, start-ups or SMEs can make to the attainment of the Lisbon goals;

WELCOMES the intention of the Commission to present by the end of 2003 a further communication developing more fully its planned preparatory action on security-related research, with reference also to the longer-term perspective;

INVITES the Commission to report on progress made towards the achievement of the objectives set out above by the end of 2003.

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