

- 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.

## 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.