

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0407/04
by Hugues Martin (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: CRAFT Community programmes

Since the 1990s, the European Union has been financing so-called CRAFT projects through its successive Community R+D programmes. The purpose of these projects as to support the needs of SMEs in R+D, facilitate transnational cooperation between SMEs on R+D, and to encourage cooperation between SMEs and European research.

CRAFT has enabled many SMEs from throughout the European Union to come together to set up R+D projects. Hence its sheer importance.

However, now that Europe has embarked on a multi-annual programme in favour of companies, and particularly SMEs, with the particular goal of simplifying the legislative, administrative and financial measures which concern them, it appears that Europe itself no longer feels this burning obligation. The paperwork required to obtain European aid is more and more complex to handle, and once the submission has been accepted, payment takes a long time, which discourages SMEs. Such, accordingly to my information, is the case of CRAFT.

For that reason, even if strict rules are necessary in order for European funding to be agreed, could the Commission itself not make an effort to achieve administrative simplification, in collaboration with the SMEs, so that all Europe's SMEs can benefit from such programmes, whose importance requires no demonstration?

With particular regard to CRAFT:

- Would it not be possible for SMEs to obtain the relevant contracts from the Commission in their own languages, so as to avoid any doubts which may arise from unofficial translations, or the need to use a language which they are not fully cognisant with, even if the contract itself is signed in English?
- Would it not be possible to ask the research centres simply to put in their bills PROFORMA, and thus save themselves VAT problems?
- Could the Commission not commit itself to a maximum delay in paying-out of three months, since any longer period creates difficulties for the cash offices of SMEs?
- Would it not be reasonable to reduce the deadlines for signing by the Commission's lawyers to two months for adding possible riders?
- Finally, would it not be appropriate to redefine the role of the Scientific Officers as that of mediators, with the obligation to ensure that CRAFT rules are respected, but by helping the SMEs rather than cracking down on them?