**Marlene Mizzi (S&D).** – Mr President, SMEs account for 99% of all EU businesses and provide about two-thirds of employment in Europe. This makes them an indispensable sector in stabilising the European economy and creating jobs and growth in Europe. One of the biggest challenges SMEs encounter on a daily basis is that of difficult access to affordable finance. Unfortunately, the current instruments are insufficient and do not provide SMEs, especially micro and small enterprises, with the necessary means to finance investment.

We must put in place the right environment and create the right opportunities for our SMEs to thrive and invest in the future. Therefore, I support the report, which not only underlines the importance of better access to financing for SMEs but also highlights the need to simplify relevant administrative procedures for continuous information and training on projects, and stresses the crucial role of local government in the proper utilisation of EU funds.