COUNCIL RESOLUTION

of 6 February 2003

on corporate social responsibility

(2003/C 39/02)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING:

The Commission Green Paper on promoting a European framework for corporate social responsibility, which launched a consultation procedure on the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR);

The Council Resolution of 3 December 2001 on follow-up to the Commission's Green Paper [1], which recognised that CSR can contribute to reaching the objectives laid down by the European Councils in Lisbon, Nice and Göteborg for the European Union to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world fostering social integration and sustainable development;

The Commission Communication concerning corporate social responsibility: A business contribution to Sustainable Development, which constitutes a follow-up to the Green Paper;

Existing internationally agreed instruments, whose relevance to CSR was recognised in the above Resolution;

The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and the adopted plan of implementation according to which the international community should promote CSR, accountability and the exchange of best practices in the context of sustainable development.

WELCOMING the Communication from the Commission, including the Commission's view that a strategy to promote CSR should be based on:

— recognition of the voluntary nature of CSR,

— a need for credibility and transparency of CSR practices,

— a focus on activities where Community involvement adds value,

— a balanced and broad approach to CSR, including economic, social and environmental issues as well as consumer interests,

— attention to the specific needs and characteristics of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and

— support of, and compatibility with, existing internationally agreed instruments.

EMPHASISING that CSR is behaviour by businesses over and above legal requirements, which should continue to be properly enforced, and that:

— globalisation has created new opportunities for enterprises, but it has also increased their organisational complexity; therefore policies on CSR should focus not only on single undertakings, but also on their subsidiaries and subcontractors,

— the debate on CSR must be seen in the wider context of corporate governance and accountability,

— in order to be effective, CSR should be a part of a concerted effort by all those concerned towards meeting shared objectives, including social and civil dialogue in accordance with national law and practice,

— undertakings should address not only the external aspects of CSR, but also the internal aspects such as health and safety at work and management of human resources.

SUPPORTING the intentions of the Commission, in particular to focus its strategy on:

— increasing knowledge about the positive impact of CSR on business and societies in Europe and abroad, in particular in developing countries,

— developing exchange of experience and good practice on CSR between undertakings, including SMEs, in particular through business organisations and networks,

— promoting the development of CSR management skills,

— facilitating convergence and transparency of CSR practices and tools, which should, *inter alia*, build on the fundamental ILO Conventions and on the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, as minimum common standards of reference,

— integrating CSR into Community policies.

[1] OJ C 86, 10.4.2002, p. 3.

WELCOMING the launch of a Multi-Stakeholder Forum on CSR at EU level.

WELCOMING the commitment of the Commission to involve the candidate countries in the implementation of the EU strategy to promote CSR.

CALLS UPON the Commission and the organisations represented in the Multi-Stakeholder Forum:

— to continue to ensure the transparency and efficiency of the work of the Multi-Stakeholder Forum through regular reporting on their work,

— to make sure that the views of all relevant actors at European, national, regional and local level will be channelled into the work of the Multi-Stakeholder Forum,

— to make sure that any outcome of the work in the Multi-Stakeholder Forum, operating on the basis of consensus, takes fully into account and respects the abovementioned principles of CSR,

— to ensure that the Multi-Stakeholder Forum addresses the gender dimension in its work, and

— to continue to put an emphasis on how CSR can contribute to the objectives of the European Union as laid down particularly at the European Councils in Lisbon, Nice and Göteborg.

CALLS UPON the Commission:

— to take into account, when developing a European strategy on CSR, the goals and commitments agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, and

— to increase awareness about the valuable involvement of all those concerned, including social partners and civil society organisations, in practices of CSR at all levels.

CALLS UPON the Member States, while bearing in mind the principles of CSR outlined above:

— to promote CSR at national level in parallel with the development of a strategy at Community level, in particular by making companies aware of its benefits and highlighting the potential results from constructive cooperation between governments, business and other sectors of society,

— to continue to promote the dialogue with social partners and civil dialogue,

— to promote transparency of CSR practices and tools,

— to exchange information and experiences regarding their policies,

— to integrate CSR into national policies, and

— to integrate, where appropriate, CSR principles into their own management.

CALLS UPON future Presidencies:

— to continue to stimulate the debate on CSR and maintain the involvement of the Council in the Multi-Stakeholder Forum.