

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

This advice is a follow-up to the conclusion drawn by the European Heads of State and Governments at the EU Spring Council (March 2005) that Europe must regain its competitiveness. This conclusion was based on a process that began under the Dutch EU presidency to make a strong case for a Clean, Clever and Competitive Europe. At the invitation of the December 2004 Environmental Council, a broad circle of business and civil society stakeholders launched the process and agreed to name a small group of experts – the Eminent Persons Group – to synthesise the discussions and compile this advice to European leaders.

The advice closely examines the experience of entrepreneurs, innovators and other stakeholders in dealing with the challenges of competitiveness and the opportunities in sustainable development. It proposes a framework of policies and measures that will enable the European business community to enhance its competitiveness as well as progress towards sustainability at enterprise level and at the level of society and the economy.

Europe has an ambitious agenda for progress that provides direction and perspective for all actors in society. The European Spring Council (22-23 March 2005) relaunched the Lisbon Agenda, refocusing priorities on growth and employment. It stressed knowledge and innovation as vital engines of sustainable growth. It encouraged eco-innovation and environmental technology. The Commission and member states are called upon to implement the Environmental Technology Action Plan (ETAP) and advice on their progress in National Action Plans.

In June 2005 the European Council approved the Declaration on the Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development that fixes as key objectives a knowledge-rich, competitive and eco-efficient economy, and also defined 24 integrated Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPG). They give significant weight to eco-efficiency and eco-innovation, moving it to the core of EU economic policy. The Lisbon Agenda and the Gothenburg Agenda for Sustainable Development are thus closely related, which ensures the overall consistency of

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

the economic, social and environmental objectives of the European Union, shaping an “EU Agenda for Change” to be implemented at member state level in the first term through the National Reform Programmes already in place.

These objectives are expressed in a set of ambitious mid and long-term targets: first and foremost, targets that strengthen Europe’s social model, with 70% employment (among people aged 15-64), halving school abandonment and 3% of GDP in R&D investments; targets for decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation, halting the loss of biodiversity, obtaining 22% of electricity generation capacity from renewable sources and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 8% relative to 1990 levels, all by 2010.

Such ambitious targets point in a clear and consistent direction. Europe is competing with other powerful economies that have their own strategies for economic success. Getting a competitive edge by integrating its environmental and social goals should become Europe’s ‘trademark’. This requires a concerted effort by all European stakeholders – the Commission, the member states, European business and civil society organisations. This concerted effort is already embodied in the ETAP, the EU R&D Framework Programmes and the Competitiveness & Innovation Programme (CIP) and in many other initiatives and programmes at European, member state and regional level.

This effort is also the background of the dialogue that led representatives of the business community and NGO experts to make the following specific recommendations for accelerating a real market movement that ensures a Clean, Clever and Competitive Europe.

Eco-efficiency is an approach to production and consumption that creates more economic value while reducing the use of natural resources and ecological impacts. It bridges the seemingly opposite objectives of increasing economic growth and creating jobs and reducing pressure on limited environmental resources. This can be accomplished by avoiding compromises between opposite approaches (usually a zero-sum game) and finding new solutions beyond the opposites (a win-win situation).

Innovation is thus the operating mode of eco-efficiency. Water conservation, material recycling, energy saving, alternative fuels and energy sources have already impelled new technologies in Europe, new business ventures and economic benefits, and created more

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

quality of life for all. They fit needs that are rapidly becoming critical for all parts of the world and provide an improved quality label. For Europe this is a strong opportunity to define its competitive edge in relation to the United States, other industrialised nations and rapidly emerging markets like India and China.

Eco-efficiency is not related to the size of the enterprise. In many ways it is easier to implement in small systems, with few variables. Hence many eco-efficient innovations are first promoted by small companies or small teams within large organisations.

Potential profitability is a main driver for companies to invest. This also applies to investments in eco-efficient innovations. But, as desirable as it sounds, the move to eco-efficiency does not happen spontaneously. Enterprises and governments that have adopted a strategy for eco-efficiency have all found that progress cannot be made without appropriate promotion, pressure and incentives. They have also come to realise that the best-conceived innovations and eco-efficiency contributions will have little impact unless they succeed in the market place. There are several barriers to market introduction:

- the perception of reliability, risks and benefits in comparison with the familiarity of the mainstream products and services;
- the difficulty of raising venture capital and credit that gives innovators time to gain market share;
- the uncertainty about the development and stability of government policies on resource efficiency and environmental issues;
- the failure of the market to provide reliable economic values for most of the environmental advantages and resources protected by eco-efficient innovations.

While being fully aware that demand and supply are inseparable in a market system, the CCC initiative concentrates on the demand side to complement a number of European initiatives that are already in place or underway on the supply side. In fact, conditions that strengthen demand for eco-efficient innovation will also stimulate their supply “pipeline” and thus the effectiveness of those supply-side initiatives.

Competitiveness cannot be achieved spontaneously either. Nevertheless, measures that drive eco-efficient innovation can also enhance competitiveness. As they address barriers

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

and market failures, they will encourage and enable business to grab the opportunities offered by eco-efficient innovations and enhance Europe's competitiveness.

This advice sets out a number of recommendations for fostering economic value, job creation, energy and resource conservation, and environmental quality by stimulating the demand for eco-efficient products and services. However, the advice does not address all aspects of competitiveness. Each year several "scoreboards" (World Economic Forum, OECD, IMD World Competitiveness Centre, World Bank and the European Commission's Competitiveness Report) propose benchmarks for critical factors for innovation, competitiveness and business climate. They recognise the favourable position of most European member states but also point to the different situations and levels of progress among EU member states and the progress of other contenders for these top positions. Eco-efficient innovations are thus a window of opportunity for Europe to improve its overall competitive position, but urgent action is called for. This advice will focus on a policy process that can enhance the relevance and sophistication of Europe's competitive drive.

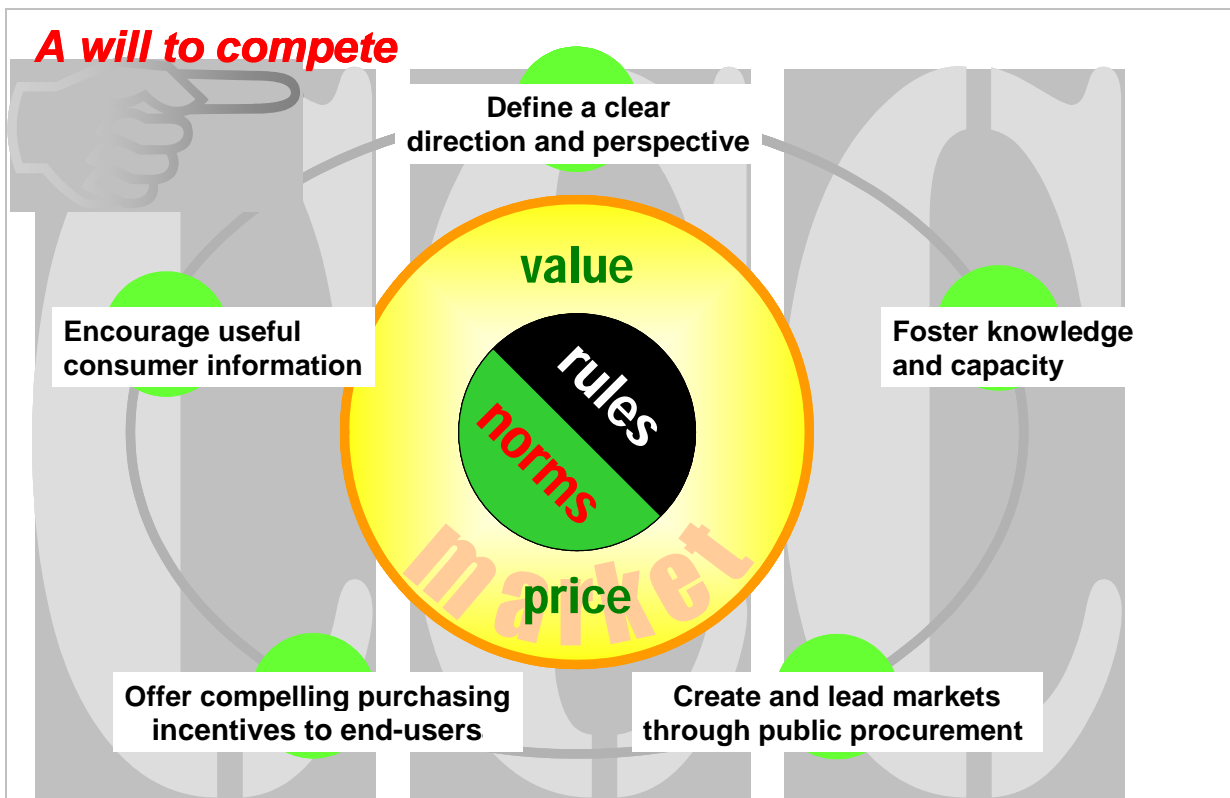
This advice therefore identifies five policies – five courses of actions for governments and public authorities – that will significantly improve Europe's competitiveness and the market prospects of eco-efficient innovations.

1. Define a clear and shared direction and perspective
2. Foster knowledge and capacity
3. Create and lead markets through public procurement
4. Offer compelling incentives to end users
5. Encourage useful consumer information

Much has already been studied and said about each of these policies. The point here is that all five must be implemented to accelerate progress. They are five elements of a continuous competitiveness improvement cycle.

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006



The competitiveness improvement cycle

The competitiveness of Europe's economy will not improve spontaneously. It requires a will to change and act as expressed in this set of five demand-side policies. Freedom is needed for innovation and the proposed policies rely largely on information, knowledge and economic signals that steer suppliers and buyers in the desired direction. Voluntary action can produce cost-effective solutions that legislators cannot imagine. Market-based action can efficiently spread and consolidate innovations.

However, voluntary action and markets alone cannot produce progress at the speed and scale required to meet long-term competitive or sustainability challenges. Governments must stay alert to this slackening of progress, address market imperfections and focus the market dynamics with economic incentives or bring in norms and smart regulations that help more suppliers and buyers catch up with the leading pioneers.

A competitive economy cannot allow laggards or short-term interests to define the market mainstream. It must provide medium and long-term perspective and objectives, clear signals and incentives, transition time and support facilities to point its participants towards its longer range objectives. No-one should lose out, unless they want to, but maintaining the

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

status quo is a risky option. Shaping a market framework for competitiveness and sustainability is ultimately a political responsibility. Yet politicians should also preserve and encourage a learning process that leaves space for bottom-up institutional, social, commercial and financial innovations in order to amplify the value of technological innovations.

The Competitiveness Improvement Cycle and its five policies form a model for a smart regulatory process that combines, on the one hand, the power of private sector initiatives, output-oriented incentives and learning processes with, on the other hand, the shaping of norms and regulations. This model will eventually add momentum to the policy objectives.

Define a clear and shared direction and perspective

It is a basic principle of management excellence: start with the end in mind. Defining perspectives helps enterprises to focus on innovation, reducing its risks and costs. In this respect the European Union and its member states have announced demanding plans for competitiveness, employment and resources efficiency. They have set greenhouse-gas emissions ceilings and a host of economic, social and environmental targets. Year after year the number of objectives increases as a function of Europe's complexity and ambitions.

Leadership is about declaring what comes first, making clear choices and creating broad support for them. Governments should therefore provide a perspective on first-order and second-order societal priorities. In this respect they should recognise, as the Clean, Clever and Competitive initiative does, the creative convergence and coherence of the priorities of competitiveness, job maintenance and creation, and resource efficiency. This convergence should remain a priority until tangible results can be seen. In the meantime, systematic recourse to benchmarks like the yearly Spring Progress Report of the Commission on the Lisbon agenda and the related National Reform Programmes will identify the policies and practices that are most effective.

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

The plan to establish a multi-sector stakeholders' panel under ETAP will be an important driver for eco-efficient innovation as long as it influences the Commission and member states on ETAP strategy and its implementation and helps to disseminate information about progress to the different actors.

The planned High-Level Working Group on Energy, Competitiveness and Environment should also take up the concept of eco-efficient innovation as a promising approach to the future challenges that face European industries and policymakers.

The European Union and its member states should promote initiatives where relevant stakeholders develop shared scenarios for different sectors, such as energy, water, housing and transport. This would bring certain modes of production and consumption to a new level of efficiency by using available innovations. Such scenarios should be qualified by science-based integrated impact assessments. Thus a large section of the domestic lighting market could show a four-fold energy efficiency improvement with existing compact fluorescent light bulbs and other state-of-the-art devices. Or existing combinations of heating and building innovations could be used to bring down the energy requirements of existing and new houses. Various reliable studies have shown that using existing technologies would lead to energy savings in buildings in excess of 25%. In developing a progress scenario starting from state-of-the-art eco-efficiency solutions, suppliers, users and public authorities could define the best portfolio of measures and actions to encourage a higher level of efficiency while creating markets, critical mass and competitive strength for Europe's recent innovative products and services.

The European Union and its member states must clarify the direction and perspective of a competitive, clever and clean Europe. Together with developers, suppliers and consumers they should develop shared scenarios for relevant sectors with specific ambitions and milestones and well defined roles and responsibilities for the different stakeholders.

Foster knowledge and capacity

Developers and buyers of innovative products and services need useful and timely information. A lot of information systems and networks are active in Europe. To some, it may seem like information overload, but for most there is still room to improve the organisation and dissemination of user-friendly information that is relevant and of direct use and that serves the overarching priorities of competitiveness and resource efficiency. A major problem is the lack of interaction between research & development institutions and industry (particularly SMEs), which could bring R&D to specific market applications. Another problem is the installation and service sector's lack of awareness and capacity. Solar thermal and photovoltaic panels could be used effectively to provide buildings with hot water and electricity in a large area of Europe. But the know-how must be passed along the chain of architects, plumbers and appliances distributors as a matter of routine; otherwise the innovation will continue to lose out to fuel, gas or electrical water heaters. The European Union and the member states should provide appropriate support to reinforce and accelerate two important processes:

1. The first process entails fostering the *opening up and dissemination of knowledge* and matchmaking between R&D institutions, diverse business sectors and public authorities. Exchange of experience and cross-fertilisation are proven innovation success factors. They cannot occur without workshops, technical conferences, newsletters, Internet sites or on-the-job training. For some, this will only add to the information overload. Yet this can be avoided by applying the "cluster" approach. This approach involves forming networks and even identifying real territories to concentrate a range of knowledge, development, design and manufacturing resources on the basis of an appropriate theme: bio-fuels and bio-chemicals, solar power, water conservation, etc. With these approaches, innovation can also be brought into traditional and mature industrial sectors. Europe already has a competitive position in many thematic areas and some Chambers of Commerce are fostering competitive innovation clusters. There are also European-scale networks of national intermediaries, such as the Innovation Relay Centres and the European Research Area Network. All could benefit from a shared search for improvements, starting with a systematic analysis of effectiveness in reaching clients and producing

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

results.

2. The *mobilisation of knowledge* is about shortening the time to market of new products and services as well as the feedback from market to suppliers. Professional organisations that can ensure information and training on designing, specifying, installing and servicing new applications are the best conduit for mobilising knowledge. But more needs to happen in this area. They should be operating as know-how transfer-channels between academic R&D and enterprises. They should also add information about cost savings to technical knowledge. Member states should foster the creation and development of such organisations as an important complement to the competitive innovation clusters. They should also move on the establishment of the European patent to expand the coverage and lower the cost of protecting industrial property, thereby facilitating the exchange of information between developers and buyers of know-how.

This is not an argument for new networks and institutions as such, but for more focused, streamlined and concerted action in and between existing institutions, networks and other initiatives. This will focus more effective attention on eco-efficient innovations, especially on the demand side of the markets.

The clusters and networks that actively disseminate and mobilise knowledge will also need to address two important constituencies that influence market access: banks and local permitting authorities. The availability of credit and the time it takes to obtain operating permits often deters potential users from using a new technology that is largely unknown to lay people. Trade promotion agencies should also actively support the export of eco-efficient innovations.

The European Union and its member states must foster more concerted action between information, training and matchmaking institutions and networks that can bring new developments to market and improve their effectiveness. They must move on a European patent and the creation of clusters of competences around important societal needs and innovation themes.

Create and lead markets through public procurement

Through public procurement, governments can trigger the market by playing the role of a launching customer. Public procurement agents often show a conservative bias in order to secure public money against the risk involved in new, innovative products or services. They tend to favour proven performance over potential improvements of performance. Innovative suppliers and small enterprises thus find it hard to compete for public tenders. The issue of Green Public Procurement is recognised and put forward in the European Technologies Action Plan (ETAP) and Integrated Product Policy as an important lever to stimulate innovation. Moreover, it is a straightforward sign of commitment by public authorities. Competitive bidding must therefore move to set purchasing objectives, targets and technical specifications for eco-efficient, innovative products and services. The public authorities should also enable European small businesses that match a minimum innovation and eco-efficiency profile to participate in the bidding process.

Public procurement is not concentrated in the hands of a single central organisation. It requires awareness and decisions from thousands of agents at all levels, from local authorities to government ministries all the way to the European Union head office itself. Information, knowledge and capacity building are therefore important and motivation through managerial support, directives and targets is essential. Progress and experience need to be shared throughout the network.

In the recent debates around Green Public Procurement, various interested parties have put forward some practical proposals:

1. Introduce a screening process that entails consulting with potential suppliers prior to tenders in order to understand progressive solutions and admitting them to the subsequent tendering procedure.
2. Apply life-cycle analysis in procurement to develop bidding specifications.
3. Set up accreditation schemes to facilitate tendering by SMEs. Their certification standards and qualification requirements should be set to measure technical competency with simple administrative procedures.
4. Set up a financial guarantee facility to secure pilot purchases of interesting

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

technologies without a proven record against possible performance failures.

5. Regularly benchmark progress towards green procurement by the Commission and the member states.
6. Publicise public procurement initiatives in order to influence private business-to-business procurement practices.

Most of these proposals have the capacity to generate opportunities for the business community and inspire it to move forward and review its procurement policies.

The European Commission and other public authorities at all levels must take the lead by pursuing public procurement objectives that favour eco-efficient and innovative products/services and secure market entry for innovative SMEs. This will encourage the business community to follow suit.

Offer compelling incentives to end users

Information and advertising alone seem only to move a small fraction of consumers towards innovative and eco-efficient products and services. Few such innovations are cost neutral, at least in the beginning before they benefit from economies of scale. Except for a fringe of innovation-seeking consumers and cost-conscious firms and public authorities, the majority of buyers seem reluctant to assess the price premium and substitution effort by performing a complete life-cycle costing analysis. If they did, they would often find that the innovative product is a good investment that would soon provide net savings. But the prevailing consumer rationale is short-term cash over a possible rate of return in the longer run.

Temporary financial incentives can therefore create larger market shares for innovations if they also provide fast compensation for the up-front cost premium or increase the cost of the status quo or result in a combination of both. Financing schemes can also lower the initial cost premium by incorporating the expected operational savings. Such temporary market

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

distortions are legitimate. They not only reduce the acquisition hurdle but they also secure the additional benefits of protecting common goods like clean air and water and healthy ecosystems. A fiscal framework that could help each market player calculate the value of environmental services is still far away but proxy directional signals can be designed.

Public authorities can opt to use the tax system to provide such economic signals:

1. lower VAT at point of purchase for small price signals;
2. tax rebate/credit for signals that exceed the VAT level – the procedure for recovery or payout must be simple to minimise transaction costs and waiting time;
3. additional tax levies on purchases and usages with a higher impact on environment and resource consumption;
4. tax incentives for green financing.

They could also introduce a voucher/levy combination that would offer a cash allowance for qualified resource-saving appliances before adding a levy on that resource. The beneficiaries could also pool vouchers or even collect cash based on their resource-saving strategy. Governments should announce such policies well in advance in order to allow manufacturers and service providers to adapt and plan new strategies for products and markets and educate consumers to fully understand the logic, mechanism and impact of the new model.

It is critical to provide incentives before penalties to clarify the positive side of the policy objective and to first focus on markets that are supported for the common good and phase out other usages over time. Companies, consumers and citizens should also get a sense that the budget for incentives is generally related to the income from penalties and helps the beneficiaries to anticipate and avoid future costs. Such measures should be presented as transitory campaigns to move the market to a higher level of efficiency and innovation. Feedback about practice, momentum and impact should be readily available and publicised.

The option of a community-wide levy could address the need to provide incentives to improve the eco-efficiency of large sectors like transport and energy, while at the same time providing resources for the European budget to foster eco-efficient innovation.

It is important to focus on large public-interest themes like making Europe the most energy efficient economy that generates a higher proportion of its energy from renewable sources

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

(with its collateral benefits for climate change, oil and gas dependency, air quality, etc.). Such themes can be proudly adopted by consumers, small and large enterprises, farmers and research institutions. They affect all aspects of our life and build on a host of European technological advantages. Potential successive themes are water conservation, healthy foods, recycling and natural resources and raw materials efficiency issues. Focusing on too many themes at the same time could be counterproductive.

Many sectors of industry have not been waiting to act with regard to energy efficiency, water conservation, resources and waste management. Good cost control, regulations, caps on greenhouse gases and the carbon trading scheme have already generated a response. Performance is growing in these sectors without the need, at this stage, to compound the pressure with additional financial instruments that would add to operating costs. It is preferable to address the technology lock-in factor of existing investments and help replace them with instruments like accelerated depreciation schemes or financing from green investment funds and increased availability of venture capital with government guarantee schemes. It is also important to tie in such support measures with full implementation of the auditing provisions of the Integrated Pollution Prevention Control (IPPC) directive in order to gain transparency about progress.

The EU and its member states must improve the comparative purchasing advantages of innovative products and services that also have tangible societal and environmental advantages. Incentive schemes should be phased out as beneficiaries succeed in establishing a market share and economies of scale.

Encourage useful consumer information

As price signals move consumers towards innovative systems in general they also need specific information to guide their key purchasing decisions. In fact, purchasing incentives can apply only to items that meet a desired performance profile. Transparency and specifics

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

about this performance are therefore necessary and their verification procedures must be reliable and also cover imported goods. In this respect, the EU energy labelling framework presents a number of advantages: it gives the explicit energy consumption in usage, a profile of several performance indicators and their rank from best to worst. It is, in fact, a competitiveness assessment that informs consumers about what to expect from their purchasing choice. It allows performance benchmarks to be set that will trigger public authorities to provide purchasing incentives in order to influence eco-efficient purchases.

Such a differentiated energy labelling scheme should be extended to all energy-consuming and energy-saving goods. It should also be regularly reviewed to integrate the more innovative solutions that enter the market. It can be adapted to support other resource-efficiency themes. It can also be used to warn against usage of strong impact products. Public agencies should hold regular marketing campaigns to promote consumer interest and efficiency in support of innovative products and services, in particular those under the European eco-labelling scheme.

Product information is important but performance also depends on consumers' usage style of the consumer and the system that surrounds that usage. A top-class heating system will be of little effect in a poorly insulated home with an obsolete temperature control system. Networks of local advisory offices (as already exists in several member states), help lines and internet portals should assist consumers in taking full advantage of the complete market offering and the incentive schemes available, whether they are contemplating a retrofitting project or an important appliance purchase.

The European Union and its member states must push for more coverage and relevant eco-efficiency consumer information within the product and services information schemes already in place.

Eco-efficiency and a competitive economy are key elements of Europe's continuing journey towards sustainable development. Sustainable development remains the agreed approach for promoting environmental, economic and social progress in the most effective way. There

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

are no short cuts and it is not a spontaneous process. It needs perspective, a shared will and common action.

The debate organised for a Clean, Clever and Competitive Europe has come to the conclusion that there is wide scope for action and improvements. An innovative Europe will not just prosper as a function of how it organises and funds research and development, but also at the pace that its innovators earn a return in the market.

The five policies that constitute the Competitiveness Improvement Cycle are therefore designed to stimulate market demand. But they will also indirectly stimulate the supply side as most entrepreneurs, researchers and venture capital investors continuously monitor demand signals to orient their activities. They will thus improve the effectiveness of the measures already undertaken on the supply side of the innovation market.

Clean Clever Competitive Advice of the Eminent People Group

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

The advice produced by the CCC Eminent Persons Group is the result of a thorough debate (on green procurement, fiscal reform and other economic instruments, for example) amongst its members, based on their own experience and the continuous feedback they received during the work process from the stakeholders and organisations who nominated them to this group. The advice is a consensus and represents the collective opinions and recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group.

While their respective organisations are under no obligation to endorse every single statement and proposal in this advice, they recognise it as a new basis of dialogue and a collective effort amongst themselves and with the European Commission.

The Eminent Persons Group

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**Clean Clever Competitive
Advice of the Eminent People Group**

Finalised consensus text 17 January 2006

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