Results of the European Council meeting (13-14 March 2008) - Lisbon Strategy

2008/2516(RSP) - 26/03/2008

At an extraordinary plenary session, MEPs, the Council and the Commission held a debate on the outcome of the last European Council of 13 and 14 March 2008.

Council: Slovenian Prime Minister, Janez Jansa, highlighted the launch of a more ambitious three-year cycle of the Lisbon Strategy, and established a timeframe for the adoption of an energy and climate change package. He also defined new measures to be taken to stabilise financial markets. The Council also insisted that the reforms implemented should give priority to knowledge and innovation, promote entrepreneurship and the modernise labour markets. The European Council confirmed three fundamental principles: economic performance and efficiency, solidarity and equality as regards burden sharing and transparency**.**

European Commission: the President of the Commission stressed the need for a common vision to meet citizens' expectations in an environment marked by problems in financial markets. He welcomed the roadmap adopted by the ECOFIN Council to improve the functioning of financial markets and the common European approach on sovereign wealth funds. He welcomed the new impetus given to the revised Lisbon Strategy which focuses on the fifth freedom of knowledge. He also highlighted legislative work in progress on climate change and renewable energy in the context of the Copenhagen conference which will open in early 2009. He pointed to three areas on which the Commission will make proposals by the summer: renewal of the social agenda, SMEs and the Euro-Mediterranean Union.

The positions expressed by the different political groups may be summarised as follows:

- **EPP**: the Group's president welcomed the new cycle of the Lisbon Strategy and the encouraging results in terms of employment, growth rates and reducing budget deficits. However, in view of the situation across the Atlantic, he warned Member States against the suspension of their reform policies. He asked that emphasis be placed on the free movement of researchers by removing barriers to mutual recognition of diplomas and modernising universities. He welcomed the idea of a Union of the Mediterranean to meet the challenges of development, migration and political stability and real peace in the Middle East.
- **PES**: recalling that growth remained fragile, the President of the Group stressed the importance of the social dimension. Likewise, he warned against the Council and Commission ignoring the European Parliament as none of the official documents submitted to the European Council came from the Parliament. On the issue of the climate challenge, he underlined the need to involve industry in the fight against climate change.
- **ALDE**: cautious of excessive optimism, the Group's representative regretted that the commitments made by the Member States had not led to concrete results. She called for urgent action on climate change and criticised the lack of substantial progress in the area of energy efficiency. She was in favour of green taxes to reduce CO2 emissions. She also regretted that the EU had not reached the 3% goal for research and development and the four freedoms had not yet been fully achieved in terms of free movement of people and services.
- **UEN**: as regards current threats to growth such as the US financial crisis, the vice President of the Group called for further investment in new innovation and technologies. He also stressed the need for social solidarity, so that economic growth may be beneficial to the greatest number of citizens.

- **Greens**: the group criticised the lack of ambition of the European Council as regards climate policy. In favour of a sustainable industrial development, the Group hoped for a debate on EU emissions trading.
- **GUE/NGL**: the Group emphasised the lack of success at the Summit and the weaknesses of various EU policies. He regretted the lack of ambition in terms of social objectives, whilst recalling that there are 70 million poor people in the EU.
- **IND/DEM**: the representative of the Group welcomed the ambitious proposals for legislation on climate change and called for a necessary consensus to found, which implies an agreement between the European Parliament and the Council, and avoiding a decision which requires unanimity. He expressed the hope that other legislative proposals would follow in this area and for the international community to address the issues.
- **NI**: the member who spoke said that the Summit conclusions did not address the real problems, such as over-taxation and the EU's inability to face up to the challenges of global competitiveness.

Lastly, Janez Janša, on behalf of the **Council**, stressed the need to implement an effective social policy. On climate change, he hoped that the EU would continue to lead the way but stressed that only a global commitment would lead to results. He also welcomed the establishment of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology recently approved by the European Parliament.

The President of the **Commission** asked not to under-estimate the results of the summit, given the difficulty of reaching a common ambitious policy on behalf of the 27 Member States in the area of climate change. He pointed to three areas on which the Commission will be focussing on during the summer: renewal of the social agenda, the small business act and the area of Mediterranean partnership.