EC/Switzerland Agreement: free movement of persons; accession of Croatia to the EU. Protocol

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted the report by Danuta JAZOWIECKA (EPP, PL) on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of a Protocol to the Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Swiss Confederation, of the other, on the free movement of persons, regarding the participation of Croatia as a Contracting Party, following its accession to the European Union.

The committee recommended the European Parliament to **give its consent** to the conclusion of the Protocol.

The Protocol provided that for a period of 7 years from the entry into force of the Protocol, Switzerland may limit the access of Croatian citizens into the labour market (quotas, priority to local workers, control of working conditions and wages).

Further provisions are laid down to enable Switzerland and Croatia to maintain the controls on the priority of workers integrated into the regular labour market and the wage and working conditions applicable to nationals of the other Contracting Party concerned.

Croatia should be entitled to introduce the same quantitative limits for Swiss nationals for the same periods. An important final safeguard clause states that at the end of the 7-year period of the Protocol, Switzerland shall have the opportunity for a further three years, to unilaterally activate the safeguard clause against Croatian citizens with a view to limiting the number of residence permits to allow them to work.

The total transition period with safeguard clause – if applicable – is thus of 10 years from the date of entry into force of the Protocol.

The committee recalled that Switzerland benefits comparably to the EU Member States from the internal market and its enlargements. It is beyond doubt that both Croatia and Switzerland will benefit from the signature of the present Protocol, politically, economically and culturally profiting from a larger internal market where the free movement is a crucial element.

Therefore, the committee supports the Protocol to the agreement and recommends it be given a consent.