Increased cooperation

2000/2162(INI) - 12/10/2000

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by José María GIL-ROBLES (EPP-ED, E) on closer cooperation. The report argued that closer cooperation should be further developed within the Union framework, while preserving a single institutional framework with the full participation of all MEPs and all members of the Commission. The Commission's right of initiative, full involvement by Parliament and judicial review by the Court of Justice should be the rule for all closer cooperation. The rapporteur also proposed that to the requirement that closer cooperation should only be used as a last resort be added a ban on using it in cases where the Treaties already provide for decisions to be taken by qualified majority voting (QMV). Common foreign and security policy, as well as defence policy, should be included in the scope of closer cooperation. In line with the resolution of 13 April, the report said a minimum of one third of Member States should be needed to embark on a closer cooperation procedure. However it pointed out that the more states take part, the better the guarantee that any such move was a response to a widely agreed need rather than being in the interests of a small group. As regards the procedure for starting a closer cooperation exercise, the committee wanted the right of veto currently available to any Member State to be abolished. The procedure for launching closer cooperation, like that for enabling any other state to join at a later stage, should be the same for all the pillars, namely: an initial proposal by the Commission, assent by Parliament and decision by the Council by QMV. The option of referring the decision to the European Council should be abolished, or else the need for a unanimous decision by the latter should be replaced by a QMV decision. The rapporteur added that any Member State must have the right to join an existing closer cooperation procedure at any time, and argued that the conditions for joining the procedure at a later date should therefore be laid down at the time the initial decision was taken. Lastly, the report said, where enlargement was concerned, the instrument of transitional arrangements should be used in preference to closer cooperation.