Reform of the Council

2001/2020(INI) - 13/09/2001

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Jacques POOS (PES, L) on the reform of the Council. It pointed to the many shortcomings in the way the Council operated, with its meetings behind closed doors and its increasingly complicated decision-making procedures. The committee felt that, pending the forthcoming constitutional process to be laid down by the Laeken Council, a first stage of reform was needed (albeit without amending the Treaties) to make sure that the Council functioned smoothly and to ensure sound governance of the Union, in particular after enlargement. The report said that, while the role of political guidance assigned to the European Council was essential to the progress of the Union, this role was called into question by the excessive expansion of its agenda. It was necessary to reassess the role of the General Affairs Council in particular in order to ensure the coherence of decisions and the proper coordination of the various EU policies. The committee argued that the General Affairs Council should meet more frequently (on a weekly basis) and that the excessive number of sectoral formations of the Council should be redistributed within a limited number of specialised Councils which would pave the way for formal decision-making but would not be able to take legislative decisions themselves. It was also necessary to reduce the number of Council committees, which were a source of bureaucratic delay, and delegate to the Commission more often. MEPs also wanted the Council to comply with the rules relating to its quorum and ensure that the majority of ministers were present for votes on legislative procedures. A further recommendation was that the Council should be present when legislative texts were adopted in Parliament and that Parliament should also be present when the Council took final legislative decisions. There should be more collaboration with Parliament in general, and the Council should spend more time in attendance at Parliament's plenary sittings. There was also a call for the Council's activities to be more transparent. Lastly, the committee urged that the office of High Representative for the CFSP be merged with that of the Commissioner responsible for external relations and that this role be assigned to a Vice-President of the Commission.