European governance: greater openness and participation. White Paper

2001/2181(COS) - 13/11/2001

The committee adopted the report by Sylvia-Yvonne KAUFMANN (EUL/NGL, D) on the Commission White Paper. It welcomed the Commission's readiness to examine the way in which the Union exercised its powers but made a number of observations on various issues. Firstly, the committee restated its view that the EU's decision-making system needed to be "parliamentarised", on the ground that only regional, national and European institutions with democratic legitimacy could take accountable legislative decisions. On the question of consultation, therefore, 'organised civil society', whilst important, could not be regarded as having its own democratic legitimacy given that representatives were not elected by the people. Only the Council and Parliament could take legislative decisions, although due account should be taken of the opinions of other bodies specified in the Treaties, such as the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, which kept the EU institutions in touch with economic and social actors and enabled regional and local authorities to play a greater role in EU policy. The committee also warned that the creation of commonly-agreed consultation standards and practices at EU level should not be tied to any quid pro quo on the part of NGOs because independent and critical public opinion was essential for a vibrant democracy. Autonomous agencies should be used only if specific scientific or technical expertise was required and a decentralised administration seemed appropriate. However, this should not lead to a reduction in expert and judicial scrutiny by the Commission or to any dilution of the Commission's political accountability. There was a need to address the issue of how detailed regulation should be at EU level, particularly given the impending enlargement. Where "framework" directives were used these must be accompanied by adequate mechanisms for democratic control. The committee also stressed that the drafting of an "action plan for better regulation" by working parties at the Council and Commission represented a serious breach of the Community method, since Parliament was neither informed of nor involved in the work of these bodies. MEPs therefore urged the Commission not to submit an action plan of this kind to the Laeken European Council. They also called for an interinstitutional agreement on the question of co-legislation.