Generalised tariff preferences, GSP: special incentive for application of social and environmental requirements

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The Committee strongly welcomes the Commission's proposals as providing provisions for positive measures to promote respect for labour and environmental standards in GSP beneficiary countries. Nevertheless, it expresses its concern that the practical application of the new system of incentives detracts from the advantages of the 1995 reform of the overall system, namely simplicity, transparency and reliability. The Committee appreciates that the additional incentives should apply even to countries that have graduated from the basic system. In the case of the least developed countries, which already profit from a tariff level fixed at zero, the Committee would propose that additional measures must be taken in order to provide an incentive to respect labour rights and undertake environmental protection. The Committee welcomes the strong emphasis given by the Commission that as a prerequisite for access to improved preferences, potential beneficiary countries will have to demonstrate that both their law and their practice provide a framework within which freedom of association and abolition of child labour can realistically be guaranteed. The Committee expresses its regret and disappointment that the Commission proposal restricts the new instrument to three ILO Conventions only. This is a departure from earlier positions as regards international trade and labour standards, taken by the Commission and supported by the Economic and Social Committee, which included ILO Conventions on forced labour and on discriminations. Concerning the fact that not all Member States have so far ratified the ILO Convention No. 138, which would have to be respected by countries applying for the additional preferences, the Committee wishes to make the point that the EU's demands will be much more credible if all its Member States meet themselves the criteria they wish others to meet.