Enlargement, cultural diversity: role of European regions and of international organisations

2002/2269(INI) - 02/12/2003

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Christa PRETS (PES, A) on preserving and promoting cultural diversity which, it stressed, were among the "founding principles of the European model". It pointed out, however, that the principle of cultural diversity was still not recognised as a fundamental right under international law and therefore welcomed the approval given by UNESCO's General Conference for a mandate enabling work to begin on drafting a Convention on Cultural Diversity. The committee said that the right of Member States, regions and sub-state entities, where appropriate, to define, implement and adapt cultural policies was one of the fundamental guarantees for the respect and promotion of cultural diversity. It called on the Intergovernmental Conference to consolidate the various references to cultural diversity and pluralism in the Draft Constitution by adopting the provisions proposed by the Convention, in particular the unanimity rule in the Council as laid down in Article III-217 (4), when negotiating and concluding agreements in the field of external trade in cultural and audiovisual services. The report urged the EU, its Member States and non-EU countries not to enter into bilateral agreements which could compromise fundamental objectives in areas such as education or culture or undermine the ability of governments to support cultural and national identities. The UNESCO General Conference should also insist on a similar commitment from the Member States. The Commission, for its part, was urged to ensure that the growing trend towards concentration in the media did not lead to an oligopoly that would threaten pluralism, cultural diversity and freedom of choice for consumers. MEPs also reaffirmed the importance of public services in preserving cultural diversity, with particular emphasis on the role of public service broadcasting in "safeguarding cultural diversity and identity, democratic dialogue, media pluralism and access for all citizens to quality content and knowledge for their successful participation in the information society". The committee was particularly concerned that the proposed Convention on Cultural Diversity should fully acknowledge the need to preserve language diversity as a basic fact of development cooperation and international relations in general. It called for specific strategies for the promotion of multilingualism to be developed through active and concrete support for education in the mother tongue and for the acquisition of foreign languages, training and "consciousness-raising without discrimination". The Commission was also urged to pay particular attention to the preservation and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity in the accession countries. Lastly, MEPs wanted the EU to speak with one voice at the forthcoming negotiations on the proposed UNESCO Conventtion and called for the Commission to be given a mandate to negotiate on behalf of the EU and its Member States.