Commerce. Green paper

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The committee unanimously adopted the draft resolution on the Green Paper on trade. While approving the overall presentation of the sector by the Commission, the rapporteur, Mr Riccardo Garosci (UPE, I), opened by stating his regret that many of the statistics in Annex A to the paper were no longer up to date and referred to the beginning of the 1990s. He went on to criticize the lack of interest shown by the Green Paper in problems relating to electronic commerce, especially the failure to find an international solution to the problem of the application of VAT on trade via international electronic networks. Similarly, the Commission paid too little attention to the adoption of the "principle of origin" of VAT, which was extremely important in terms of the administrative charges on commercial SMEs. The draft report called for effective simplification of Community legislation and referred to the over-regulation of SMEs engaged in commercial distribution at both Community and national level. The rapporteur reiterated the extremely positive contribution of the sector in question to employment and advocated initiatives to open specialized commercial schools for this purpose. In addition, the text adopted referred to the difficulties of local trade and small retailers, especially in remote, island and mountain areas and recommended that this be remedied by modernizing the sector through a series of measures, including the promotion of technologies and infrastructures to develop electronic commerce. As far as cross-border trade was concerned, joint SMEs needed to be set up and, given the positive effect on economic and social cohesion ascribed in the Green Paper to local shops, the rapporteur urged the Commission to adopt specific measures (via the Structural Funds and with regard to innovative projects (Article 10 of the ERDF), perhaps by setting up a European retail trade observatory). Finally, commerce was indispensable in completing a number of urban strategies and socio-economic policies: town planning and urban renewal, improving the environment, food production and the protection of animals (e.g. this sector helped to reduce product packaging, especially during transportation). As far as consumer information was concerned, the rapporteur praised the attention given in the Green Paper to the fact that commerce will soon act as the medium for the introduction of the euro on the consumer goods market and called on the Commission on behalf of all these requirements of a changing market to keep its promises and issue a final White Paper on commerce within the next two years.