European Automobile Industry: progress in the structural adjustment of the industry. Report

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The Committee on Economic Affairs unanimously adopted the proposal for a resolution on the Commission's communication on the automobile industry in 1996. Recalling the main points raised in 1995 in Parliament's opinion on the 1994 communication, with regard to which the Commission had not announced any new major political initiatives in 1996, the rapporteur, Mr Donnelly (PPE, UK), set out a number of inevitable priorities for the future of the European automobile industry, which faced the dual challenge of raising manufacturing quality and consumer reliability to a high standard and modernizing its structure to ensure greater competitiveness on the market. He therefore deplored the lack of resources and limited staff of the Commission's Task Force on "the car of tomorrow" and recommended that its minor role be upgraded to a strategic function by incorporating this body into the "strategic actions" under the fifth research and development framework programme. In addition, Mr Donnelly retabled the idea of setting up a special high-level panel made up of representatives of the manufacturing industries, trades union and user groups and granting it a consultative remit. With regard to global agreements with trans-Atlantic competitors, the rapporteur considered that it would be advisable to achieve more consistent regulation of vehicles through bilateral contacts with the United States, especially as regards environmental and safety standards, and for the European Union to adhere to the 1958 United Nations agreement on motor vehicles and for the European Parliament to exercise its powers and be informed before any decision was taken or move made within the Council or the committees set up under Article 113 of the EC Treaty when the agreement was revised or when any other initiative was taken at international level to harmonize vehicle safety and environmental standards. Finally, Mr Donnelly pointed out the urgent need for a public information campaign to warn parents of the dangers of using child restraint systems in the front seats of vehicles equipped with air bags in order to ensure that the tragic experiences in America were not repeated.