Economic and employment policies: streamlining of annual coordination cycles

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Othmar KARAS (EPP-ED, A) on the Commission communication on streamlining the annual economic and employment policy coordination cycles. It welcomed the Commission's approach - and in particular the focus on the medium-term - as an appropriate way of implementing the objectives of the Lisbon strategy but regretted the fact that the Commission had neglected the introduction of environmental goals even though the Gothenburg European Council had added sustainable development as a third dimension of the strategy. The Commission and Council were therefore urged to introduce guidelines and measurable targets in this field too. The report stressed that, while the BEPGs had to set the general economic policy framework and the Employment Strategy, in particular the Employment Guidelines, had to be the main instrument for setting objectives and methods for coordinating employment policy, there should nevertheless be improved recognition of the employment strategy in the BEPGs. The committee also said that the streamlined policy coordination cycle needed to be given greater democratic legitimacy and called for greater involvement of the European Parliament in the whole process, to be guaranteed under an interinstitutional arrangement. The specific timing arrangements for the streamlined and synchronised approach should be respected by all EU institutions. In this connection, the report expressed concern at the new timetable for the Guidelines Package, which it said gave the EP an even shorter time than before to examine the Commission proposal. It proposed that a special debate on the Commission's Spring report and implementation package as well as on Parliament's contribution to the Spring Council be held among the three institutions in good time enabling Parliament to express its opinion. The committee also stressed the need for Parliament's working method to be adapted and for the work of the relevant EP committees to be made more efficient through greater cooperation and coordination. Other recommendations included giving the social partners a greater role in implementing the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategy, through an efficient tripartite social summit and a strengthened macroeconomic social dialogue, and setting up an institutionalised dialogue with civil society through the Economic and Social Committee. Lastly, the report called on candidate countries to play a full part in implementing the Lisbon strategy and urged the Commission to provide support for training administrators from those countries to help them implement the Guideline Package priorities.