Annual assessment of implementation of stability and convergence programmes

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Bruno TRENTIN (PES, I) on the annual assessment of implementation of stability and convergence programmes. It said that the implementation of these programmes was "highly satisfactory" in most of the Member States and urged the others to follow this example. The report agreed with the Commission that the most adequate answer to the current economic slowdown was the Lisbon strategy as well as structural reforms by the Member States in such areas as the labour market, which had proved so inflexible in recent years as to become a major cause of unemployment. It called on the Member States to "proceed to an immediate and simultaneous implementation" of the priorities set down at the European Councils in Lisbon (2000) and Göteborg (2001), in particular reducing disincentives to work in some Member States, increasing public and private investment in education and training, research and innovation for products and processes and the development and application of new products and services. The committee also urged the Commission to put forward a plan of action to allow the candidate countries to join the Lisbon strategy process. Among its other recommendations, the report called for the Stability and Growth Pact to be scrupulously adhered to, and for all attempts to soften the Pact, thereby jeopardising the long-term stability of the European currency, to be resisted. It also called on the Heads of State and Government, at the forthcoming Spring Summit, to step up efforts to push ahead with the necessary structural reforms on the basis of an "unvarnished assessment", so as to ensure that more comes out of the ambitious Lisbon objectives than "a mere Utopian ideal".