Social protection: strategy for modernising

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The committee adopted a report by Jan ANDERSSON (PES, S) on a concerted strategy for modernising social protection. It welcomed the Commission paper, which provides a framework for social convergence, but called for further steps along the lines of the Luxembourg process on employment. The Council, it said, should consider a model of convergence which included benchmark criteria, evaluation systems and guidelines as a basis for national action plans. Joint talks between the Ecofin Council and the Social Affairs and Employment Council would be an essential part of the development of the process as would effective cooperation with the European Parliament, social partners, NGOs, representatives of the applicant countries and other relevant bodies. The committee called on the Commission to submit a social action programme which would set out a practical plan including a timetable for implementation as well as legislative proposals for statutory minimum standards of social protection. The report argued that the process of social convergence needed to be accompanied by effective and ambitious fiscal coordination and that taxation and social security schemes should be shaped in such as way as to avoid "employment traps". Particular attention should be paid to the need for a gender perspective in order to overcome segregation of men and women at work. In the longer run, the committee was in favour of promoting a complete switch to individualised social security schemes. It called on the Commission and Council to draw up a separate report on poverty in Europe and to use Article 13 of the Treaty to draw up legislation to combat discrimination. It also wanted them to devise a coordination procedure for the fight against social exclusion and poverty, including adequate social standards. Finally, with a view to enlargement, the committee argued that social convergence was needed as a way of strengthening the European social model and eliminating the threat of social dumping.