Spring Summit 2002: Lisbon process and the way to follow

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With a view to the forthcoming Barcelona Summit, the committee adopted the own-initiative report by Udo BULLMANN (PES, D) calling for the Lisbon process to be speeded up and for closer coordination of economic, employment and structural policies in order to address the current economic downturn. It warned Member States against watering down the ambitious objective of a 70% overall employment rate which was agreed at the Lisbon summit in 2000. The report also underlined the need to invest more in human resources and to boost economic activity through liberalisation and the completion of the internal market. The environmental impact of economic policies should also be taken into account, and the "environmental mainstreaming" approach should be further developed. MEPs pointed out that in recent months job creation had come to a halt for the first time since the Luxembourg process was launched. To reverse this trend, Member States must reform their policies and accelerate their employment strategies. Greater efforts should be devoted to mobilising women and older workers, encouraging the use of new working arrangements, such as part-time work and teleworking, and easing the tax burden on lower paid jobs. The committee pointed out that greater labour mobility was essential to increase competitiveness but added that a sustainable working life required an improvement in the quality of jobs. It would like to see more investment in health and safety at work, equal opportunities and skills training, and in particular life-long learning. Social dialogue should be fostered in order to meet the social and labour market policy challenges facing Europe. MEPs also asked the Commission to take greater account of the employment and social implications of all EU policies and argued that it should establish at Community level a set of principles for good business practice when companies had to restructure. In addition, the Commission was asked to produce an assessment of the liberalisation of public services in terms of the impact on employment, regional cohesion and the quality of services. With demographic changes looming large over the next few decades, the report stressed the importance of a gradual and balanced reform of the current pensions system. As to the fight against poverty, it strongly recommended that the 2002 spring summit should adopt a clear target for 2010 as well as an EU definition of poverty. Lastly, MEPs called for Parliament to be fully involved in the open method of coordination through an interinstitutional agreement, saying this would give the procedure greater democratic legitimacy.