Employment: candidate countries' policy, joint assessment papers

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Harald ETTL (PES, A) in response to the Commission paper on the implementation of the Joint Assessment Papers on employment policies in candidate countries. MEPs noted that special efforts were needed to enable the candidate countries to achieve a stable employment policy and called on the Commission to make it easier for them to have access to funding from the various support programmes, for example, by eliminating red tape. The report also called for an additional aid instrument to prevent regions from becoming impoverished as a result of industrial restructuring. The candidate countries, for their part, were urged to draw up employment strategies for particular crisis regions in order to avert further emigration and impoverishment. The committee also wanted those countries to involve the social partners and NGOs in economic and social policy-making processes and to make further efforts to prevent and combat illegal employment. The report stressed that a broad and adaptable training and education strategy was crucial for the development of industrial and commercial mixed-economy structures. It urged private investors from the EU to earmark part of their investment for training and further training of their employees. Moreover, the Commission was asked to consider further measures for promoting cross-border mobility in the area of education. MEPs said that farms should be assessed not only from the viewpoint of business economics but also in terms of their importance for environmental protection and landscape conservation and "the relief which they will continue to afford in the social field until such time as enough alternative jobs come into existence outside farming". Other points dealt with in the report included the need to ensure equal treatment of and to combat discrimination against the disabled and minorities. The committee also wanted to see employment measures and practices based on equal status for both sexes and called for practical measures to improve women's access to education, training and employment, improve the position of women and men on the labour market and make it possible to combine family and working life.