People with disabilities: equal opportunities, European action plan DAP

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Mario MANTOVANI (EPP-ED, I) in response to the Commission communication. MEPs welcomed the Commission's proposed European Action Plan as a follow-up to the European Year of People with Disabilities (2003), but regretted the Plan's overemphasis and rather narrow focus on employment and education policy. Pointing out that there would be 50 million people with a wide range of disabilities in the enlarged EU, the report said that attention must be focused on all areas of life. The committee also called for gender mainstreaming to be introduced into all disability policies and called on the Commission and the Member States to take vigorous measures against all forms of violence against disabled women. MEPs were critical of the lack of legislative proposals in the Action Plan and repeated Parliament's longstanding demand for a directive to combat discrimination based on disabilities in areas not covered by Directive 2000/78/EC (on equal treatment in employment and occupation). They also urged Member States which had not yet done so to transpose the "equal treatment" directive fully as soon as possible and to develop training measures for those responsible for its implementation, including judges. And they wanted to see greater use of qualified majority voting in the Council and the codecision procedure for the adoption of legislative measures designed to combat discrimination. The committee stressed the importance of the biennial report on people with disabilities as an instrument for raising awareness and promoting good practice, and said that disabled people's organisations should be actively involved in the decision-making process at national and European level. It wanted particular support to be given to such organisations in the enlargement countries to assist them in the transition to accession. MEPs also wanted disability issues to be mainstreamed into certain areas of Community legislation, such as the Structural Funds, for example by including a disabled access requirement in the rules governing the funding of infrastructure, building projects and training modules, including training in new information and telecommunications technologies. While welcoming the Commission's commitment to promote the principle of 'design for all' in Community policies in the built environment, they wanted to see a more ambitious strategy and called for the recommendations of the EU expert report on "Accessibility for All" to be implemented without delay. An appropriate legislative framework should be drawn up laying down common rules on accessibillity to goods, services and infrastructures and accompanied by incentives for business and the promotion of public/private partnerships.