Amsterdam draft treaty

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The Committee welcomed the Amsterdam Treaty, albeit with reservations. The report by Iñigo MÉNDEZ DE VIGO (EPP, E) and Dimitri TSATSOS (PES, Gr), adopted by 22 votes to 11, with 3 abstentions, recommended that the Member States ratify the treaty, as it marks a new stage in the process of building European political union. However, the committee believes that the new treaty also has its failings, particularly as far as the shape of the EU's institutions is concerned. MEPs were disappointed that the treaty had failed to take the concrete decisions on the reform of the institutions which will be needed if an enlarged EU is to function more efficiently and more democratically. In this connection, the committee noted that the Protocol on the institutions envisages additional institutional reforms as a pre-requisite for enlargement; it also expressed approval of the Declaration by Belgium, France and Italy on the same subject. However, it felt that the need for enlargement to be preceded by an overhaul of the institutions should be further underlined. These reforms should start as soon as possible, so as not to delay the accession of new countries to the Union. The committee therefore called on the European Council to set the process in motion by holding a political dialogue with Parliament on the basis of its report, which is to be debated plenary. MEPs believe the following steps are needed before any further enlargement takes place: -adjustments to be made to the weighting of votes in the Council and to the number of Commissioners; -qualified majority voting to become the general rule in the Council; -the unanimity requirement to be restricted to decisions of a constitutional nature; -decisions to be taken on all other reforms required for enlargement. To ensure rapid progress, the Commission is asked to take over Parliament's position and submit to it, at an early date and certainly before the European Council summit of December 1998, a report containing proposals for a comprehensive reform of the Treaties. These proposals should also be forwarded to the parliaments of the Member States. Parliament, the committee says, should be fully involved in the next Intergovernmental Conference and a binding arrangement is needed to the effect that the Treaty may enter into force only with Parliament's assent.