Amsterdam Treaty: increased cooperation

1997/2243(COS) - 24/06/1998

The Committee adopted the own-initiative report by Friedhelm FRISCHENSCHLAGER (ELDR, A) on the subject of "closer cooperation", which is provided for in the Amsterdam Treaty and allows a group of Member States to go further than the rest in certain policy areas. MEPs, however, want this option to be exceptional and limited in nature, so as to ensure that the EU's policies remain coherent. They are particularly keen to emphasise the conditions which must be respected if this procedure is to be used: it must only be used as a last resort, it must not affect the rights and interests of non-participating Member States and it must be neutral with respect to conditions of competition between Member States.At the same time, the committee warns against using the right of veto granted under the Treaty to Member States which wish, for important reasons of national policy, to oppose any specific use of the provisions on closer cooperation. It believes that this right should only be used exceptionally and as a last resort in cases of political emergency. It calls on the Commission to include, in its report containing proposals for comprehensive reform of the Treaties, the abolition of this virtual veto.The process for launching closer cooperation, argues the committee, must be subject to democratic scrutiny by the European Parliament and the principle of the unity of the budget must be respected. The report also says that it is unrealistic to expect that closer cooperation can provide a suitable framework for meeting the main challenges that lie ahead for European integration, such as enlargement and the economic aspects of EMU. It therefore calls on the Commission to make a study of the potential applications of closer cooperation with a view to entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty. ¿