World Trade Organisation (WTO): the Union's approach to the Millenium Round, 3rd conference of Seattle

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The committee adopted the report by Konrad SCHWAIGER (EPP/ED, D) on the EU approach to the forthcoming WTO Millenium Round. The report endorsed the general negotiating approach outlined by the Commission and looked at a number of separate issues such as agriculture, where it expressed support for CAP reform and endorsed the idea that the precautionary principle should be explicitly included in the WTO rules so that the EU could continue its policy of strict food safety standards. On services, the committee agreed with the Commission and Council that further liberalisation was needed but also took the view that sectors and services with a specific social mandate, such as health and education, should be dealt with not in the context of the revision of the GATS agreement but exclusively in a framework laid down by the state concerned. The report also called for electronic commerce to be incorporated into the GATS agreement. The committee welcomed the idea of creating a multilateral legal framework for direct foreign investment and highlighted the need for continued reductions of tariffs on industrial products. It regretted that the work of the WTO in the area of the environment had so far failed to produce any tangible results, and called on the Commission to ensure that the question of processes and production methods was included in the negotiations. Particular attention should also be paid to transport-related environmental damage. On development, the committee recognised the need for developing countries to be given improved access to markets and called on the Commission to pay particular attention to development policy in all negotiating areas under the Millenium Round. Other points raised in the report included a call for the ILO's core labour standards to be incorporated into the WTO and the need for greater transparency and openness in the WTO's dispute settlement procedures. Lastly, the committee wanted to see Parliament kept fully informed of progress in the negotiations.