Free trade regional areas and commercial strategy in the European Union

2002/2044(INI) - 25/03/2003

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Erika MANN (PES, D) looking at the relationship between various regional free trade areas and the multilateral trading system of the WTO. The report argued that the different forms of regional integration, of which free trade areas were one, were not intended purely to eliminate customs duties but were also an instrument which served geopolitical and strategic ends. MEPs said that the issues relating to the abolition of customs duties could only be tackled at multilateral level, and that WTO rules should act as a frame of reference for free trade areas. The report added that free trade areas could be used as tools for development, as was the case with the EU's policy of favouring reciprocal preferential trade agreements with the ACP countries while respecting the diversity of these countries. MEPs also called for improved economic and trade relations with the Asia-Pacific region and in particular for negotiations on a free trade area to be opened with Singapore.