Services: internal market strategy

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The committee adopted the report by Maria BERGER (PES, A) on the Commission communication. It welcomed the paper as part of the Lisbon strategy for making the EU the world·s most competitive knowledge-based economy before the end of this decade, and stressed that a fully functioning internal market in services would help cut costs for businesses and consumers alike and result in greater consumer choice. It warned, however, that the creation of such a market required a political commitment on the part of the Member States, and urged the Commission to make use of its powers under the Treaty to bring proceedings in cases of genuine infringements. The report pointed out that measures were needed to ensure that small businesses played a full part in the internal market, which would give them the opportunity to offer their services all over the EU more easily and cheaply, as they would not be required to set up costly offices in other Member States or comply with many different national regulatory systems. The committee nevertheless emphasised that, to avoid over-regulation at Community level, harmonisation of national rules should be limited to what was strictly necessary to ensure the free movement of services and freedom of establishment. The Commission was urged to ensure the application, as far as possible, of the mutual recognition of national rules and the country of origin principle. This was particularly important with a view to developing on-line services. Lastly, the report called on the Commission and the Member States to promote innovation in Europe in order to ensure the competitiveness of European services. It also stressed the importance of ensuring that the internal market in services was in place before enlargement.