Research and development: EC/Australia, Canada, USA agreements, intelligent manufacturing systems

1996/0235(CNS) - 02/12/1996

The Committee (Chairman Mr DE CLERCQ (ELDR,B)) decided, as proposed by the rapporteur Mr MALERBA(UPE,I), to recommend to the plenary next week the approval of the international agreement for cooperation in research and development in the field of intelligent manufacturing systems between the European Community, on the one hand, and Australia, Canada, Japan, the USA, Norway and Switzerland, on the other (consultation procedure). The Parliament will deliver its opinion in time for the final decision by the Council later in December. The agreement lays down the areas of common research, means of technical cooperation and intellectual property rules for the diffusion of new information. It also identifies the EU programmes "Materials Technology" and "Information Technologies" as the budget lines to support the 10-year programme. The rapporteur based his recommendation on his belief that the agreement can benefit the European industry and, in the long run, have a positive impact on employment. In his opinion, the cooperation envisaged in the present agreement should involve horizontal projects covering enabling technologies, whereas pre-competitive focused research should be carried out only within the European Union. He further called for extending the programme to the automated services of public utilities (such as energy management or postal services). The Commission must ensure that the cooperation is accessible to a wide range of European enterprises, mainly SMEs, which are structurally weaker and worse equipped in terms of strategic vision than the large US and Japanese corporations. On the operational side, the rapporteur called for lean management structures and efficient use of funding.