The trading system and internationally recognized labour standards

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The report drafted by André SAINJON (F, ERA) on the communication from the Commission to the Council on the trading system and internationally recognised labour standards was approved with a number of amendments. These related to the paragraph relating to the UK, recognising "the fact that the United Kingdom has now accepted the Social Charter including recommendations for the protection of young people at work." The Parliament requests the creation of a code of conduct for multinationals which should be based on the ILO declaration of fundamental principles and other minimum applicable international standards and could be ratified at will by European multinational undertakings. It would not at present be accompanied by sanctions but undertakings entering into such a commitment would have their nam mentioned in the Official Journal of the European Communities and on the Commission's Internet site. The Parliament calls on the Commission to work in close partnership with representatives of business, trade unions and NGOs from North and South in developing and implementing these proposals. The report calls for a dialogue within the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to establish measures that will ensure the respect of fundamental social rights by all member countries signing multilateral trade agreements. The Parliament calls on the Commission, within the framework of the accession negotiations, to take account of the state of ratification of the conventions forming part of the ILO Declaration on fundamental principles. It also calls on the Commission and the Council to give greater political support to the ILO and make every effort to establish real coordination between the WTO and the ILO. It insists that in due course, all members of the WTO should ratify the ILO Declaration on fundamental principles and that this matter should be considered when a common document is drawn up by the two organisations. The Parliament welcomes the adoption by the Council of a Regulation introducing special incentive arrangements into the Community Generalised Scheme of Tariff Preferences (GSP) and calls on the Council to apply these arrangements without discrimination to all developing countrieswhich benefit from tariff preferences including those which currently benefit from a zero rate and the Andean and Central American countries. The report also considers it essential that a social clause be included not only in the trade and cooperation agreements concluded by the EU with third countries but also in all financing conventions between the Commission and European undertakings benefiting from the various instruments to encourage investment in third countries. At the same time, the Parliament deplores the unacceptable levels of child labour which have developed in some EU Member States. It cites estimates by child welfare organisations that 4 out of 10 British children between the ages of 11 and 16 and 2 out of 3 between the ages of 15 and 16 are working, often outside the authorised hours and under unacceptable conditions. In the Parliament's view, combatting child labour should be the focus of a European initiative which would help to provide educational and vocational training opportunities for boys and girls. Within thisframework, the Parliament calls on the Commission to consider the criteria for intervention, the procedure for granting, and the amount of, such aid and the financing criteria. This initiative would be financed by appropriations from the Community budget and by contributions from public, private, trade union, trade and charity organisations in the EU Member States. The Parliament finally calls on the Commission to submit by January 2000 concrete proposals for the implementation of the principles laid down in this resolution.