Competitiveness of the European textile and clothing industry, plan of action

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In adopting the report by Mr Sergio RIBEIRO (GUE/NGL, P) on the competitiveness of the European textile and clothing industry Parliament pointed out first that this sector employed about 2.25 million workers, of whom 75% were women, in 120 000 undertakings. Between 1990 and 1996 this sector lost 600 000 jobs and almost 800 000 jobs were expected to disappear in the next few years. Considering, therefore, that a plan of action was needed, it advocated the implementation of a consistent measure and considered that the plan proposed by the Commission for the European textile and clothing industry was inadequate (lack of cohesion and specific commitments, etc.). It therefore called on the Commission to submit a new plan of action which placed particular emphasis on: - promoting innovation and the use of new technologies in the sector, including information technologies and electronic commerce; - strengthening the interaction between all the chains of the industry from fibre producers to machine manufacturers and from textile and apparel producers to retail distributors; - implementing a broad programme of training specific to the textile sector with emphasis on SMUs and on regions where there is a heavy concentration of the textile industry; - fostering the greening of the sector with immediate action to phase out the use of the most problematic materials at EU level. It stressed that modernisation of the textile and clothing industry in Europe must include promoting regional diversification, conversion of production capacities, training for employees and well-focused support for environment-friendly products and production methods along the whole production line. It also called on the Commission to come forward shortly with a report on child labour in this sector within the EU and in third countries and on measures which could be effective in the fight against it. It was also necessary to promote employment in this sector, especially by strengthening aid to SMUs, by reducing working time and strengthening vocational training. It stressed the need, however, to take action against illegal employment and to improve the situation of home workers. At the same time it called on the Commission to monitor more effectively the outward processing arrangements in order to combat the counterfeiting of products with designations of Community origin. It also called on the Commission to retain as from 1 January 1998 the rule concerning raw materials of Community origin in respect of products placed on the market under these arrangements. It also called on the Commission to bring forward the deadlines for investigation of the antidumping procedures and the procedures applicable to goods with false trademarks so as to ensure that the disputes could be settled within a reasonable time. With regard to third countries, Parliament stressed the need to stimulate access to third-country markets in order to boost competitiveness and called for Community actions to promote SME exports. It called for action against unfair practices by certain third countries which continued wrongfully to protect access to their markets. It also called for the strengthening of measures to combat falsifications and fraud in the preferential customs regimes applying to developing countries as regards the rules for establishing the genuineness of certificate of product origin. In this connection it called on the Commission to step up its efforts with a view to harmonising and simplifying the documentation for preferential rules of origin. It also asked the Commission to assess the RETEX programme and to take the necessary measures to ensure its proper implementation in the Member States. In this context it deplored the cessation of this programme with effect from 1999, as proposed in the reform of the funds in relation to Agenda 2000. Lastly it called for the European Textile and Clothing Observatory to continue its activities.