Resolution on the preparation of the Spring European Council, 20-21 March 2003

2003/2516(RSP) - 12/02/2003 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the 2003 spring European Council, calling on the latter to rise to the challenges facing the European economy at the beginning of the 21st century. It must maximise the synergies of the various processes

- broad economic policy guidelines, employment guidelines and internal market strategy

- over the medium term, focus on achieving existing objectives and avoid setting more targets.

Parliament expressed concern about the substantial lack of follow-up at Member State level and called for specific national targets to implement and measure performance. Parliament emphasised the following:

- a stronger emphasis on implementation and results if the Lisbon targets are to be reached, in particular in the area of structural reforms;

- a more detailed roadmap from the Commission indicating how the agreed objectives will be reached by 2010, together with a chronological scorecard to check that steady progress in all areas is maintained;

- more determination from the European Council in eliminating the delivery gaps in transposing EC legislative commitments into national provisions;

- bringing the European Parliament into the evaluation process, thereby supporting its role as co-legislator. Structural reforms will only be accepted if they are accompanied by substantial economic, educational and social investment and lead to new and better job opportunities.

On the question of economic and financial stability, Parliament supported necessary adjustments to the Stability and Growth Pact, while ensuring the credibility of the stability-oriented framework. Demands for public spending must be reconciled with budgetary restraint.

Parliament emphasised the need to develop strategies for the comprehensive reform of pensions, to ensure adequate pensions in the long term, with the combination of three 'pillars', namely public systems, occupational schemes and personal provision.

Tax co-ordination was endorsed provided that it reduced the fiscal burden on labour, created a more small- and medium-enterprise-friendly tax system and used tax incentives to stimulate private investment in particular in the fields of research, environment, education, training and lifelong learning while at the same time ensuring stable financing for social protection.

On the matter of the internal market, Parliament expressed its concern about the low level of implementation of internal market legislation and the high number of infringement proceedings for failure to implement agreed Single Market legislation. It also emphasised the importance of SME's and services of general interest.

Parliament went on to emphasise the importance of retaining the EU's leading edge in R&D in the information and communications sector by increasing investment by giving high priority to the eEurope 2005 action plan.

On employment and social cohesion, Parliament gave a strong endorsement of the European Social Model and emphasised the need to increase the labour market participation of underemployed sections of the population, such as young people, women, immigrants, older workers and disabled people. This could be done, for example by means of targeted integration measures,measures for the reconciliation of work and family life and incentives to promote a longer working life. Member States must promote incentives for work, for example by taking action to adapt tax and benefit systems to make work and education pay. Under the new employment strategy, national and regional labour market policies must be adapted to local conditions and to more flexible methods of working. The importance of measures in education was discussed, in order to boost competitiveness and improve jobs.

On the question of sustainable development, Parliament felt that the environmental indicators developed by the Commission and included in the list of structural indicators were a good basis for future assessments of sustainable development, but should be further developed together with quantified sectoral targets.

Finally, Parliament called on the European Council to specify the use of the method of open coordination on certain matters where there is no Community competence, in such a way that it does not bypass the European and national parliaments.