Analysis and open method of coordination in the fields of employment and social matters

2002/2223(INI) - 05/06/2003 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Miet SMET (EPP-ED, Belgium) by 181 votes in favour, 106 against and 6 abstentions. The resolution analyses the open coordination procedure in employment and social affairs. (Please see the summary of 24/04/03.) Parliament called for the Constitutional Treaty to include an article specifically relating to the open coordination method and stipulating that: - the application of the open method of coordination to any given policy must be decided on a Commission proposal after the European Parliament and the Council have given their approval; -- the Commission proposal must be accompanied by a description of the techniques and methods to be used; - the principal components of the method are: the setting of common targets, guidelines and common indicators, a timetable, the submission at regular intervals of a summary report on the strategy followed, which should summarise and analyse the national reports, and the formulation of recommendations; - Parliament must be formally consulted and the Economic and Social Committee should give an opinion on the guidelines, the summary report and the recommendations; the social partners must be consulted on matters relating to labour market and social policy; - each national report must indicate how representatives of civil society have been consulted; - the recommendations must be lodged with the relevant parliaments within the Member States, and the recommendations must be accompanied by the European Parliament's report. The Commission was asked to draw up a study on the effectiveness of the method, which should examine a number of specified topics. Parliament also asked the Commission to look into the possibility of linking money from the Structural Funds with the performance of the Member States within the recommendations. Parliament noted that the open coordination method tends to favour the proliferation of the preparatory formations and forums known collectively as 'committees' and suggested ways of expanding the expertise available to the committees and safeguarding democratic debate. Parliament asked the Council and the Commission to take greater account of Parliament's observations when establishing guidelines and to ensure that Parliament has the necessary time to draw up informed and high-quality opinions. Parliament will consider adjusting its own practices. All institutions must ensure that the application of the open method of coordination: - does not serve as a fig leaf for a country's failure to take action; and - cannot be used as a means of replacing more binding forms of Community regulation, for the express purpose of avoiding such regulation and, at the same time, undermining the whole concept of the European Social Model. Finally, Parliament emphasised the importance of including equal opportunities for men and women and gender mainstreaming at all levels of formalisation of this new policy management instrument.