Resolution on the outcome of the European Council meeting held in Brussels on 12 and 13 December 2003

2003/2590(RSP) - 18/12/2003 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the Presidency conclusions of the European Council meeting held in Brussels on 12-13 December 2003. It welcomed the Council's endorsement of the European Action for Growth, but underlined that boosting investments alone, even in key projects, cannot solve the problems of the European economy. The structural reforms necessary to restore European competitiveness, generate growth and create employment must be pursued. Parliament felt that the Growth Initiative did not adequately reflect the fact that investment in human capital, including for secondary education and lifelong learning, is probably the most important single factor if Europe is to be able to cope with the challenges of the innovation-based global economy. The criteria for the identification of possible investment projects should be extended, notably by means of ambitious investment activities for improvement of employment, education and lifelong learning. Further, Parliament stated that the priorities for development of the TENs must be strategically planned in accordance with the common interest. Priority should be given to rail and sustainable waterway infrastructure projects, in line with the modal shift vision of the Commission's White Paper. Parliament felt that the TEN-T priority projects should be limited to transborder, intermodal and sustainable projects. There must be a strategic environmental impact assessment on the TEN-T initiative, including its impact on CO2 emissions. A mid-term evaluation of the European Action for Growth should be provided to both the European Council and the European Parliament by 2006, and not by the end of 2007, to enable them to draw conclusions as regards the new Financial Perspective 2007-2011 and the new funding period of the EU structural funds. Parliament went on to express its concern at the substantial lack of follow-up on the Lisbon strategy at the level of the Member States, and asked for their performances to be monitored, in particular in employment and social affairs. Whilst the European Council's twin emphasis on competitiveness and employment is welcomed, Parliament pointed out that in the European social model the concept of competitiveness is not limited to reducing costs but it also includes qualitative issues with a long-term impact, such as social and environmental concerns. The Council is asked to follow up the experience of the European Year of People with Disabilities 2003 by making the labour market more accessible to people with disabilities across the enlarged Europe. On the matter of freedom, security and justice, Parliament deplored the failure of EU leaders and the Council Presidency to discuss the rights of the Guantßnamo detainees to a fair trail. The European Council and the new Irish Presidency must raise this matter at every opportunity with the US Administration. With regard to immigration, Parliament called on the Council, in particular, in the context of the return action programme and speedy negotiation of readmission agreements, to counterbalance all the measures taken on combating illegal immigration with an active policy of integration and promotion of the rights of third-country nationals legally residing on the EU territory. It expressed its concern at the rise in xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism and noted the Council's resolve to combat racially motivated acts of violence. Parliament moved on to the question of enlargement and looked forward to welcoming the new Member States. It noted the outcome of the Turkish Cypriot 'elections' of 14 December 2003 and hoped that this result is indicative of support for a comprehensive settlement. Parliament then discussed foreign affairs and considered the capture of Saddam Hussein to be a turning point in the process of establishing peace, stability and democracy in Iraq. The Council and Member States are asked to call on the United Nations Security Council to ensure that Saddam Hussein is tried in accordance with international rules and the Geneva Conventions, while fully implementing Resolution 1511 with respect to the sovereignty of the Iraqi people. With regard to the peace process, Parliament felt that the commitment of the European Council to pursuing the objective of two states, Israel and a viable and democratic Palestinian state, requires stronger political will on the part of the European Union, and asked for an urgent resumption of the Quartet Initiative. It reaffirmed the

Council's position urging the Palestinian Authority to demonstrate its determination to combat terrorism and extremist violence and urging the Israeli Government to dismantle settlements built after March 2001. Parliament fully shared the conviction expressed by the Council that the transatlantic partnership is irreplaceable, and asked the Council and the Commission to put forward proposals for deeper transatlantic cooperation on the development of a common agenda, including a common approach to achieving more effective multilateralism in world affairs. Finally, Parliament welcomed the decision to invite the Council and the Commission to draw up an assessment report on all aspects of the Union's relationship with Russia, but said that the shortcomings of Russian democracy with regard, in particular, to the general elections of 7 December 2003, the ongoing ruthless conflict in Chechnya and the delays in ratifying the Kyoto Protocol contribute to weakening a possible strategic partnership.