Resolution on the preparation of the Laeken European Council, 14-15 December 2001

2001/2627(RSP) - 29/11/2001 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

MEPs voted 357 to 86 with 46 abstentions in favour of a joint resolution setting out Parliament's priorities for the Laeken Summit. There is welcome for the decision to set up a Convention to pave the way for future institutional reform and recent developments on the ground in Afghanistan, particularly regarding the fight against terrorism and the Taliban. Parliament supports the objective of destroying the Al Quaida terrorist network and capturing its leaders and the setting up of a transitional government representing all aspects of Afghan society. There is support for the EU to supply necessary humanitarian aid in conjunction with UN agencies. A message of sympathy is sent to the families of those who have lost their lives in Afghanistan. On the Middle East, MEPS reaffirmed previous appeals to both sides to reopen negotiations and proceed on the basis of recommendations in the Mitchell report. The recent US proposals are also welcomed but Parliament would like to see a new European initiative in cooperation with the USA, designed to bring about a viable Palestinian state and at the same time ensure respect for the integrity and security of Israel. At the same time the resolution "regrets strongly declarations made by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on the occasion of the visit by the EU Troika in the region". There is also support for further assistance to the Palestinian population. Turning to the Balkans, the resolution welcomes the holding of elections in Kosovo and calls for the establishment of a broad coalition representing all interests in Kosovo. The Commission, Council and Member States are called upon to maintain the EU commitment to the Balkans. There is also welcome for the constitutional changes in Macedonia giving ethnic Albanians more rights. On defence, while there is welcome for closer cooperation agreed by the Member States after the September 11 attacks, Parliament's resolution emphasises that for a European defence policy to become operational "European operations must include the possible use of NATO assets". MEPs want to see the agreement on financing arrangements for the Rapid Reaction Force. On enlargement, the resolution welcomes the optimistic forecast from the Commission that up to 10 accession candidates could complete negotiations by the end of 2002, but at the same time emphasises that great efforts are still needed in these countries to comply with EU rules or the "acquis" required for membership. There is therefore support for more financial aid to the countries to enable this to happen. MEP want to see special measures taken to ensure respect for democratic and minority rights of peoples such as the Roma and moves to involve the Roma in the European integration process. The resolution also expresses Parliament's opposition to any attempt by one single country to hold any negotiations to hostage and singles out Turkey for statements threatening to annex Northern Cyprus if Cyprus accedes to the EU before a political settlement for the whole island is agreed. The resolution does however welcome the planned meeting between the President of Cyprus and the leader of the Turkish community. On economic and social policy, there is a call on the European Council to adopt a more coordinated approach to tackle the slow-down in the economy, which includes emphasis on the need for proper preparations for the Barcelona Summit to further the Lisbon reform process, in particular with respect for deadlines for structural reforms. Social partners should also be involved in the preparations for the Summit. There is also a call for more cooperation in the area of pensions, with a view to ensuring solidarity and social cohesion. There is a specific request for the Council to support a framework directive on public services. In expressing support for the new round of trade negotiations at the WTO, there is also a call on the European Council to support the idea of establishing a WTO parliamentary body. As to justice and home affairs, MEPs want to see an agreement on moves to combat terrorism, in particular the European arrest warrant scheme while at the same time there is criticism of slow progress made in this area, due MEPs believe, to the need for unanimity in Council in reaching agreement.