The future of the textile and clothing industry after 2005

2004/2265(INI) - 14/06/2005

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Tokia SAÏFI (EPP-ED, FR) on the future of the textiles and clothing industry after 2005. MEPs called for a level playing field between the EU and China for textile exports, and urged Chinese manufacturers to observe international labour and environmental standards. The report also called on China to do more to combat the production of counterfeit goods.

MEPs stressed that they were not seeking protectionism but simply equal terms for EU manufacturers. They welcomed the Memorandum of Understanding concluded between the EU Commission and China on 10 June 2005 aimed at limiting Chinese textile exports. But they wanted to go further, and called on the Commission and Council to "extend the coverage of the agreement to other categories of textiles where necessary and to ensure transparency as to the calculation basis used for the export limitations".

MEPs also called for the introduction of measures in accordance with the WTO TRIPS agreement on combating counterfeiting and pirating, and for the Commission to ensure that such measures are implemented by the Chinese Government. The Commission was also urged to enforce the terms of trade agreements under which exporters to the EU must comply with international norms on workers' rights and environmental standards.

The report called on the Commission to conduct a new study on measures that could be taken to support the textile industry in the developing and least-developed countries (for which textile exports are vital), to boost their national and regional markets and improve their capacity to compete on international textile markets. As far as the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) was concerned, the committee repeated the position adopted by Parliament in a resolution in March 2005 that preferences should continue to operate in favour of the most vulnerable countries and that graduation mechanisms should be envisaged to withdraw tariff advantages from products originating in a beneficiary country which had reached a high level of competitiveness in a section.

To address the slow-down in the European textile industry and safeguard its future and competitiveness, the committee would like to see a Euro-Mediterranean production area established. It said that this was the only way to ensure that countries on both shores of the Mediterranean wouldbe able "to stand firm against the American and Asian regional blocs". MEPs advocated support for programmes for research, innovation and cooperation in this connection, as well as a common customs framework.

Lastly the committee called for a European textile plan to assist in restructuring and retraining for the entire textile and clothing sector, especially aimed at small and medium-sized firms. It added that, as well as the interests of the European manufacturing industry, the long-term interests of European importers also needed to be taken into account.