Exploitation of children in developing countries, with a special focus on child labour

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Emmanouil MAVROMMATIS (EPP-ED, EL) on the exploitation of children in developing countries, with a special focus on child labour.

The report recognised the deplorable situation of 352 million working children in the world, 179 million of whom are victims of the worst forms of child labour, according to ILO findings. It looked at ways to tackle such child exploitation and identified two categories of child labour which merit special attention: work that is so harmful to the health of children that it must be stopped as a matter of urgency and work where it is possible to prevent violations of child workers' rights through improving conditions or providing alternatives.

The committee called on the Commission to implement "child-labour free" labels for goods imported into the EU so as to create consistency between the EU's trade policies and its obligation to protect and promote children's rights. It also called on the WTO to introduce such labelling, and wanted a WTO role in securing a ban on child labour in trade. MEPs further recommended that the implementation of core labour standards be part of all bilateral trade agreements and strategic partnerships, including the incorporation of a clause banning child labour, and a special reference to respect for the minimum age for employment.

The committee also wanted the Commission to monitor the impact of EU funding for basic education as part of the drive to get child workers into full-time schools while ensuring that humanitarian aid does not suffer as a result of this commitment. It was also in favour of an EU special representative for victimised or endangered children.

Finally, the report called for corporate responsibility as regards the use of child labour, and recommended the setting up of an EU mechanism to identify and prosecute EU-based importers who are in violation of ILO rules. The use of child labour, in any part of the supply chain, would be enough to constitute violation. The Commission should also offer incentives for importers to play an active role in ensuring the compliance of their products. Transnational companies would also be required to adapt their business practices accordingly, and governments of their home countries to monitor and report back on the contribution of these companies to the abolition of child labour and implementation of ILO core labour standards.