Situation of the European economy, report on the broad guidelines for economic policies BGEP

2004/2269(INI) - 22/02/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 331 votes to 273 against, with 34 abstentions, the report by Robert GOEBBELS (PES, LU) on the European economic situation - preparatory report on the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines. It should be noted that this report was adopted despite a call from rapporteur Robert GOEBBELS for MEPs to vote against. He argued that the final text after amendments at committee stage and in plenary had become distorted and no longer reflected his views.

During the debate, he said that structural reforms have taken place but without growth they will not be effective. The problem in the eurozone is not a lack of stability, it is a lack of growth, especially in France, Germany and Italy. One large European economy has done relatively well: the UK, thanks to proactive government investment and consumer spending.

The Parliament welcomes the definition of the key priorities by the Group chaired by Mr Wim Kok. It calls on the Member States to be pro-active in implementing the key priorities. The Commission is encouraged to focus its efforts on these areas. It also takes the view that the general guidelines set out in the 2003-2005 BEPGs have not been incorporated into the economic policies of the Member States. The Commission is called upon to analyse the best performance of Member States and to learn lessons therefrom. Parliament recommends giving greater weight to growth and job creation by means of increased competition and competitiveness within the Lisbon Strategy.

Parliament recalls that financial stability, the reform of public finances and the low interest rates brought about by the stability policy of the European Central Bank are the explicit pillars of the Lisbon Strategy.

A simplification and improvement in the coordination of the various instruments available to the European Union is recommended as is a reduction in the number of reports and programmes both at Community and at national level, with the aim of securing greater commitment by Member States. The Commission is asked to step up its efforts to complete the internal market in sectors where there are still protectionist barriers and trade restrictions; also asks the Commission not to slacken its endeavours to secure fair competition in all sectors.

Parliament supports wholeheartedly the independence of the European Central Bank and considers that any influence on monetary policy by the bodies determining economic policies would be contrary to the Treaty, since it would put an end to that independence. It proposes the harmonisation of the economic hypotheses used as a basis for drawing up the budgets and of the budgetary timetables of the Member States of the eurozone, taking into account the timetable for drawing up the BEPGs and the employment guidelines.

Member States are called upon to support forward-looking investments, by promoting investment and emulation in research, including basic research, and development, high technology, environmentally-friendly technologies and trans-European infrastructures and networks and education and lifelong learning.

It is noted that intra-Community trade accounts for the bulk of the external trade of the Member States of the Union, and concludes that the completion of the internal market is necessary in order to contribute to economic growth and thus the social development of the Union.

It considers that the growth of free and fair international trade, founded on equal opportunities, on the basis of the Doha commitments will both contribute to the development of poor countries and create new markets for developed countries, and that it is only through growth that developing countries will be able to increase the income of their population and achieve higher social and environmental standards.

Parliament reiterates its wish to see both national parliaments and the European Parliament more closely involved in discussions on the BEPGs. It considers that this would result in greater democratic accountability and, above all, mean that Member States would embrace them more wholeheartedly and therefore be more committed to their implementation.

Lastly, the Parliament considers that the management of economic policy requires reliable and comparable statistics and calls upon the Commission to increase the means available to Eurostat to carry out its mission of gathering and monitoring the statistics of Member States and, within the framework of the OECD and other relevant international organisations, to press for an improvement in the reliability and the costs involved in collecting statistics must not hamper the competitiveness of businesses.