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

2005/2004(INI) - 05/07/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Emmanouil **MAVROMMATIS** (EPP-ED, EL) on the exploitation of children in developing countries, with a special focus on child labour. (Please see the summary of 06/06/2005.) Parliament also pointed out that 5 million children are being exploited at places of work in eastern Europe and the Mediterranean region and in particular (it would appear) in EU Member States, which is particularly unacceptable. It recommended that the Commission make the implementation of core labour standards a permanent element in bilateral consultations at all levels, both with countries where violations occur and with countries which are involved with them through trade and investment. In addition, the ratification of and compliance with ILO Conventions 138 and 182 must be two of the requirements which the Commission and the Council should impose on countries applying to join the EU.

The Commission must ensure that the EU's trade policies are consistent with its commitment to protecting children's rights. Parliament urged an investigation into the introduction of an EU scheme for the labelling of goods imported into the EU to attest that they have been produced without the use of child labour at any point in the production and supply chain, and implementing "child-labour free" labels for these products, whilst ensuring that such a scheme complies with World Trade Organization (WTO) international trade rules. In the interim, products and produce from developing nations should be labelled "responsibly grown /manufactured without child labour".

Link between education, poverty and elimination of child labour: Parliament reiterates its view that there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between a lack of education and child labour, making education the basic instrument for achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Particular attention should be paid to the primary education of girls, who encounter more barriers and obstacles than do boys (cultural factors such as early marriage, discrimination, their social and family role and so, on playing a part) preventing them from enrolling and remaining in school and from completing their studies.

Worst forms of child exploitation: the Commissionwas asked to support programmes combating less common forms of child labour such as domestic work and the selling of children to pay off family debts (debt bondage). Parliament proposed the appointment of an EU special representative for children who are victims of armed conflict, wars, displacement, drought, hunger, natural disasters or AIDS, or children who are caught up in the trafficking of human beings, and to ensure that due attention is given to such situations. Parliament called for the support of the WTO in the form of a ban on child labour in trade and suggested that child-labour free products be marked and labelled as such for consumer awareness of responsible practices.

Corporate responsibility: Parliament welcomedthe fact that the Commission has taken the initiative to draw up a communication on corporate social responsibility. It recommended that the Commission investigate the creation of appropriate EU-level legal mechanisms which identify EU-based importers who import products which allow the violation of the core ILO conventions, including the use of child labour, in any part of the supply chain. The Commission needs to explore the possibility of creating incentives for EU importers who carry out independent monitoring of the manufacture of their products in all third countries forming part of the production chain. The Commission and the Council should promote the fair trade initiatives, in particular in new EU Member States, monitoring producers to ensure that their methods are consistent with fair trading standards. Parliament went on to recommend that the Commission identify companies which persistently use child labour in any part of the production and supply chain and

called for such a list to be made available to EU importers. The Commission should make compliance with core labour standards a precondition in its purchasing and contracting policy, and develop a policy which makes it possible for small producers in developing countries likewise to comply with these standards.

Lastly, Parliament asked the Council to support the OECD's guidelines for multinational enterprises and the UN's Global Compact. Moreover, it recommended that the Commission propose the extension of the scope of the OECD Guidelines from investment to trade, enhance the implementation instruments and reach agreements with governments of developing countries on the way in which enterprises can contribute to the effective abolition of child labour.