Economic immigration: a Community approach

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Ewa KLAMT (EPP-ED , DE) in response to the Commission Green Paper on economic migration. The report as finally voted in committee was heavily amended and differed substantially from the original text presented by the rapporteur.

The report regretted that the Council had decided to maintain the consultation procedure in the whole area of legal immigration and said that only the codecision procedure would make it possible to adopt "effective and transparent" legislation in that field. It stressed the need to adopt a common immigration policy "in order to end the exploitation of workers made vulnerable by the absence of legal immigration channels". The report also pointed out that mass regularisation for illegal migrants was no substitute for substantial policies for dealing with illegal immigration, nor was it an effective means of recruiting economic migrants.

The committee pointed out that migrants had contributed, and were still contributing, to the prosperity and the economic, cultural and social development of the EU Member States, and said that "economic migration is a positive human phenomenon".

However, MEPs emphasised that economic migration was only "part of the solution" to Europe 's demographic problems and economic difficulties. Problems within the EU labour market should also be tackled by stimulating innovation and encouraging the employment of older workers.

The Member States were urged to promote the integration of economic migrants residing legally in Europe by granting them the same rights as EU citizens, including the right to vote in local and European Parliament elections for those who have been continually resident in the EU for at least five years. There was also a need for public information and awareness campaigns on legal immigration policies and their positive impact, in order to dispel public anxiety and create a positive image of immigration.

In a controversial amendment to the original report, the committee called on the Commission to put forward a proposal for a European green card system, which would create a single administrative procedure for issuing an employment and residence permit for an economic migrant. However, MEPs added that the admission of an economic migrant under such a system should in principle be linked to the existence of a specific job. Moreover, the Commission should clearly define the rights and obligations of an economic migrant.

On the question of the return of illegal immigrants, MEPs called for clauses on compulsory readmission to be included in all association and cooperation agreements signed with non-EU countries. They also urged the Commission "to define a return policy, based on the promotion of voluntary return, including possibly supportive measures in the country of origin".

Lastly, the report stressed that a European economic migration policy should also include "practical solutions to the problem of the brain drain", and urged the Commission to open a dialogue with the governments of countries of origin in order to achieve "balanced legislation" and develop specific measures in the sectors particularly affected by this phenomenon.