

Restructuring and employment

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Jean Louis COTTIGNY (PES, FR) in response to the Commission's communication on restructuring and employment. It welcomed the Commission's decision to opt for a "global, transversal approach" to this issue. MEPs agreed with the Commission that restructuring is not necessarily synonymous with social decline and a loss of economic substance provided that such measures are correctly anticipated and effectively managed through proper collaboration between the affected firms and trade unions, plus a suitable training policy for workers. However, they stressed that "these conditions are not often present". The report added that business restructuring should only take place in order to save jobs or improve the competitiveness and the economic development of firms. Faced with "immoral or predatory tactics", the Commission should make use of the possibility of mediation at European level through a group of independent ombudsmen.

MEPs said that, since the EU was responsible for opening up the market, it had a duty to put in place the "necessary financial resources to anticipate better and accompany restructuring and mitigate its social consequences". They wanted to see particular support given to SMEs in this context, mainly via the structural funds, as such businesses were all too often overlooked. They also proposed that the financial programmes under discussion for 2007-2013 should be geared more closely to anticipating and managing restructuring and that the structural funds should be allocated "a budget adequate to this task".

The committee stressed that dismissed employees were the first victims of restructuring and said that "priority aid should be given to them in all cases". It also drew attention to the "hidden effects" of restructuring, such as medical and psychological problems affecting workers who are directly threatened by redundancy, as well as the high mortality rate among such employees during the first five years following their dismissal. The report called for aid for training and re-training for workers who are made redundant to be given as quickly as possible.

Calling "for better monitoring and better traceability of the use of Community funds", MEPs noted that funds are sometimes diverted to related, speculative or administrative purposes and used to fund relocations. To prevent "subsidy tourism", they said that firms subsidised from EU funds should not receive any further Community aid for a given period of time if they relocate part or all of their activities within the EU. In addition they should be required possibly to reimburse aid.

Lastly, the report called on the Commission to propose a "European one-stop shop" for all citizens, local authorities, social partners and businesses affected, enabling them to find information on the problems related to restructuring, on the opportunities which exist for anticipating and properly managing restructuring, and on their rights and obligations.