Economic immigration: a Community approach

2005/2059(INI) - 26/10/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report by Ewa KLAMT (EPP-ED, DE) on economic migration. The final text differed so much from the draft report initially proposed by rapporteur Ewa KLAMT that many members of her political group decided to abstain in the final vote on the text as a whole. The report was adopted by 259 votes in favour, 85 against and 176 abstentions. Parliament rejected a paragraph calling the European Commission to present a proposal on the creation of a Green Card system for economic migrants. (Please see the summary of 05/10/2005.)

Parliament regretted that the Council had decided to maintain unanimity and the consultation procedure in the whole area of legal immigration. Parliament felt that only by means of the codecision procedure will it be possible to adopt effective and transparent legislation in that field.

It recalled that migrants have made a major contribution to the prosperity and the economic, cultural and social development of the Member States, and continue to do so. Economic migration is a positive human phenomenon which has always promoted the development of civilisations and cultural and technological exchanges.

Parliament also regretted that the Council had not yet managed to adopt a common immigration policy, and has concentrated essentially on the punitive aspect (readmission agreements, police checks at borders, etc). It indicated that the effective development of a common migration policy with due regard for fundamental rights and international human rights obligations is a priority goal of European integration. The right to vote is a matter of Member State competence. In order to encourage the social and political integration of migrant workers, they should be granted equivalent rights. Member States, the Commission and the Council are requested to take steps to ensure recognition of the right of migrants who have been continuously resident in the Union for at least five years to vote in local and European Parliament elections. In addition, Member States should create specific residence permits designed to facilitate the search for work.

Parliament emphasised that migration requires a differentiated approach depending on the reasons for entry, such as asylum, flight or economic migration. It insisted on the need to adopt a common immigration policy in order to end the widespread exploitation of workers made vulnerable by the absence of legal immigration channels. Mass regularisation aims to provide prospects for illegal migrants, but is no substitute for substantial policies for dealing with immigration or an effective means of recruiting economic migrants. Economic migration is part of the solution to the problem of Europe's ageing population and its economic difficulties. However, the problems within the EU labour market should be solved not only by economic migration but also by stimulating innovation and new technologies, increasing productivity and encouraging the employment of older workers in the EU. Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to launch public awareness and information campaigns on legal immigration policies and their positive impact, notably in order to dispel public anxiety and create a positive image of immigration.

It moved on to call on the Commission to draw up a proposal for a directive laying down minimum and sufficient criteria for admitting third-country nationals into the Union for purposes of employment, the main objective being to open up legal channels for immigration. This legislation should define an overall (rather than sectoral) regulatory framework of reference. Parliament was convinced that it was preferable to put in place one single administrative procedure for issuing an employment and residence permit for an economic migrant. In principle, the admission of an economic migrant under such a system should be linked to the existence of a specific job. However, Parliament asked the Commission to investigate the

possibility of issuing special residence permits for jobseekers and the self-employed. Member States were asked to consider the introduction of special combined residence and work permits in order to facilitate the recruitment of workers on a seasonal or time-limited basis. In order to reduce illegal immigration and black labour, the proposal should include provisions enabling migrant workers to enter for the purposes of seeking employment. Parliament called on the Commission to clearly define the rights and obligations of an economic migrant.

Parliament went on to calls on the Commission to propose a regulation to ensure that, following their return to developing countries, economic migrants have access to the money paid by them into European social security schemes. Te host Member States and migrants' countries of origin should conclude agreements to guarantee transfers of entitlements acquired in either country to the other regarding length of service, wherever worked, or social security. Payments transferred by migrants from developing countries to their home countries significantly exceed development aid payments and are of huge importance to achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating poverty. On the matter of brain drain, Parliament was in favour of encouraging 'brain circulation' by extending the principle of 'Community preference' to those who have already worked for some years in the EU before returning to their own country. It asked the Commission to open a dialogue with countries of origin, in order to achieve balanced legislation that allows migration and enables professional experience to be developed. It also called on the Commission, within the context of this dialogue, to enhance the development of specific measures in the sectors particularly affected by the brain drain, in accordance with the countries concerned.