Report on European political parties

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Jo LEINEN (PES, DE) on the funding of European political parties, which is governed by Regulation (EC) No. 2004/2003. The report looked at the political background to this issue and put forward proposals to improve the system of funding on the basis of practical experience to date.

Political background: the committee stressed that political parties were a vital element in building a European political area, benefiting democracy at European level. European political parties could help overcome the gulf between many members of the public and the EU institutions, particularly during the present period of reflection on the future of Europe . In order to do so, they must take on a further role than that of umbrella organisations and become active proponents of European policy options. The report stressed the need for a genuine European party statute which goes further than the regulation on funding. Such a statute should establish the rights and obligations of European political parties and enable them to attain a legal personality based on Community law and effective in the Member States. It should also include provisions on individual membership of parties at European level, on their management, on the nomination of candidates and elections and on arrangements and support for party congresses and assemblies.

Proposals for improvement: a number of changes should be made to the funding system in order to achieve greater flexibility:

- at the start of the parliamentary term, a funding plan should be agreed over several years to provide greater financial certainty;

- in order to be able to make longer-term financial plans, parties should be able to build up reserves from their own funds, particularly those derived from donations and membership subscriptions;

- against the background of increasing demands on the political work of European political parties as a result of enlargement, there should be an "appropriate increase" in their funding.

Lastly, MEPs also called for a discussion of such issues as: support for European political foundations to assist European political parties in their work of political information and education; establishing European lists of European parties for the European elections; the role which European political parties can play in referendums on European topics; and ways of promoting and enhancing the role of European political youth organisations and movements.