Nanosciences and nanotechnologies: an action plan for Europe 2005-2009

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Miloslav RANSDORF (GUE/NGL, CZ) welcoming the Commission communication on an action plan for Europe on nanosciences and nanotechnologies for the period 2005-2009. MEPs said that nanotechnologies could help address needs such as public health, energy and transport, and contribute to the EU's competitiveness and sustainable development goals, and they welcomed the "clear focus" in the Commission paper.

The report stressed the need to increase publicly funded investment in R&D, saying that world-class R&D infrastructure is needed in order for the EU to remain competitive in nanosciences. The EU must also clarify the legal and business environment for these technologies and create a nanoscience and nanotechnology patent monitoring system governed by the European Patent Office. In addition, MEPs said that an ethical approach was essential to win public trust. They therefore welcomed planned reviews of issues such as non-therapeutic human enhancement and the links between nanosciences and nanotechnologies and individual privacy, but they urged that these reviews be made public. They also called for ethical committees to be set up to help ensure the public is properly informed and to create a climate of trust based on awareness of the risks and the benefits of nanotechnologies.

The report emphasised that all applications and uses of nanosciences and nanotechnologies must comply with the high level of protection for human health, consumers, workers and the environment prescribed by the EU and insisted on the need for codification of nanomaterials. Lastly, the committee stressed the importance of international cooperation in the field of nanosciences and nanotechnologies and urged the Commission to develop further the already excellent relations with Russian scientists in particular and to investigate "the possibilities and limitations" of cooperation in this area with the USA, Japan, China and India.