Resolution on the input to the Spring 2006 European Council in relation to the Lisbon Strategy

2005/2652(RSP) - 15/03/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the input to the Spring 2006 European Council in relation to the Lisbon Strategy. The resolution, put forward by the three main political groups of the Parliament - the EPP-ED, PES and ALDE - was adopted by 431 votes to 118, with 55 abstentions. MEPs outline the priorities and strategies that the Spring Council should concern itself with regarding the realisation of the revised Lisbon Strategy.

General observations: Parliament noted with satisfaction that the revised Lisbon Strategy has led to the presentation by all Member States of national action plans, focusing on priority areas such as R&D, innovation, and education. This has led to the clarification of competences at EU and national level as well as a better understanding of this complex strategic approach. However, the effective implementation of NRPs is necessary. Member States and the EU should assess whether tax systems, research and industrial policy set incentives appropriately and agree on an EU investment strategy, focusing on the Commission's four proposed priorities, in particular on R&D, innovation, education, life-long learning, and social services, as well as the creation of an environment favourable to business. Parliament insisted that political commitment regarding the Commission's four priority areas is incompatible with the Financial Perspective (2007-2013), which provides for major cuts in spending proposals on key Lisbon Strategy programmes and budget headings.

NRPs and European growth and employment strategy: Parliament discussed the importance of accomplishing fully the internal market through its four core principles, with particular reference to the adoption of the Services Directive, which was crucial to opening up the EU's vast services market and contributing long-term job creation in accordance with the revised Lisbon Strategy. Placing the emphasis on competitiveness and growth alone would be a mistake, because public support for the Lisbon Strategy presupposes a genuine social dimension. Parliament welcomed the fact that many Member States' NRPs indicate plans for public-private partnerships, whether in research, higher education, or other sectors. It discussed the costly effects of delaying action or a failure to address environmental challenges, pointing also to the potential offered by eco-innovations and environmental technologies, for which global demand is growing steadily. As regards employment, Parliament spoke of shifting the burden of taxation from labour to resource use and environmental degradation. The Commission and the Member States must explore these synergies and reduce environmentally hazardous subsidies.

Parliament believed that a well-functioning internal market and labour market safeguarding social and environmental standards, were a vital means of freeing the EU's competitive potential, economic growth and job creation. It was deeply concerned about the actions of a growing number of national governments that seek to take or have already taken defensive and protective measures in favour of national industries or companies. These measures were an assault on the basic principles of the internal market since they created obstacles to the right of establishment of nationals of other Member States as well as to the free movement of capital within the Community. Parliament called on the Commission to be far more outspoken and unambiguous in the defence of the internal market, including in the field of energy and financial services.

It deplored the fact that the European Council intended, to cut back the appropriations for trans-European networks called for by Parliament under the next Financial Perspective. It recommended using the

possibilities offered by the forthcoming launch of the Galileo system to improve electronic traffic flow management, which would necessitate the gradual introduction of an electronic toll system, preventing congestion and involving users in paying the real price of mobility.

Ageing population: demographic challenges: in order to minimise the negative consequences of demographic change, it will be essential to implement the Lisbon Strategy in full, to create an inclusive society based on the promotion of high employment, high productivity, innovation and health. Modernising the social framework across the EU is a political imperative. In addition, Parliament considered that, in order to attain the Lisbon Strategy goals, suitable measures should be taken for the elderly generations to be able to cope with technological innovations, avoid finding themselves in a position of vulnerability and social exclusion and be more actively involved in the labour market.

It went on to state that immigration policies should promote the successful economic, social and legal integration of migrants, with a view to alleviating Europe's demographic challenge. However, it recognised that this in itself will not resolve all the questions related to demographic change. A successful policy of legal immigration also depended on the implementation of a comprehensive strategy to achieve full integration. Immigration policies that give priority to skilled workers also weakened the economies of the countries of origin of those immigrants, and such labour movements are only capable of solving the challenges of demographic change in the short term. Nevertheless, there should be a detailed assessment of the impact of immigration policies that prioritise skilled workers on the economies of their countries of origin.

Innovation and research, intellectual property rights (IPRs), and life-long learning : Parliament believed that innovation was one of the main cornerstones of wealth creation, growth and jobs, that it strengthened the EU's competitiveness and that it contributed to achieving the overall policy of sustainable development. EU and Member State budgets should fully translate to the Lisbon Strategy priorities by significantly reinforcing the EU's innovation and research capacity and by expanding life-long learning, including the use of new financial instruments. Such policies must, however, be focused on areas of general interest.

Parliament noted that the public sector was lagging behind the Lisbon Strategy objectives for R&D, and that, in general, the private sector is also a long way from meeting the target. Medium-sized companies in particular are not investing enough in research. On life-long learning, Parliament considered this to be a necessity. In order to ensure that EU industry is competitive, the quality of education and training systems must be reinforced at various stages of life and access to higher education must be facilitated. Education and training systems must target those areas where the EU is lacking skilled people and must respond to the requirements and gaps of a rapidly changing labour market and technological society.

All young Europeans must have the possibility of mastering electronic tools. Parliament called on the Member States to ensure that, by 2010 at the latest, a computer is available to every pupil in the EU, information technology is fully integrated in school programmes and the take-up and effective use of such programmes are universal in schools.

Energy policies: A coherent and efficient energy policy is essential for economic growth in the EU and for the durable prosperity of EU citizens. In particular, energy security constitutes a strategic responsibility in view of the EU's dependence on third-country imports. Parliament insisted that measures be taken to ensure a secure long-term balance between supply and demand. Moreover, Parliament agreed with the Council conclusion that a shared view on a strategy for security of supply should respect Member States' geographical, economic, regional, climate and structural differences. Parliament looked forward, therefore, to the Spring 2006 European Council discussions on energy issues, which should lead to concrete actions in the field of energy saving, resource efficiency, and further promotion of renewable

energy, thereby also contributing to the greenhouse gas emission reduction targets of the Kyoto Protocol and beyond. The fight against climate change is creating economic and social opportunities which can help to bolster the sustainable development strategy – the third pillar of the Lisbon Strategy.

Parliament also covered both renewable and nuclear energy policies. In relation to renewable energy, it acknowledged an awareness that long-term energy security is not possible without an economically and ecologically meaningful development of renewable energies. The Commission is asked to establish market-based incentives in order to make renewable energies economic as rapidly as possible and to help expand the use of hydrogen as an environment-friendly and sustainable energy source.

Regarding nuclear energy, Parliament recognised the role that nuclear energy currently plays in maintaining security of electricity supply, constituting a significant part of the energy mix and avoiding an estimated 312 million tonnes of CO2 emissions per year, that is, 7% of total greenhouse gas emissions in the EU. Current estimates project a 12% increase in EU CO2 emissions by 2020, which is well short of the Kyoto target 8% reduction. Parliament also recalled that Europe possesses globally acknowledged expertise in the area of nuclear energy, which is one possible response to energy dependence and climate change and that this expertise relates to the efficiency and quality of production installations, and to decommissioning processes.