

Policy framework to strengthen the European Union manufacturing: towards a more integrated approach for industrial policy

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Joan **CALABUIG RULL** (PES, ES) in response to the Commission communication on a policy framework to strengthen EU manufacturing as part of the Lisbon agenda. Parliament recognised the important role of the manufacturing industries in the EU, and pointed out that manufacturing, services and trade were strongly and increasingly interlinked in the modern business environment. It supported, therefore, the development of a coherent industrial policy at European level to tackle the challenges of globalisation. Parliament also recalled that the EU must aspire to remain a major industrial power, and not merely confine itself to developing its services sector.

Parliament felt that the Community policy of aid for national industrial policies must aim to develop European Flagships for Excellence, creating synergies between the skills of local labour markets and research centres. It supported the initiatives set out in the Commission communication. It was convinced that the future of Europe's manufacturing industries lay in increased added value and better quality, and was therefore concerned that overall EU trade was still concentrated in sectors with medium-high technologies and low to intermediate labour skills. Education and training at all levels were key issues, both in terms of improving labour force qualifications and facilitating structural change. Parliament regretted the fact that the Commission communication did not pay enough attention to education, lifelong learning and training. It urged Member States to increase their efforts to attract more young students into technical and scientific studies.

Moreover, the transfer of knowledge and the application of research results in new products and processes was still too weak in the manufacturing industries, and especially in SMEs. In this respect, Parliament saw a clear need to bridge the current gap between the research community and the market sector. It stressed the major potential of nano-sciences and nano-technologies and urged the manufacturing industry to keep up to date with technological progress and the provisions of the 2005 to 2009 European programme of action in this field so as to be in a position to take advantages of the opportunities and new perspectives opening up for each of its sectors. Parliament also stressed the problem of access to finance and venture capital, especially for innovative start-ups and SMEs, and asked the Commission to involve the EIB and the European Investment Fund in the work of the sectoral initiatives.

Parliament maintained that no Community aid should be granted to companies which, after receiving such support in a Member State, transfer their manufacturing operations to another country without completely fulfilling the agreements entered into with the Member State concerned.

It called on the Commission to make an in-depth analysis of the current situation of the manufacturing industries in the new Member States and the challenges ahead and to ensure that Community legislation is properly enforced. This would make it possible to obtain aggregated data for the 25 Member States and, on the basis of those data, to analyse the various sectors and draw up recommendations to guide industrial policy.

The Commission was urged to focus on the area of market surveillance and the fight against unfair competition and counterfeiting, and to come forward before the end of 2006 with concrete proposals in the area of protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights. It should also monitor and record the

extent to which imported products comply with European environmental and consumer health protection legislation and affect the competitiveness of European products.

Finally, Parliament stressed the importance of market access for the manufacturing industries. It urged the Commission to identify international practices which could adversely affect the competitiveness of European undertakings, particularly regulations and subsidies, and tackle barriers to trade and investment that were in breach of international rules.