Single market review: tackling barriers and inefficiencies through better implementation and enforcement

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The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection adopted an own-initiative report drawn up by Jacques **Toubon** (EPP-ED, France) on the Single Market review. The report wished the Single Market review to be the occasion for demonstrating to the European public all the benefits that they can gain from the completion of the Single Market, and it called on the Commission and the Member States to close the gap between the potential and the reality of the Single Market. To this end, Members hoped that working relations with national parliaments may be strengthened, and regretted that Member States did not feel enough ownership of the Single Market on a practical level. In a Single Market delivering quality of life, environmental and consumer protection concerns need to be taken into account.

The Committee felt that new policy initiatives should be more driven by an analysis of the impact they have on various markets, economic sectors and the environment, and in the social sphere. It stressed the importance of boosting citizens' confidence by promoting social and environmental objectives common to the Member States, such as quality jobs, equality of opportunity, and protection of health and the environment, while respecting European cultural diversity. The Commission was asked to ensure that the EU performs its protective function in these areas and to avoid regulatory competition between the Member States.

The Committee made a series of recommendations, including the following:

- encouraging the free movement of workers within the Single Market;

-putting in place practical measures designed to support the innovative potential of craft and small enterprises;

- adopting a global strategy concerning intellectual property rights and to strengthen the protection of those rights as a tool to support innovation;

- combating fraud and piracy within the Single Market;

- tackling climate change and ensuring sustainable development;

- increasing consumer confidence in cross-border purchases by putting an end to the fragmentation of the Single Market in the digital environment;

- further improving accessibility for disabled people, the elderly and children;

- encouraging Member States to improve access for SMEs to public procurement contracts and to applying pre-commercial procurement to improve the innovative capacity of the Single Market;

- removing obstacles to the creation of a single payments area, as well as further liberalisation of postal markets, while ensuring the financing of an efficient universal service;

-furthering financial integration in the European Union;

- investigating tax problems related to personal mail order and Internet shopping;

- ensuring that risk capital from the European Investment Fund usefully reaches SMEs and innovative enterprises;

- increasing its staff resources and improve its information strategy;

- establishing an effective fast-track arbitration redress mechanism to be established at EU level to promote the prompt resolution of disputes concerning Single Market rules;

The report welcomed the Commission's initiatives to reduce the administrative burdens for businesses and urged that further efforts of this kind be made to improve access to the Single Market without reducing the necessary protection for citizens, consumers and employees.

The Committee went on to state that boosting competition through regulatory reform is the stimulus that Europe needs to improve productivity, and it reiterated that Parliament's rights in the context of regulatory reform should be fully respected. It called on the Commission to incorporate an 'Internal Market Test' into the better regulation mechanisms, as advocated by Parliament, to ensure that regulators always take into account the implications of their actions on the four freedoms of the Single Market, alongside the other aspects that they are required to consider, notably sustainability and employment.

The report regretted the fact that some Member States are taking measures to protect their national markets, and emphasised the importance of achieving a level playing field across the Single Market, stressing that a well-functioning Single Market constitutes a competitive advantage for Europe in the face of globalisation. It called on the Commission, when framing internal policies, systematically to evaluate and take into consideration similar policies implemented by the EU's major partners, such as the US, Russia, China, India, Brazil, Japan and so on, with a view to improving the EU's competitiveness and removing barriers to global trade.