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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

further to the Council and Commission statements

pursuant to Rule 37(2) of the Rules of Procedure

by Carles-Alfred Gasòliba i Böhm and Elspeth Attwooll

on behalf of the ELDR Group

on the outcome of the European Council (Brussels, 20/21 March 2003)

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European Parliament resolution on the outcome of the European Council (Brussels, 20/21 March 2003)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Brussels Spring European Council conclusions of 20 and 21 March 2003,
 - having regard to the Lisbon European Council conclusions of 23 and 24 March 2000, the Göteborg European Council conclusions of 15 and 16 June 2001, and the Barcelona European Council conclusions of 15 and 16 March 2002,
 - having regard to the conclusions of 16 September 2002 on the outcome of the World Summit on sustainable development,
 - having regard to the Tripartite Social Summit held prior to the Spring European Council in Brussels on 20 March 2003,
- A. whereas progress towards meeting the strategic Lisbon goal of making the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion by 2010 has fallen considerably behind schedule and risks missing many of the target dates set in Lisbon,
- B. whereas economic growth has been weaker than expected since 2000 and has been undermined by a combination of global insecurity as a result of fears of international terrorism, the conflict in Iraq and corporate governance scandals,
- C. whereas the EU growth strategy, developed over the past three years, must emphasise the interdependence of economic, social and environmental considerations in building a strong, sustainable and inclusive economic future for Europe's businesses, citizens and environment,
1. Recognises that the 2003 Spring economic summit coincided with the outbreak of armed conflict in Iraq which deflected much needed attention away from the urgent reforms required to rejuvenate the European economy;
 2. Endorses the ECOFIN 'Key Issues Paper' of 7 March 2003 and the declared intent to pursue sound macroeconomic policies combined with steps to accelerate labour, product and capital market reforms; strongly agrees that reforming employment and welfare systems and fostering entrepreneurship and innovation should be the top priorities and the key to raising growth potential;

3. Shares the Council's concern regarding the remaining delivery gap and believes there is a real danger of not reaching the Lisbon targets; welcomes the Council's intention to intensify its efforts to close the delivery gap, but stresses that words have to be turned into action; considers that these delivery gaps which exist in many of the Lisbon policy areas show the need for a stronger monitoring of the Lisbon process by the Commission and for better scrutiny by parliaments;
4. Highlights the mixed performance of Member States so far in meeting the Lisbon goals – whilst some (Denmark, Sweden and Finland) are clearly leading the way in achieving the targets set in 2000, others (notably France, Germany and Italy) have fallen behind;
5. Reiterates its support for the Lisbon strategy, but believes that the open method of coordination and peer review are not sufficient on their own to bring about the dynamic structural changes required unless specific objectives and deadlines are set and adhered to; points to the need to pay more attention to the scoreboard of Member States' progress in fulfilling their Lisbon agenda commitments;

ECONOMIC POLICY AND COMPETITIVENESS

6. Underlines its commitment to the Stability and Growth Pact and the adjustments proposed by the Commission; calls on all Member States to reach a budget position close to balance or in surplus in the coming years and to avoid pro-cyclical policies, especially when growth conditions are favourable, in order to let automatic stabilisers work symmetrically over the whole economic cycle; emphasises that sound public finances are necessary to guarantee sustainable social protection systems and social cohesion, not least in the context of the demographic challenge of ageing populations;
7. Notes that the European Council calls for the rapid completion of the energy (electricity and gas) and transport (rail and air) markets with a view to maximising efficiency gains from existing networks and infrastructure whilst filling in any missing links; points out that the Member States, through the sectoral councils, have a responsibility to follow up this commitment;
8. Notes the near unanimity on the tax package (savings and energy tax) and deplores the attempt by one Member State to block a final agreement by linking it to the issue of milk quotas;
9. Welcomes recognition of the fundamental role of SMEs as a key motor for innovation, economic growth and job creation; agrees with the Council that the potential contribution that new entrepreneurs and small businesses can make is not fully realised; stresses in this context the importance of implementing rapidly the recommendations of the European Charter for Small Enterprises as well as the Action Plan for 'Simplifying and improving the regulatory environment'; agrees with the Council that all major draft legislation should be subject to a comprehensive impact assessment taking account of the three pillars of the Lisbon strategy and considered separately by the competitiveness Council;

10. Underlines again the importance of a thriving, competitive information and communications sector in delivering a 'knowledge-based' EU economy; welcomes the Council's statements of intent to realise the e-Europe programme, adopt the Community Patent and reform European systems of education and training, but emphasises once again that action and not words will make Europe more competitive and knowledge-based;
11. Welcomes the call for an Action Plan on corporate governance by the end of 2003;
12. Fully endorses the European Council's call for effective application by Member States of internal market legislation already agreed upon in order to establish certainty and clarity for business and investment across Europe; emphasises, in this regard, the importance of meeting the deadline of 2005 for completing the Financial Services Action Plan with every effort to achieve an integrated securities market by the end of 2003;
13. Expects to see more concrete evidence of progress towards the goal of earmarking 3% of GDP for research and development and encouraging innovative and effective links between research and new business opportunities; tasks the Commission with the effective monitoring of progress towards achieving this goal as part of the drive to establish a European Research Area;
14. Underlines, in the context of enlargement, the need to reinforce the policy coordination procedures and systems of economic governance in the accession countries, which must be fully involved in the Lisbon process;

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

15. Points out that the fight against poverty and social exclusion is a vital objective of the integrated strategy and insists it is essential to coordinate efforts to improve and safeguard social protection systems organised and financed in accordance with high social principles and standards; welcomes, in this respect, efforts to improve the measures to safeguard financially sustainable and portable pensions;
16. Welcomes the formal establishment of the Tripartite Social Summit prior to the Spring Summit, since the social partners can play an important role in implementing the Lisbon agenda, for example in the areas of lifelong learning and investment in human capital; underlines that this role must be strengthened;
17. Notes the recent proposals made by Chancellor Schröder to introduce much needed reforms of Germany's economy and labour market, proposals which must be followed through; highlights the absolute necessity of labour market reforms in other Member States as well, such as France and Italy, promoting flexibility and adaptability in the labour market whilst ensuring job security;
18. Welcomes, in this context, the European Council's firm statement on the need for concrete measures to speed up reforms of tax and benefit systems and of the labour market, especially by improving wage formation systems, modernising employment

legislation and integrating underemployed sections of the population, such as women and older workers, and invites the Commission and the Council to develop these ideas further; endorses, further, the emphasis on skills, languages, digital literacy and lifelong learning; stresses that these commitments must be matched by concrete action, such as implementation of the Skills and Mobility Action Plan and the rapid reform of Regulation 1408/71;

19. Takes the view that the current Employment Strategy, recently reshaped, is an efficient instrument to foster employment in the European Union; believes, furthermore, that the Employment Committee (EMCO) is best placed to assess employment issues, and that therefore there is no need to increase bureaucracy by creating a new Task Force on Employment; calls on the Council to limit the remit of such a task force, for example to identifying practical reform measures, and to report to Parliament about its work;
20. Reiterates the contribution made by the voluntary sector and non-standard forms of business organisation to increasing employment and delivering other public policy objectives; calls on the Commission and Member States to develop new strategies to support this sector;
21. Welcomes the recognition of the need for a fresh approach to the issue of immigration in the light of the skills shortage and demographic change in the European Union;

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

22. Reminds the Council of the Göteborg conclusions on the need to integrate environmental considerations into the annual economic and social policy coordination process so that future economic growth is both socially and environmentally sustainable and an effective decoupling of economic growth and environmental degradation is achieved;
23. Notes the invitation to Member States to accelerate progress towards meeting the Kyoto Protocol targets, but so far sees little evidence of the political will to take these commitments seriously; expects to see discernible progress by Spring 2004;
24. Expects progress on the taxation of energy products, increased investment in renewable energy sources, the use of economic tools to encourage more environmentally-conscious industrial practices and the development of a Community framework on the principles of transport infrastructure pricing;
25. Welcomes the European Council's commitment to agreeing a legal framework on environmental liability by April 2004 as well as its call to Member States to ratify the Aarhus Convention;
26. Eagerly awaits the rapid implementation, as called for by the European Council, by the Transport Council of the measures to enforce the ERIKA package of maritime safety proposals and the rapid phasing-out of single-hulled tankers and compulsory audits of flag state controls;

27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.