



Preparations for the Spring Council and the Lisbon Strategy

Parliament adopted on 15 March a resolution on 2006 Spring 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 outlined the priorities and strategies that the Spring Council should concern itself with regarding the realisation of the revised Lisbon Strategy.

Concern over defensive and protective measures

The resolution opens by expressing satisfaction that the revised "*Lisbon Strategy... has led to the presentation of national action plans proposed by all Member States, focusing on priority areas such as R&D, Innovation and Education*". It also "*reiterates its satisfaction at the fact that this has led to a clarification of responsibilities at European and national level*". MEPs emphasise however that "*effective and rapid implementation of the National Reform Programmes is necessary*" and that "*economic growth requires, inter alia, a supportive economic framework*".

Parliament is 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. MEPs consider these measures to be an assault on the basic principles of the Internal Market as they create obstacles to the right of establishment of nationals of other Member States as well as to the free movement of capital within the Community. The House calls 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.

Freedom of movement for citizens and workers

MEPs "*note the diverse national approaches to the integrated guidelines taken in national action plans*" and "*believe in the need to set a common structure as the basis for the national action plans*" in hope of "*allowing a better comparative analysis of the impact of the proposed actions*" at both the Member State and European level. Parliament also outlines the importance of "*freeing Europe's competitive potential, economic growth and job creation*".

To do this, Parliament *"calls for a well-functioning internal market, as well as a well-functioning labour market, within the 25 Member States"*. Parliament therefore *"calls upon the Member States to move as fast as possible towards total freedom of movement for citizens and workers within the EU together with determined action to promote quality of work in all its aspects"*.

Ageing Population / Demographic Challenges

The resolution discusses the imperative nature of *"modernising the social state across the EU"* and putting *"the social dimension of our economies – social rights, protection and social dialogue – at the core of how we ensure that people can face up to economic change with self-confidence and ease"*. Furthermore, *confirms that reforms must promote a dynamic and adaptable economy while safeguarding employment security (flexicurity)"*. MEPs also *"consider 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."*

In relation to immigration, MEPs state that *"immigration policies should promote successful economic, social and legal integration of migrants, with a view to alleviating Europe's demographic challenge."* However, Parliament *"recognises that this in itself will not resolve all the questions related to demographic change"*. Moreover, the resolution asserts that *"a successful policy of legal immigration also depends on the implementation of a comprehensive and pro-active strategy to achieve full integration, covering a range of social, economic and civic measures, induction programmes and language training"*.

Innovation and Research / Life-Long Learning

The necessity of lifelong learning is underlined by the resolution when it considers *"that, to ensure that European industry is competitive, the quality of education and training systems must be reinforced at various stages in life and access to higher education facilitated"*. MEPs *"believe that education and training systems must target those areas where Europe is lacking skilled people and respond to the requirements and gaps of a rapidly changing labour market and technological society."* The joint resolution also expresses the desire for Europeans to *"master electronic tools"*, and thus *"calls on the Member States to ensure that, by 2010 at the latest, a computer is available to every pupil in the European Union"*.

MEPs highlight the importance of encouraging innovation through the delineation of proper financial provisions in the EU's financial perspective, Parliament *"believes that innovation is one of the main cornerstones of wealth creation, growth and jobs, strengthens Europe's competitiveness and contributes to achieving the overall policy of sustainable development"*. The House also *"believes that the EU and Member State budgets should give effect to and fully translate the Lisbon strategic priorities by significantly reinforcing Europe's innovation and research capacity and expanding life-long learning, including the use of new financial instruments"*. However, MEPs insist *"on focusing such policies on areas of general interest"*.

Energy Policies

The resolution broadly states the need for coherent energy policies that allow for the variation that exists among Member States. Parliament considers that *"a coherent and efficient energy policy is essential for economic growth in Europe and the durable prosperity of European citizens"*. Moreover, MEPs *"agree 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"*. Correspondingly, the group looks forward *"to the Spring European Council discussions on energy issues"*.

Parliament also covers both renewable and nuclear energy policies. In relation to renewable energy, the House acknowledges an awareness that *"long-term energy security is not possible without an economically and ecologically meaningful development of renewable energies"*. MEPs therefore call on the Commission *"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, the House states that it *"recognises the role that nuclear energy currently plays in maintaining security of electricity supply, as a significant part of the energy mix and for avoiding an estimated 312 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions per year (7% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the EU)"*. Parliament also *"points out that current estimates project a 12% increase in EU CO₂ emissions by 2020, well short of the Kyoto target 8% reduction"*. Furthermore, MEPs *"recall 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 inter alia to the efficiency and quality of production installations, and to decommissioning processes."*