Complementarities and coordination of cohesion policy with rural development measures

2008/2100(INI) - 24/03/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 626 votes to 34, with 37 abstentions, a resolution on complementarities and coordination of cohesion policy with rural development measures.

MEPs believe that it is of key importance to the EAFRD's success to ensure **mutual complementarity** between activities co-financed under the EAFRD and those co-financed under the structural funds, and thus for the assistance under the various funds, in particular the European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund and the European Social Fund (ESF), to be suitably coordinated and for the complementarity of those funds to be ensured.

Distinguishing rural areas from urban areas: MEPs believe that the criteria traditionally used to distinguish rural areas from urban areas (lower population density and level of urbanisation), may not always be sufficient to provide the "full picture", and consider, therefore, that the possibility of adding additional criteria should be explored and call on the Commission to produce concrete proposals in this field.

Targeted and integrated approach: the resolution stresses that, in a large number of rural areas, development possibilities, especially for young people and women, are reduced by difficulties in accessing public services, lack of jobs and the age pyramid. Moreover, in certain areas there are no alternatives to certain forms of agricultural production. In view of the major differences between rural areas in the various Member States and because such areas account for up to 80% of EU territory, it is necessary to adopt and implement a suitably targeted and integrated approach for the sustainable development of such areas, aiming at levelling the existing inequalities and promoting economic dynamism of urban and rural areas.

Rural development strategy: Member States and regional authorities, in cooperation with the Commission, are called upon to: (i) formulate, in partnership with all competent authorities and bodies representing civil society, a transparent, long-term, sustainable rural development strategy at national and regional level; (ii) ensure the direct participation of the organisations representing SMEs, microbusinesses and craft undertakings, with a view to responding in the best way possible to those enterprises' needs and expectations.

Better coordination and planning: MEPs consider that the efficiency of rural development policy can only be achieved if the measures implemented under EARDF and regional development policy are coordinated and complementary, so as to avoid double financing and gaps. The Commission is therefore called upon to propose reforms aimed at ensuring better coordination in the planning and implementation of measures co-financed under the cohesion policy and CAP.

Preventing the rural exodus and promoting competitive holdings: the Parliament recalls that one of the priorities of rural development policy is to propose measures which do not result in the rural population having to abandon agriculture and which also help, inter alia, to promote competitive holdings. It also stresses the importance of support for young farmers to keep them on their land by providing them with incentives for development and other activities too, such as rural tourism and of strengthening SMEs in the countryside.

In this context, the Commission, the Member States and regional authorities are called upon to:

- supply detailed figures and forecasts for the take-up of EAFRD and structural funding in rural areas and to look into the synergies that can be created by the EAFRD and the Structural Funds in terms of the funding available in rural areas;
- assess whether regional policy programmes can contribute to offering farmers a reliable income, for example through carrying out environmental protection, nature conservation and landscape management activities;
- take systematic account of the countryside in EU policies and to provide appropriate support for projects to develop human capital, in particular through the provision of training opportunities, with a particular focus on young women;
- lay the emphasis on strengthening competitiveness by also assisting other productive sectors and to foster entrepreneurship in rural areas;
- create a high-level working group by 2011 as part of the CAP Health Check which would bring forward proposals to secure the future of the rural economy and all who live in rural areas after 2013.

Implementation of rural development policy: the resolution recognises that the difficulties in implementing rural development policy stem from the fact that sectoral policies and territorial cohesion policy cut across each other, as do the economic and social aspects of both types of policy, and from the wide variety of responsibility allocation and policy coordination systems used in the Member States. In this connection, it stresses once again the necessity to create synergies between the EAFRD and the Structural and Cohesion Funds and calls on the Commission to assist national, regional and local authorities in properly understanding the possibilities offered by these financial instruments. It calls on Member States to ensure dialogue between managing authorities so as to create synergies between the interventions of the different funds and enhance their effectiveness.

Defining best practices: lastly, MEPs believe that, prior to rural funding reform, the Commission should conduct a detailed assessment of all sectoral policies having an impact on rural areas, and that a set of best practices should be drawn up for rural development policy as a whole.