Control of the budgetary implementation of the Instrument for Pre-Accession

2008/2206(INI) - 22/04/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 640 votes to 28, with 9 abstentions, a resolution on control of the budgetary implementation of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) in 2007.

The Parliament welcomes the structured dialogue established with the Commission on the implementation of the IPA and reiterates its position in this respect, notably the need to:

- grant all beneficiary countries equal access to the full range of policy tools available under the instrument;
- give adequate priority to the fight against corruption and organised crime;
- pay increased attention to institutional capacity-building, particularly at parliamentary level, development of civil society organisations, measures to promote the principle of tolerance and non-discrimination, human development and regional cooperation in key policy areas.

Late implementation: the Parliament is pleased by the high implementation rate of IPA commitments in 2007 but regrets that the first IPA programmes were only adopted at the end of 2007 and the actual implementation started only in 2008. It also believes that it is important to strengthen the coherence between the 2007 IPA national programmes and the EU pre-accession policy.

Do not undermine the political criteria: the Parliament notes that the main focus for the candidate countries lies in the implementation of European standards, namely statistical, environmental and fiscal standards. It stresses, however, that the importance of the political criteria, notably democratic governance, respect for human rights, freedom of religion, women's rights, minorities' rights and the rule of law, should not be undermined.

Assistance should benefit citizens: the Parliament reminds the Commission that the Union's legitimacy and capacity to promote reforms can be greatly enhanced if the IPA targets its assistance to areas of direct benefit for the citizens of the candidate and potential candidate countries, particularly in view of the needs and challenges generated by the global financial crisis. It is consequently of the opinion that the IPA should support the efforts by the beneficiary countries to meet the requirements laid down in the roadmap for visa liberalisation, so that the citizens of the Western Balkans can finally enjoy freedom of movement and participate fully in EU programmes and schemes.

Increasing transparency: stressing the need for transparent and effective IPA management and control, the Parliament expects the Commission to report every year to Parliament and its responsible Committee on Budgetary Control on payments and implementation of IPA funds.

Horizontal issues: the Parliament notes that horizontal issues, such as environmental impact assessment, good governance, civil society involvement, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, are not sufficiently present and visible in the 2007 IPA projects. The Commission is called upon to develop, in particular, multi-beneficiary regional or horizontal programmes, notably on the fight against corruption and organised crime, intercultural dialogue and gender equality.

Unequal regional funds: the Parliament notes that limited funds are allocated for large geographic areas or comprehensive policy areas and that these funds are fragmented into many small projects rather than concentrated in fewer, more visible projects. It points out that the annual national programmes should

strike a balance between providing an adequate response to the key priorities identified in the progress reports and avoiding over-fragmentation of the funds.

Combating corruption: the Parliament stresses the need to use the IPA to strengthen in all beneficiary countries the fight against corruption and organised crime with a special focus on money laundering, illegal migration and human trafficking, and suggests that EU funds should be earmarked for this purpose.

Involvement of civil society organisations: the Parliament considers that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the beneficiary countries should be more actively involved in the development and initiation of projects. It points out that future IPA programmes should tackle the systematic donor dependency of the CSOs, and should address the development of some of the CSOs along ethno-political conflict lines (especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo). It expects the new Civil Society Facility to tackle many of the problems with regard to the diversity, complexity, and fragmentation of EU programmes.

Improving the visibility of the EU: noting that IPA-funded projects and activities score low in terms of EU visibility "on the ground" and have not generated "bottom-up" legitimacy for further EU rapprochement, the Parliament insists on this aspect.

Education, youth employment and women's rights: stressing that education and youth employment have not been adequately addressed, the Parliament suggests that the Commission examine the possibility of making greater use of the flexibility provided for in IPA so as to allow funding of measures in these areas. The Parliament also calls for pre-accession funds for strengthening women's rights in the Balkans, in particular through women's NGOs and women's organisations.

Cross-border cooperation: the Parliament is concerned that the total 2007 IPA allocations for Component II was only EUR 38.8 million out of a total IPA of EUR 497.2 million (i.e. less than 8%). Regretting that effective cooperation has been difficult to establish, in practice, the Parliament calls on the beneficiary countries and the Commission, under this component, to pursue further existing cooperation and to develop new cooperation, in line with the objective of fostering good neighbourly relations and promoting economic integration, especially in the fields of environment, natural and cultural heritage and the fight against corruption and organised crime.