

Agenda 2000: pre-accession, coordinating aid to the applicant countries

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The second report by Enrique BARÓN CRESPO (PES, E) on the proposal for a regulation on coordinating pre-accession aid to the applicant countries has been adopted by the Committee. The aim of the regulation is to coordinate the various pre-accession instruments following the decision by the Luxembourg European Council (12-13 December 1997) to set up two new aid programmes over and above the Phare programme. The new programmes are an agricultural aid instrument and ISPA (for structural aid). The regulation is designed to ensure that the funds allocated to these programmes (520m euro for agriculture, 1040m euro for ISPA and 1560m euro for Phare) are soundly managed. At the first plenary debate on 19 November 1998 Mr Barón Crespo asked for his report to be referred back to committee because the Commission was unable to accept Parliament's amendments. Parliament's delegation subsequently met the Council Presidency three times. This informal "conciliation" process resulted in the use of a flexible and efficient mechanism during an ordinary consultation procedure, where such a process would not normally be possible. It emerged from these informal meetings that there was a consensus within the Council on virtually all the amendments tabled by Parliament. Against this background, the second report retables most of the amendments adopted in November 1998 (except for those relating to the preamble). The rapporteur welcomed the fact that the main amendments had already been accepted by the Council and said that, in the case of the others, a further expression of support in plenary could only bring greater influence to bear on the Council when it adopted its final position. The report underlines the need to ensure that aid is used efficiently and is properly monitored. For Community-funded operations to have the maximum economic impact, the beneficiary States should be "systematically required" to contribute to any such investments. Funding under the Phare programme should focus on the main priorities for the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, e.g. consolidating the rule of law and democracy, with particular reference to strict respect for individual rights and judicial and police cooperation. Aid for the improvement of nuclear safety should also be implemented in accordance with the Phare regulation. As regards the monitoring of aid, the report calls for the Commission to submit more frequent reports, i.e. annually rather than every other year, and for Parliament to be kept informed about the work of the Coordination Committee.