

Agenda 2000: CEEC applicant countries, pre-accession aid for agriculture and rural development SAPARD

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The committee adopted the report by Jan SONNEVELD (EPP, NL) on pre-accession support for agriculture and rural development in the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) (consultation procedure, first reading) lays down political, economic and social conditions for the granting of this aid over the period in question (2000-2006). The aid is intended in the first instance to improve transport infrastructure and support environmental measures in connection with the adoption of the acquis communautaire and efforts to promote sustainable development. EU funds totalling EUR 520m per year will be provided from the agriculture budget. The applicant countries, says the committee, must adhere to their commitments to implement the reforms needed for accession, namely: they must not, in the hope of attracting foreign direct investment, grant third-country undertakings or products more favourable commercial or financial treatment than that afforded to their EU counterparts; they must swiftly bring their agro-industry up to the food standards of EU and world markets by means of structural improvements ("measurable progress should be evident within a very short time"). The committee also wants to add other points not included by the Commission. These relate to various sectors: rural infrastructure, coordinated reforestation, genetic diversity of plants and livestock, water quality, veterinary and plant health control, procedures to promote food safety, vocational training and retraining, and the establishment of an agricultural credit and rural banking system. The form and conditions for the payment of financial assistance must also be better defined, argues the report. It therefore calls for a Consultative Committee (made up of experts from the EU and applicant countries) to be set up to establish priorities. Lastly, the committee stresses that the measures being funded must be compatible with the reformed common agricultural policy.