Agriculture and rural development: SAPARD programme for applicant countries (Regulation (EC) No 1268/1999). 1st annual report 2000

2002/2007(COS) - 17/04/2002

The committee unanimously adopted the report by Willi GÖRLACH (PES, D) on the Commission's first annual report on the SAPARD programme (2000). It expressed deep concern at the delay in implementing the programme and said that this delay was hindering preparations for accession of the CEECs in the agricultural sector. The committee also pointed out that the public in the applicant countries were unaware that management of the programme was decentralised to the applicant states and that the delay was the result of administrative difficulties experienced by those states. This was increasing scepticism in those countries towards the enlargement process. The report said that the Commission must ensure that SAPARD funds were not forfeited as a result of the late implementation of the programme and also called on it to consider allocating some of the funds centrally in order to improve uptake. The committee feared a "massive rise in unemployment following accession" if the applicant countries' farm sectors were exposed to the full rigours of competition from the current EU-15. It pointed out that only 11% of the SAPARD money was earmarked for development and diversification of agriculture in the CEECs, and called for a reorientation of the SAPARD programme so that more support would be given for the creation of alternative employment in rural areas. The committee therefore urged the Commission to submit a proposal for an Innovative Participatory Rural Development Programme (INPARD), to enable SAPARD to be expanded along the lines of the Leader+ programme which takes a "bottom-up" approach towards rural development. The committee said that the EU's financial perspective should be amended to make more funds available for pre-accession measures in rural areas.