Evaluation activities by the Commission

2002/2131(INI) - 09/09/2002

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Christopher HEATON-HARRIS (EPP-ED, UK) on the Commission's evaluation activities. Starting from the premise that one of the EU institutions' most important tasks was to respond efficiently to European taxpayers' demands for clarity, openness and transparency as regards the use of their contribution to the EU budget, the report said that systematic evaluation was a prime instrument for ensuring value for money for expenditure and welcomed the Commission's efforts to develop a general evaluation culture. Turning to the question of division of responsibility, it noted the recent practice, following the Commission reform, of making operational DGs and services responsible for regular evaluation of their programmes. It felt, however, that it would welcome an opinion from the Court of Auditors on whether central services should have a greater say in defining priorities for the annual evaluation programme, and also called on the Commission to guarantee increased coordination of its evaluation effort. The committee also wanted to allow for the possibility of external evaluations whenever necessary, on a case-by-case basis. The report pointed out that the most difficult task in the evaluation process was to integrate evaluation findings into future policy, budgetary orientations and resource allocation. The Commission was urged to improve internal feedback of evaluation reports and enhance the role of evaluation in the context of Activity-Based Management (ABM) in order to strengthen the link between evaluation findings, decisions on policy priorities and the allocation of resources. MEPs also singled out a number of areas where policies had come in for strong criticism, such as agricultural set-side, international fisheries agreements, cooperation with Asia and Latin America and EU support for NGO structures, and called for the Commission to take account of such criticism in current policy reviews in these areas. As far as transparency was concerned, the report praised the Commission's Evaluation website and the fact that the Commission had pledged to forward information twice a year to Parliament's relevant committees on forthcoming evaluation reports. However, it regretted that the committees were not automatically informed as and when evaluation reports were finalised. It also drew attention to the high number of reports listed as being unavailable for 2001 and pointed out that, under the rules on access to documents, access to a report could be refused only in exceptional cases. The Commission was accordingly asked to justify, case by case, the reasons for refusing to make these reports available. The committee also called for a more readable and more concrete annual evaluation review for 2002 than the one presented for 2001. Lastly, pointing to the flaw in the evaluation process whereby ex ante evaluations in several 'high risk' areas are carried out by the national or regional authorities and project managers, who have a vested interest in the continuation of the projects, the committee urged the Commission to consider ways and means of conducting independent evaluations of all key Community programmes at least once in their lifetime, and ensure that the results were sent to Parliament.