Structural Funds. 11th annual report 1999

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PURPOSE: to present the Commission's 11th Annual Report on the Structural Funds (1999). CONTENT: This Report describes how the Structural Funds regulations were implemented during 1999, with a particular focus on Objectives 1 to 6 and the Community Initiatives. As the last year of the programming period, 1999 saw the programmes fully implemented. This meant that very few new items of assistance were adopted during the year. In all, only five such items were adopted in 1999 for the various Objectives. These comprised two operational programmes for Objective 1 (regions whose development is lagging behind), one concerning the territorial pacts for employment in Spain, the other a programme to develop ecological buses in Greece. In general, three global grants were adopted in Italy. All together, these five items account for only 0.1% of assistnace from the Funds for the period. At the same time, 24 small Community Initiative programmes were also adopted. As in 1997 and 1998, the implementation of appropriations speeded up considerably in 1999, in many cases enough to make up for the backlogs which had accumulated during the early years of the programming period. This was true of both the national initiatives programmes (CSFs/SPDs) and the Community Initiatives. As in 1998, Objective 1 and 3 (combatting unemployment and exclusion) achieved the best implementation rates. Again as in 1998, the Member States which had the best rates of implementatoin of appropriations were the least prosperous Member States (Spain, Portugal, Ireland) and therefore the main beneficiaries of the Funds. By contrast, the more prosperous countries continued to lag behind in the implementation of payments. The implementation of the Community Initiatives (CIs) also speeded up considerably, partly thanks to the reallocation of finance carried out in 1998. The Commission devoted special efforts in 1999, as it did in previous years, to giving fresh impetus to a number of its activities and priorities. Safeguarding and promoting employment, in particular, continued to be a priority receiving sustained support. A complete review of the national action plans for employment were undertaken and resulted in recommendations to the Member States on how best to honour their commitments. The Commission guidelines on employment adopted in 1998 were expanded in 1999 to include new goals, such as lifelong training, access to the information society, the involvement of the social partners in the organisation of work and the incorporation in the programmes of equal opportunities for men and women. In its resolution on the employment guidelines, the Council stressed the role of the Structural Funds, and particularly the ESF, in achieving the goals of the European Employment Strategy. The regulations governing the Structural Funds in 2000-06 require the Member States to include the employment guidelines and more generally the principles set out in the European Employment Strategy, in their programmes. Following the proposed regulations to govern the Structural Funds which the Commission had drawn up in 1998, 1999 was a crucial year for actual preparations for 2000-06, since it saw the adoption of a large number of decisions. Finally, this year's report looks at measures topromote equality between men and women and more specifically, the improvements made in incorporating this political priority in the Funds' programmes.