Development cooperation: democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms

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The Committee has adopted the draft report by José TORRES COUTO (PES, P) on a Council regulation laying down procedures for implementing measures in support of democracy and human rights as part of the EU's development cooperation policy. The aim is to provide funding in support of three main objectives: human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratisation and conflict-prevention measures. The amendments adopted in committee seek to expand the regulation's sphere of application, by including in it the "proper management of public affairs", support for refugees and displaced persons and support for moves to abolish the death penalty. The committee believes the Community should take a particular interest in activities which encourage grassroots democracy and therefore calls for financial support to be given to partners who cannot demonstrate any previous experience in the field. It says in particular that the tendering procedure should be adapted to ensure that it gives small-scale operators equal opportunities to participate. MEPs also want the Commission to present an annual report reviewing the measures taken, so that a proper assessment can be made of the contribution made by development cooperation to the consolidation of democracy.Lastly, on the budgetary side, the committee has deleted from the draft regulation all mention of a "financial reference amount" (providing for ECU 250m for the period 1999-2004) as it believes it is up to the budgetary authority (Parliament and Council) to decide on the funding as part of the budget negotiations.