Development cooperation: Asian and Latin America countries ALA

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The committee adopted the report by Marieke SANDERS-TEN HOLTE (ELDR, NL) amending the proposal under the 1st reading of the codecision procedure. Starting from the premise that two such different geographical areas should not be included in a single legal instrument, it divided the Commission's initial proposal into two regulations, one applicable to Asia and one to Latin America. On financing, MEPs amended the figures proposed by the Commission for each region, arguing that they were a long way off the 40% to 60% split in funding between Latin America and Asia that had come to be used as the reference. They called for the sum of EUR 1 270 as proposed by the Commission for cooperation with Latin America for the period 2003-2006 to be increased to EUR 1 517 million, and the sum of EUR 2 523 proposed for cooperation with Asia during the same period to be scaled down to EUR 2 276. The committee also made a number of substantive changes to the proposal. For Latin America, it stipulated that the regulation should establish a framework for "the formulation of political objectives". For both Asia and Latin America, MEPs wanted to implement the Council's commitment to poverty eradication as the main objective of Community development policy and bring other objectives into line with the Treaties. They specified that "reducing and, eventually, eradicating poverty" was the overall objective, to be achieved by means of "close reference to the Millennium Development Goals" as well as actions to promote sustainable economic, social and environmental development, human rights, minority rights and the rights of indigenous peoples, democracy and good governance, combating inequality, improving the gender balance and contributing to prosperity, security and stability. They also deleted the Commission's proposed policy objective of combating organised crime, money-laundering, terrorism, etc. on the grounds that this did not fall within the development objectives outlined in the Treaty. The committee also restructured the regulations, creating separate sections so that crosscutting matters, common to all sectors of activity and including such elements as spending benchmarks, gender mainstreaming and environmental assessments, were divided from the list of actions eligible for funding. For both Asia and Latin America, it specified a 35% benchmark for annual spending on social infrastructure, with a minimum of 20% going on basic health and basic education. For Latin America, it also proposed that EUR 20m should be set aside each year for a Biregional Solidarity Fund geared to the management and financing of sectoral health, education and poverty reduction programmes in the poorest countries and regions of Latin America. The committee further recommended a 10% benchmark, for both Asia and Latin America, for annual spending on improving the management of natural resources and reversing environmental degradation. Among the list of actions eligible for funding, MEPs included projects aimed at helping street children in Latin America and at combating hazardous forms of child labour in Asia, actions to guarantee sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation, the involvement of civil society and emergency preparedness. The committee was also concerned that the principle of "developing country ownership" should be given more prominence in the proposal and stressed the need to ensure the partner countries' participation in identifying and agreeing on priorities. Moreover, "ownership" should not be limited to certain ministries within a country's central government but should extend to all stakeholders, including local governments, parliaments, NGOs, the private sector and other relevant civil society actors. Lastly, the committee tabled a number of amendments aimed at improving parliamentary accountability to allow for greater scrutiny not only by Parliament but also by the national parliaments of the Member States and the partner countries. Reporting provisions were also strengthened.