Development policy: implementation of the external assistance. Annual report 2001

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The committee adopted the report by Miguel Angel MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ (PES, E) on the Commission's 2001 Annual Report on EC development policy. MEPs noted that EC external assistance for 2001 had increased but that this was due mainly to increased aid to accession candidate countries, which exceeded aid to developing countries. However, they welcomed the Commission's concentration of development assistance on the poorest states, in particular the least developed countries. The committee expressed concern at the continuing high level of committed appropriations that have not yet been paid, despite the fact that this decreased by 60% in 2001. It called on the Commission to "apply itself diligently" to solving this problem, either through activating projects or programmes for which funds have been committed or through "decommitment" whenever it is clear that there would be no point in maintaining commitments. MEPs also reiterated their previous criticisms regarding the time taken for programming European aid and called for less cumbersome administrative procedures. In addition, they repeated their calls for the rapid budgetisation of the European Development Fund (EDF) while stressing at the same time that this should not lead to any reduction, in real terms, in the value of the Fund. The report then looked at the use of European aid and expressed serious reservations regarding the use of funding for macro-economic budgetary support, much of which had gone to countries which have been criticised for poor governance. It called on the Commission to define comprehensive, rigorous and transparent control and reporting mechanisms to monitor macro-economic support and thereby ensure that it is used for the purposes for which it was intended. The Commission was also urged to analyse, in the Annual Report for 2002, the effectiveness of assistance provided for private sector development and to devise yardsticks for measuring the success of such assistance, including measures specifically designed to promote women's participation in business. Lastly, the committee suggested that, in its future annual report, the Commission should clearly distinguish between actions and resources for development cooperation with the countries of the South and its activities for the development of the northern countries, including the EU accession countries and neighbouring countries such as those in the Balkans.