Development policy: participation of non-state actors

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Richard HOWITT (PES, UK) welcoming the Commission communication as "a significant step in promoting a participatory approach in all EC development programmes". However, it emphasised that, as long as non-state actors (NSAs) were not involved in the elaboration of EU development policy documents (such as Regional Strategy Papers, Country Strategy Papers, National Indicative Programmes, etc.), there was a risk that the principles set out in the communication would remain a dead letter. It regretted that the Commission had not officially sought input into the communication from Southern or Northern NSAs, in direct contrast with those stated principles. The Commission was also urged to set up a contractually binding obligation for the participation of Southern NSAs in all EC cooperation agreements and programmes. MEPs highlighted the importance of the NGO co-financing line in the budget, which promoted own-initiative development activities by European development NGOs, and they were critical of successive attempts by the Commission to reduce the funding available. They also wanted to see a significant increase in the funding allocated under another budget line (decentralised cooperation) providing for the direct involvement of Southern civil society in EU programmes, arguing that this was essential in order to achieve the stated objective of enhancing "ownership of development strategies by partner countries". The report stressed the need for improved dialogue and consultation between local NSAs and the national authorities of developing countries in crucial areas such as the judiciary, public administration and the media in order to increase public sector effectiveness in areas such as respect for human rights, good governance and fighting corruption. It called on the Commission to consider setting up a capacity-building facility for Southern NSAs, managed by each EC delegation, which would be especially relevant in countries unwilling to support or cooperate with local NSAs. The committee expressed strong support for the Commission's plans to appoint one staff member in each EC delegation to be responsible for ensuring the implementation and monitoring of participation of local NSAs in development policies and programmes. However, it regretted that no provision had yet been made for training EC delegation staff in these tasks. Lastly, the report called on the Commission to continue providing an adequate and sustained level of core funding to support EU-level development NGOs, saying that voluntary donors to such organisations had a legitimate expectation that their contibution would be directed to development activities rather than dialogue with public authorities.