International Fund for Ireland: continuation of the Community financial contributions for 2003-2004

2002/0210(CNS) - 22/08/2002 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to present a proposal for a Council Regulation on the Community financial contributions to the International Fund for Ireland. CONTENT : to recall, the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) was established in 1986 in order to contribute to the implementation of Article 10(a) of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 15 November 1985 which provides that the two governments shall co-operate to promote the economic and social development of those areas of both parts of Ireland which have suffered most severely from the consequences of the instability of recent years, and shall consider the possibility of securing international support for this work. The objectives of the IFI are to promote economic and social advance and to encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland. The political background of the region has evolved over the years: in 1994, the main paramilitary groups announced cease-fires; in April 1998, the Belfast ("Good Friday") Agreement set a political settlement for a peace process, including the devolution of powers to a Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive Committee, which were set up at the end of 1999. However, violence and division between the main communities remain high and various suspensions of the devolved institutions have illustrated the threats and uncertainties surrounding the peace process in the region. Following early contributions from the United States and other countries, the European Community, recognising that the objectives of the IFI were a reflection of those pursued by itself, wished to give practical support to the initiative. It began contributing to the IFI in 1989. EC funding now represents 34 % of annual contributions to the IFI and 38 % of cumulative contributions to date. The Commission has been represented by an observer at all IFI Board meetings since the beginning of 1989. In this context, economic and social development in support of peace and reconciliation at grassroots level is a long term process. As an instrument towards this goal, the IFI complements the action carried out by the EU Programmes for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (PEACE I 1995-1999, and PEACE II 2000-2004). In accordance with the current round of contributions, the European Commission has recently submitted an assessment of the IFI's activities to the Budgetary Authority. This acknowledges the IFI's very valuable and positive actions for peace and reconciliation in the region, and thereby the fulfilment of its objectives. The report concluded that the Commission believes that funding after 2002 should be provided on the basis of the observations made in this report, which could be reflected either in the future Council Regulation on the EC contribution to the IFI, or through other appropriate means of cooperation between the Commission and the IFI. In light of the above assessment, it is proposed that the Commission adopts the following proposal for a Council Regulation on the EC contributions to the IFI which will : - continue the EU contributions of EUR 15 million per year to the IFI, for a further period of 2 years. The proposed new period will therefore end in 2004, which would coincide with the end ofthe PEACE II Programme. - take account of the observations made in the Commission report, in particular those reinforcing synergy of objectives and co-ordination with Structural Funds interventions, in particular with the PEACE Programme.