LIFE II: financial instrument for the environment (amend. regul. 1973/92/EEC)

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The Committee has adopted the report of Mrs. Elena MARINUCCI (IT., PES on the proposal for a Council Regulation amending Council Regulation 1973/92/EEC establishing a financial instrument for the environment (Life). The most important changed proposed by the Commission are: a stricter definition of the goals of Life, a stricter application procedure. For the second phase of LIFE, the rapporteur is in favour of allocation 800 mecu. The experience of the past years demonstrates the need for a more precise definition of priorities and the establishment of stricter selection criteria. It would be better to improve the definition of objectives, priorities and selection criteria in order to help the processing of applications and also to avoid having to disappoint so many applicants. One bone of contention between Parliament and the Commission was the separation of "nature" projects from "'others" projects. Parliament proposed that the budget line for Life be subdivided into two parts, one on environmental protection and the other on other environmental projects. For the application of EU environment policy the Commission proposes that actions under the Life programme should concentrate on coastal areas, hazardous waste and water management. Mrs. MARINUCCI and the Committee approve this under the condition that coastal areas also include rivers and wetlands. The rapporteur is also in favour of the support to local authorities for the incorporation of environmental aspects into regional planning and development. This is a very important addition, because too few Member States establish a link between regional planning and development and the environment, when in fact such integration is an essential condition for a model of sustainable development. Mrs. MARINUCCI also proposes to amend slightly the Commission proposal for the distribution of the financial sources: 45% for nature protection (was 46%), 45% for other actions (was 46%), 7% for regions bordering the Mediterranean and the Baltic (was 5%) and 3% for management and evaluation (was 3%). The rapporteur also welcomes the opening of a number of EU programmes to the associated countries of central and eastern Europe, but demands a substantial allocation of at least 10 or 15 mecu for this instrument. For the entire period covered, the Commission provides for an allocation of 450 mecu, but in fact the increase from 400 mecu to 450 mecu is a step backward. It is necessary to take account of inflation and, moreover, the surface area of the union has increased by some 40% following the accession of Sweden, Finland and Austria. There is also the question of the associated countries of central and eastern Europe. According to the White Paper these countries must bring their legislation into line with Union law as soon as possible, which will impose huge financial obligations on them. It would seem reasonable to make sufficient financial instruments available to help those countries to meet the obligations imposed on them. d. The amendments The rapporteur saw all her amendments adopted. She had tabled amendments on the budget available, on the reiteration of the objectives of the regulation, on the importance of nature protection and in particular the protection of habitats and the safeguarding of biodiversity, on a small change in the distribution of the financial instruments and on a greater clarity in the application procedures. e. Conclusions: the rapporteur deplored that, because a lack of funds, hundreds of good projects have to be rejected. Life has broad objectives, but a relatively small budget. A comparison with the structural funds is revealing. But, to finance the Union's environmental policy, for example the huge investment required to obtain clean water and drinking water, or to treat waste and to convert numerous industrial processes into sustainable processes, little more than 100 mecu is set aside per year.