Development policy: mainstreaming of gender equality in development cooperation, action programme 2001-2006

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The committee adopted the report by Maria MARTENS (EPP-ED, NL) welcoming the Commission's action programme. It regretted, however, that the programme had only finally been published 6 years after the Council first designated gender mainstreaming as a principle of EU development policy. It also felt that the programme needed to be fleshed out, by the presentation of a formal proposal and a detailed work programme setting out operational arrangements, deadlines and financial requirements. The committee questioned the rankings given to the six priority areas of Community development policy to which the programme will apply. While it agreed that first priority should be given to supporting macro-economic policies, poverty-reduction strategies and health and development programmes, it felt that transport should not be ranked in such a high position (third) and that it was unacceptable that key areas such as good governance and trade should be ranked so low (fourth and fifth positions respectively). The report stressed the importance of improved access to quality reproductive health services and said that gender mainstreaming in health should target men as well as women, in order to foster greater responsibility for family planning, safer sex and parenthood. It also pointed out that cultural, religious and socio-economic practices resulting in gender disparity should never be considered an acceptable excuse for obstructing progress in the area of gender rights. Another key concern expressed by the committee was the need to involve women and women's organisations and NGOs in all stages of the project cycle (planning, drafting and follow-up) and to ensure balanced representation of women and men in project management. MEPs also emphasised the need for gender training and awareness-raising among Commission staff in the various departments involved and suggested that each delegation and service should have a permanent official as a specialised 'gender desk' with clearly defined responsibilities. Still on the subject of methodology, the report said that gender auditing of public budgets was an essential means of establishing whether the principle of gender mainstreaming was being applied in public policy. Lastly, the committee called for sufficient resources to be made available to support the proposed actions. It criticised the reduction in the funding allocated in 2001 under the specific budget heading for integrating gender issues in development cooperation (EUR 2.02m compared with EUR 5m in 1998) and urged the Commission to draw up a new proposal to replace the current regulation governing that heading when it expired.