Women of the rural regions of the Union in the context of the common agricultural policy CAP

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Rodi KRATSA on women in rural areas of the EU in the light of the mid-term review of the common agriculture policy. Pointing out that the Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting on 27 May 2002 referred to equal opportunities for men and women in rural areas as an integral part of the Community's policy on agriculture, the committee urged the Commission and the Council to ensure that the current CAP reform proposals include effective measures designed to improve equal opportunities for rural women and to enable such women to progress. Amongst its recommendations, the report called on the Commission to ensure that, in the approval procedures for the relevant projects of the Structural Funds, due attention is paid to enhancing the role of women farmers. Furthermore, before implementing future programmes, the Commission should make a proper analysis of their likely impact on equal opportunities for men and women, taking into account the distribution of funds in accordance with the principle of gender mainstreaming. The committee also called for a specific programme to be set up for the "women" project in the future structural funds and rural development programme (2007-2012). MEPs also wanted to see measures to set up and strengthen social infrastructure for women farmers - and the inhabitants of rural areas in general - particularly in the fields of health, education and training, and culture. Moreover, given that unemployment in rural areas affects women most, the Member States were urged to promote, within the context of the structural funds, quality employment, the spirit of enterprise among women and a cooperativist culture. The report also called for reliable and accredited systems of agricultural and integrated vocational training for women farmers, and life-long learning. One area of particular concern was the fact that many women farmers fall into the "spouse or partner" category, putting them in a difficult situation in terms of pay, social security, pensions etc. The committee therefore wanted to see changes to the relevant Community legislation, involving compulsory registration of assisting spouses so that they are no longer invisible workers, together with measures to ensure that they have insurance cover for health care, invalidity benefit, retirement pensions, maternity benefit, etc. in their own right. Finally, in the light of the review of the CAP and the accession of new Member States, the Commission was urged to take account of the particular characteristics of the applicant countries, bearing in mind the situation of women in the rural economies of those countries and the role that they may play in the process of rural development, so that the Leader+ programme could be extended and adapted as necessary to the new circumstances.