Economic and social cohesion. 1st report

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The committee adopted the proposal for a resolution on the first three-year report on economic and social cohesion by 26 votes to 11. The rapporteur, Mr Juan de Dios Izquierdo Collado (PSE, E) opened by noting the absence in the Commission report of an up-to-date definition of cohesion and hence of an objective evaluation of its results. In detail, he accused the Commission of reducing cohesion to a purely economic concept, while the text adopted took account of indicators of both economic inequality, such as access to the labour market, and social inequality, such as education, vocational training and the exercise of social, cultural and democratic rights. In general, the rapporteur criticized the lack of ambition in this first report, which kept a low profile in the face of the 2000-2006 interinstitutional agreement and important events (EMU and enlargement) which would intervene once the new financial perspectives had been adopted. The rapporteur recalled that the European Parliament had voted in favour of incorporating a mechanism in the Treaty for coordinating repercussions at regional level of various Community policies in the form of jointly agreed guidelines in order to give concrete expression to Article 130B. Although he deplored the lack of scientific and technological cohesion in Europe and stressed that restrictive practices policy is the most resistant to economic and social cohesion, the rapporteur refrained from encouraging the renationalization of Community structural policy, convinced that harmonious development of the Union cannot be achieved through national policies. With regard in particular to the financial instruments of cohesion, the text adopted considered that the number of objectives needed to be reduced and efficiency and concentration increased, but without abandoning the objectives currently being pursued; on this point, the Commission's proposals in Agenda 2000 represented an initial basis for work. In conclusion, the report by Mr Izquierdo Collado, while against a reduction in the Structural Funds or the Cohesion Fund, endeavoured to highlight the aspects which needed to be developed and the priorities which needed to be included if the Structural Funds were to be more efficient instruments in the fight against regional inequalities and unemployment and respond better to the demands of the citizens of Europe.