Regional policies of the European Union: implementation in Austria, Finland and Sweden

1996/2116(COS) - 20/03/1997

The committee unanimously adopted the report by Mr Reinhard RACK (PPE, A) on the implementation of EU regional policies in Austria, Finland and Sweden. In order to speed up the approval of actions and the implementation of regional development programmes under the structural funds (1995-1999 period), the three new states only submitted single programming documents (SPDs), 41 of which were approved (Austria: 17, Finland: 9, Sweden: 15). The speed with which the SPD approval procedures had been concluded was remarkable and was ascribable first and foremost to the professionalism of the national authorities in preparing projects for the purposes of accession. However, there had been a great deal of delay in approving Community initiatives, which was why the European Parliament had called for a reduction in the number of initiatives in order to avoid a situation in which implementation costs were out of all proportion to the funding to be distributed. During the 1995-1999 programming period, Austria will receive ECU 1.623 million from the structural funds (607.6 million under objectives 1, 2 and 5b), Finland will receive 1.704 million (836.9 under objectives 2, 5b and 6) and Sweden will receive ECU 1.420 million (ECU 550 million under objectives 2, 5b and 6). Only one region in the new Member States is classified under objective 1 (Burgenland in Austria, population 271,000, per capita GDP approximately 70% of the EU average). Aid is targetted mainly at trade, industry, tourism, agriculture and the environment and should enable 7,300 new jobs to be created. It should be stressed that although these new states are "relatively prosperous, there are nonetheless disparities and specific regional development problems" (low population, isolation etc.); "the rate of unemployment in Finland and Sweden has almost tripled since the 1980s". As a result, "promoting long-term employment and reducing unemployment must be one of the basic objectives of the structural funds" and all the SPDs are based on this. "Extreme concern" is expressed at the high rate of youth unemployment in Finland and Sweden. Targeted measures were therefore needed to modernize existing forms of training and learning and "promote labour market diversification and innovation and, more importantly, to encourage local development and employment initiatives". "The European Parliament calls on the Commission to plan support for these measures beyond the current framework (objective 3 - employment)". As far as local and regional authorities are concerned, they asked "to be more closely involved in the establishment, approval and implementation of the programmes in order to satisfy the principle of partnership... by including the social partners, representatives of the civil society and non-government ecological organizations in control committees". The European Parliament also called for "a flexible approach to cofinancing" through "increased private-sector participation".