Research, development RTD, innovation: reinforcing economic cohesion and industrial competitiveness

1998/2128(COS) - 21/01/1999

The committee adopted the report by Henri de LASSUS SAINT GENI·S (ERA, F) on the Commission's paper on reinforcing cohesion and competitiveness through research, technological development and innovation. The rapporteur says that the continued existence of major regional disparities in terms of RTD between the Member States becomes glaringly obvious when one compares differences in per capita public expenditure (ranging from 13 to 1) with differences in per capita income (5 to 1). For example, the technology gap between Ireland, Greece and Portugal on the one hand and Germany and France on the other is more than double the difference in their income. The gap in RTD investment is even greater: 1 to 100 in the case of Macedonia and Berlin. The report calls for a distribution of research funding which will help stimulate a culture of innovation throughout Europe, in particular in the least-favoured regions (LFRs) of the EU, including the outermost and island regions, as laid down in the Amsterdam Treaty. In addition, the simultaneous implementation of the fifth RTD framework programme and reform of the Structural Funds offers an opportunity to create a high degree of synergy between research policy and regional policy, for which purpose an integrated approach between the two could be devised, harnessing them for the benefit of policies on industry, human resources and support for SMEs which are co-financed under the Structural Funds. This is all the more necessary given that two of the areas of the fifth framework programme relate directly to factors crucial to economic growth in the LFRs, i.e. the promotion of innovation and the development of a user-friendly information society. Overall the rapporteur takes a positive view of the Commission's paper, praising its new approach to the problems of cohesion, but says much remains to be done in order to clarify these issues over the coming years and to develop a genuine spirit of innovation in the LFRs.