Links between regional and competition policy

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The committee unanimously adopted the motion for a resolution on the Commission's paper on regional policy and competition policy. The rapporteur, Claudio AZZOLINI (EPP, I), fully backs the main points of the new guidelines, which satisfy the priorities of consistency and concentration required under the current reform of the Structural Funds. However, the aim of consistency in itself does not, according to the rapporteur, entitle the Commission to be overzealous in future. Thus, while the draft resolution as adopted does not object to the relation between the two systems of zoning of Community and national aid (whose relationship will become that of two relatively close concentric circles, thereby ensuring consistency and concentration), it voices Parliament's concern, as the guarantor of cohesion, that the maximum reductions in the intensity of aid envisaged by the Commission, as regards aid pursuant to Article 92(3)(a) and (c), will harm the development both of the least-favoured regions covered by Objective 1 and the regions of new Objective 2 (which are already penalised by the priorities of the reform of the Structural Funds). The report therefore calls on the Commission to adopt a more flexible approach when using the exclusive powers vested in it for applying competition rules. A similar worry applies to remote or sparsely populated regions and to island regions, where the report argues that measures to strengthen economic and social cohesion should not be hampered. If solutions which take account of the real difficulties facing these disadvantaged regions are not provided, fiscal substitution measures may proliferate, which would be difficult to control and might endanger the unity of the internal market.