Town and country planning and the European Spatial Development Perspective (EDSP)

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The committee unanimously adopted the proposal for a resolution on the first Commission town and country planning project. Although aware that its content might give rise to objections, the rapporteur, Mr Novo Belenguer (ARE, E), felt that the political value of the document, which was presented at the informal Noordwijk Council in June 1997, was such that it could rightly be considered a major step forward as the product of consensus and cooperation between the Member States in a new area of Community initiatives. The proposal for a resolution endorsed the three objectives of the draft European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), but asked the Commission to establish clearer guidelines and a methodology for coordination between the aims, mainly in order to achieve a balance between competitiveness and cooperation throughout the European territory. While approving the indicative and non-compulsory character of the document, the rapporteur trusted that the ESDP would not fail to achieve concrete results. Although it was to be deplored that the Treaty did not provide for specific powers as regards regional planning, there were provisions, such as articles 130a et b (cohesion), 129 b et seq. (trans-European networks) or even 130r and s (environment), which implied a direct link with the territorial approach. This meant that the ESDP needed to be taken into account when developing Community policies which had a regional impact and making decisions at national, regional or local level. In addition, the fact that the ESDP was not obligatory implied that its implementation needed to be based on cooperation, consultation and consensus; consequently, a reliable and permanent information and dialogue system was needed. Moreover, the principle of subsidiarity, which applied to the ESDP, meant that partnership was needed in the field of regional planning. Finally, as this was an open-ended document, it needed to be periodically revised and adjusted. As for the content of the draft perspective (which was still provisional), the proposal for a resolution raised certain priorities which deserved to be taken into account in the follow-up to the project, such as transport policy (especially shipping) and, more generally, the development of non-urban and non-continental European spatial entities. The text adopted also supported any initiative by the Commission under Interreg, or by the Council in connection with the creation of a European regional planning observatory. In the same institutional context, Parliament was asking for the formalisation of the Council of Regional Planning Ministers and for the Regional Development Committee to be established as a permanent body.