AGENDA 2000: economic and social cohesion

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By unanimously adopting the report by Elisabeth SCHROEDTER (Greens, D) on the economic and social cohesion aspects of AGENDA 2000, the Committee reiterated the importance it attaches to the principle of partnership especially in the establishment of programmes and during the proposed phasing out period. Members expressed their fears that as a result of the Commission's proposals rural areas will be losing out and future support will be insufficient. In addition, Members are concerned that Commission's development policies for rural areas (switch to the guarantee section of the EAGGF) will undermine local and regional partnership as well as the controlling powers of the European Parliament. For this reason the Committee proposes a division of objective 2 into two sub-categories. This, it considered, would avoid an imbalance to the detriment of the Union's rural areas. Cooperation with third countries in the context of INTERREG and PHARE should be facilitated through an examination of methods of creating joint funds. Members called for an increase in the funding of innovative measures and expressed doubt as to the viability and size of the proposed 10% reserve system. The Commission's intention to eliminate the possibility of rebudgetisation which would remove the privileged position of heading 2 was rejected. With respect to the enlargement process the creation of a specific and permanent financial instrument under the Structural Funds designed to ensure gradual and optimum integration of the applicant countries, is considered adequate.