

Agenda 2000: European Regional Development Fund ERDF

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The report by Daniel VARELA SUANZES-CARPEGNA (EPP, E) on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) comes under the cooperation procedure. The committee acknowledges that the Commission's proposed regulation clarifies and rationalises the scope of the Fund. It focuses attention on the points designed to increase the benefits of investment (e.g. the use of financial engineering techniques or neighbourhood services for companies), while also seeking to have new areas (e.g. equal opportunities) brought within the Fund's remit. MEPs reiterated Parliament's demand that the arts and tourism - which they see as ideal vehicles for boosting regional development - be included in the ERDF's scope. The figures speak for themselves: the arts sector employs 3.1m people in the EU, equivalent to 1.8% of the active population. Tourism - a lynchpin of the leisure industry - is undergoing rapid expansion and offers an alternative source of employment where there is industrial decline. The report stresses the role that the ERDF should play in the area of transeuropean networks for transport (including maritime transport), telecommunications and energy, so as to redress the inbuilt disadvantages of remote, isolated or island regions by linking such regions up with each other as well as with the EU's central regions. The committee supports the idea of a new INTERREG programme (devoted to crossborder, transnational and interregional cooperation) but believes that, by the same token, the URBAN initiative, which the Commission wants to abolish, should also continue.