

Agenda 2000: Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-accession ISPA 2000-2006, aid for applicant countries

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The committee adopted the report by Ralf WALTER (PES, D) on a proposed Council regulation establishing an instrument for pre-accession structural policies (ISPA) calls for the funding in question to be better targeted. The committee wants its demands to be taken on board by the Commission and Council. Hence its preference, under this consultation procedure, not to take a final decision but to continue the negotiations (i.e. to vote on the amendments but not on the legislative resolution). This pre-accession instrument is based on the principle of the Cohesion Fund, i.e. it is mainly intended to enable the applicant countries to bring their legislation into line with Community law in two areas - the environment and transport. There is no doubt that the needs of the applicant countries in these areas are considerable (EUR 50-90bn over a period of 15 years for the transport sector and approximately EUR 100bn for the environment, according to available estimates). ISPA will have an annual budget of EUR 1040m per year. Even if funds for Phare and agriculture (see previous page) are added to this figure, the aid being granted to the applicant countries does not match the scale of their needs. It is vital to focus efforts 100% on the two priorities of environment and transport and attain a balanced ratio (50/50) by the year 2006. It should not be forgotten that average per capita GDP in the applicant countries (with few exceptions) amounts to only 35% of the EU average. This is why the committee believes that ISPA can make a useful contribution to the pre-accession strategy only if it is implemented in the most efficient way possible, i.e. by taking into account the specific needs of each country. This is particularly true because regional disparities can only become greater with enlargement. To achieve maximum efficiency, the report says that the level of Community assistance should only in exceptional circumstances be less than 85%. In addition, with this targeted plan, in contrast to the Commission proposal, financial assistance could be granted for measures whose total cost amounts to less than EUR 5 million, although these may not account for more than 5% of the total ISPA budget. The report firmly says that, in order to avoid overlapping, overall coherence must be ensured between the three pre-accession instruments (Phare, ISPA and the agricultural instrument) on the one hand and the international financial institutions (EIB, EBRD) on the other. In this context it is important that representatives of the applicant countries should also sit on the Coordination Committee. For the sake of transparency, the committee calls for Community support under ISPA to be placed