Regions of the Union: economic and social situation and development. 6th periodic report

1999/2123(COS) - 14/12/1999

The committee adopted the report by Rolf BEREND (EPP/ED, D) containing Parliament's resolution on the Sixth Periodic Report on the social and economic situation and development of the regions of the EU. The committee felt that the Report formed a sound basis for the formulation of structural policy priorities at Union level, and welcomed the fact that it included an analysis of 'soft factors' which were difficult to measure. The resolution focused inter alia on the issue of unemployment, noting that, while the poorest regions were catching up in terms of per capita GDP, this was mainly due to an increase in productivity and only to a limited extent to an increase in employment, and that the rise in unemployment had affected the regions to widely differing degrees. It called for greater account to be taken of conditions in individual regions, such as low population density, long distances and, especially, the causes of unemployment. It stated that the employment situation in the various regions was so specific that authorities in the Member States ought to bear prime responsibility for measures to promote employment, and hoped that the Commission would operate its programmes as a supplement to national policy. It also emphasized the need for integrated measures to combat structural unemployment (in particular, retraining and continuing training schemes) and pointed to the positive impact that small and medium-sized enterprises had on employment. The committee also drew attention to the major imbalances in research and development and proposed that exchange of know-how between the regions should be improved. It questioned the effects of enlargement with regard to the distribution of structural funds and in particular the repercussions for the outermost regions, and also called on the Commission to improve the legal bases for cooperation between regions in the Member States and the applicant countries. Lastly, the resolution regretted the Sixth Report's failure to mention the importance of the fisheries sector in many regions as a factor of economic and social development and the need to maintain a structural policy taking account of its specific characteristics.