Structural Funds. 10th annual report, 1998

1999/2211(COS) - 23/05/2000

The committee adopted the report by Maurizio TURCO (TGI, I) on the Commission's 10th annual report on the Structural Funds. While welcoming the full take-up of appropriations in 1998, the committee pointed out that there were still considerable divergences in implementation between Objectives, between the Member States and between regions. The full take-up of funds was only possible because of a mechanism for offsetting under-implementation and over-implementation, so the implementation rate for a given year was not the best indicator of the quality and effectiveness of financial management. For the next programming period (2000-2006), the committee said that steps should be taken to avoid a sluggish flow of resources in the initial stages of implementation and ensure that the programme was implemented evenly in each individual year. It also hoped that the new rules would make it possible to ensure transparent financial management and avoid liquidity bottlenecks. The committee welcomed the plans to reduce the number of priority objectives, initiatives and related programmes, as the total number of programmes run by the Commission was too high for them to be properly implemented and monitored effectively. On the question of coordination with other Community policies, the committee expressed concern that many operations had been financed without complying with, for example, the procedures relating to environmental protection, the management of state aids or the award of public contracts. It also regretted that, in the context of the European Social Fund, insufficient attention had been paid to women, older workers and population groups at risk of social exclusion. The committee called for Structural Fund policy to be coordinated more closely with the Cohesion Fund and other regional development instruments, and to be aimed at reducing the structural gaps between the central part of the EU and the outlying regions. Lastly, it hoped that structural actions would in future have greater impact on job creation, particularly in regions hardest hit by unemployment.