Structural Funds. 11th annual report 1999

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The committee adopted the report by Camilo NOGUEIRA ROMAN (Greens/EFA, E) on the Commission's 11th annual report on the Structural Funds (1999). As far as the execution of the budget was concerned, the committee regretted that the Commission did not provide more extensive analysis of the budgetary performance over the whole 1994-1999 period but instead limited itself to a description of the actual out-turn. It was critical of the lack of figures - or explanations - in the report relating to the backlog of outstanding commitments remaining to be paid at the end of the period. It also regretted that, when programming was being carried out, the final evaluation of previous programmes was generally not available. The report then looked at various policy areas under the Funds. On employment, it said that there should be better coordination between structural fund operations and national employment action plans. On gender equality, a prominent theme of the 1999 annual report, the committee felt that the report had failed to provide specific details on access for women to the Structural Funds or the impact of assistance under the Community Initiatives. The Commission was urged to ensure that its future annual reports on the Structural Funds provided a breakdown by gender of data regarding the impact of assistance on employment, education and vocational training, etc. It also called for an integrated policy to promote women's interests, linking the target of 60% female employment by 2010 to the implementation of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund. Other points taken up in the report included the principle of additionality, which was not being fully complied with. The committee regretted the fact that no penalty could be imposed when Member States infringed this principle and called on the Commission to create instruments and rules ensuring that additionality was applied. It also called for the regions, and not the Member States, to be responsible for administering and taking political decisions on the Structural Fund projects that should be implemented within their territorial ambit. Lastly, the committee addressed the question of evaluation and control. It called on the Commission to step up on-the-spot checks by the appropriate inspection bodies and urged the Member States to improve their management and control systems for detecting irregularities. It also felt that there should be a review of Parliament's role, enabling it to be more actively involved in the evaluation and control process, as a guarantor of the European interest alongside the Commission.