Cohesion Fund. Annual report 1999

2001/2058(COS) - 20/06/2001

The committee adopted the report by Sérgio MARQUES (EPP-ED, P) on the Commission's annual report on the Cohesion Fund (1999). It criticised the "unacceptable" delay in publishing the 1999 report (in January 2001) and also 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. The committee was also 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. As regards the actual activities of the Cohesion Fund, the committee was upbeat in its assessment, welcoming the fact that a balance had been struck between transport and environment projects and applauding the increase in rail transport investment in three of the countries. It felt that the Cohesion Fund had been effective and that its creation had been fully justified. The committee nevertheless warned that real convergence among all the Member States had not yet been achieved and that enlargement might exacerbate the existing economic disparities. It stressed the need for continued solidarity towards the cohesion countries as well as efficient preparations for enlargement. On the financial management side, the committee emphasised the need to observe the key principle of additionality. It also called on the Commission to step up on-the-spot checks by the appropriate inspection bodies, and 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. Lastly, the Commission was urged to improve project assessment, looking not just at the achievement of short-term objectives but also at the projects' contribution to the ultimate aim of cohesion policy, i.e. reducing the development gap and backwardness of certain regions.