

Disadvantaged regions in the context of the cohesion policy and its institutional perspectives

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by José Javier POMES RUIZ (EPP-ED, E) on structurally disadvantaged regions in the context of cohesion policy. MEPs stressed that a Community cohesion policy was crucial for the development of the EU and flatly rejected any attempt to renationalise this policy. They said that the principle of solidarity underpinning cohesion policy should apply in particular to regions with permanent geographical handicaps, in other words, island regions, mountain areas, and sparsely populated areas. They argued that such regions suffer from manifest structural disadvantages which can only be overcome by means of an all-embracing structural policy and if everyone contributes. The report also pointed out that, although the Treaty makes provision for measures to assist the outermost regions, no specific provision is made for other areas affected by permanent geographical handicaps. The committee proposed that, whatever their level of eligibility for future structural policies (Objective 1, 2 or phasing out), regions suffering from such permanent constraints should be able, within their respective classifications, to benefit from a Community co-funding rate upgraded from 5% to 10% depending on the severity of the constraints suffered. It also made a number of other recommendations: - there should be an explicit reference in the Treaty to areas of the Union with low population density according to Protocol 6 of the Act of Accession for Austria, Finland and Sweden; - a wide-ranging assessment should be carried out of the favourable effects information technologies can have on sparsely populated areas; - there was an urgent need to tackle the problem of emigration and its causes; - reform of Community competition policy must make it possible to enhance the impact of regional aid on regions with permanent geographical handicaps and to ensure that quality public services are preserved there; - given the important role which major trans-European networks can play in the transport and energy sectors to overcome the handicap of inaccessibility, the TEN should in future focus more on areas suffering from permanent handicaps. Lastly, the committee called on the Convention and the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference to include the principle of 'territorial cohesion' in a concrete form among the fundamental objectives of the Union's constitutional treaty and to include in the chapters of the second part of the Treaty, concerning common policies, provisions to remedy the permanent structural constraints affecting some regions of the Union.