

Structural Funds. 13th annual report 2001

2003/2019(INI) - 21/05/2003

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Helmuth MARKOV (EUL/NGL, D) on the Commission's annual report for 2001. It was critical of the delays in implementing the Structural Funds at the start of the 2000-2006 period and said that "truly radical options" must be considered in the 2003 mid-term review. The review should, moreover, include a detailed analysis of efficiency in the use of resources, coherence with other Community policies and the contribution of the funded projects to the sustainable development of the regions. The report suggested that innovative projects under the ERDF, for which there was heavy demand, should be given more funding by reallocating resources from other programmes. The committee expressed concern that Member States were not yet shouldering their new responsibilities and that there were major differences in quality of national control work. It also maintained that entire responsibility for the Structural Funds should be assigned to a single authority and a single minister in each Member State in order to improve coordination among the many departments involved at Community, national and regional level. On the question of coordination with other financial instruments, the report welcomed the close coordination with the EIB and the EIF but noted that in some cases the EIF's lending conditions had proved unsuitable, particularly for poor regions, and that other forms of venture capital should be tried. As regards the Structural Funds' compatibility with other Community policies, MEPs wanted to see better synergies between the ESF and the European Employment Strategy. They also urged that gender equality be properly taken into account in the different programmes, for example when promoting the employment of, or the setting up of businesses by, women. Other recommendations included stricter monitoring of the full and early implementation of environmental impact assessments and improved coordination of structural interventions with other Community instruments for the sustainable development of rural areas. Turning to the issue of evaluation and monitoring, the committee said that financial controls should be stepped up and infringements by Member States in allocating appropriations should be dealt with through sanctions. Noting that one reason for problems in the implementation of the Structural Funds arose from "the interface between national rules and EU legislation", it urged the Commission to clarify responsibilities and carry out a full review of both procedures and existing legislation in order to lay down a framework before the start of the next programming period. The Member States, for their part, were invited to adopt measures to implement the Commission recommendations on simplification of administrative procedures and standardised information. Lastly, the report looked at the challenges of enlargement and stressed the need for the Commission to take "comprehensive measures" to train staff in order to guarantee proper management of the Funds. It also called for transitional measures to be developed for regions that currently have Objective 1 status but might no longer qualify in the future.