Annual report of the Cohesion Fund (2001)

2003/2020(INI) - 21/05/2003

The committee adopted the report by Dana SCALLON (EPP-ED, IRL) on the Commission's annual report for 2001. It pointed to the major impact which enlargement would have on the functioning of the Cohesion Fund and stressed that, given the major structural weaknesses of many of the candidate countries in the transport sector, it was necessary to maintain a balance between transport and environmental projects. It added that, despite increasing pressure within the transport sector, investment in the rail sector must not be neglected. Noting that Portugal's 4.1% deficit in 2001 raised, for the first time, the question of a possible suspension of funding, the committee called on the Portuguese authorities to take the necessary steps to ensure that this situation did not recur. It also felt that the financial execution of the Fund could be improved and drew attention to the issue of outstanding commitments to be paid (RAL) which, it said, "remains a serious weakness". The report also called for: - rigorous checks to ensure that the rules of transparency are observed in relation to public contracts; - improved reporting by the Commission on the Cohesion Fund, inter alia through the inclusion in the Annual Reports of more detail, more complete statistical information (in the form of a full statistical annex allowing comparison between the different Member States) and greater evaluation of the Fund's activities. By way of example, the committee wanted the Commission to report on the projects' contribution to ensuring compliance with Community environmental law and on the extent to which rail projects have resulted in a shift away from road transport.