Structural Funds. 8th annual Report 1996

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OBJECTIVE: to report on the application during 1996 of the EU Structural Funds regulation, in particular implementation of their objectives (Objectives 1 to 6). SUBSTANCE: more than half the Structural Funds assistance for the period 1994-1999 has been committed by the Member States and a third has already been paid, as shown by a Commission report. The eighth Annual Report on the Structural Funds shows that more than 500 regional aid programmes are currently in operation throughout the Union. Expenditure is increasing as the various regional aid programmes are beginning to be implemented. Progress, however, is very variable and a large number of regions and programmes are lagging behind. The report also highlights numerous financial and administrative irregularities in the Member States. These have been brought to light through monitoring by the Funds' inspectors, the Commission's Directorate-General for Financial Control and its Anti-Fraud Unit (UCLAF). In 1996 the commitments for all these Structural Funds together amounted to ECU 26.14 bn, i.e. 98% of the ECU 26.59 bn available, compared with 90% for the two first years of the current programming period. Payments amounted to ECU 22.45 bn, i.e. 95% of the ECU 23.68 bn available, compared with 81% in 1995. This satisfactory implementation shows a very significant increase in the financial movements in 1996: up 19% from 1995 in terms of commitment appropriations (+ ECU 4.2 bn) and up 30% in terms of payment appropriations (+ ECU 5.233 bn). Commitments for the various objectives amount to ECU 23.11 bn (89% of the total) within which Objective I accounts for 66% (ECU 15.36 bn). Each Fund's proportion of the total commitment varies from 2% for FIFG (ECU 448 m) to 53% of the total for the ERDF (ECU 13.8 bn). The seventh Annual Report (1995) showed that the environmental aspect had been integrated into all the structural activities, this report similarly emphasizes activities in the area of research, the information society and technological innovation.