Coal industry: State aid and security of energy supply

2001/0172(CNS) - 11/10/2001 - Document attached to the procedure

This document gives the opinion of the ECSC Consultative Committee on the Commission's proposal for state aid to the coal industry. The Committee agrees in principle with the Commission's approach of determining the future role of coal and the issue of aid to the coal industry after the expiry of the ECSC Treaty as part of a strategy on the security of energy supply. On the details of the proposal, it identifies the main concerns: -the Committee questions whether it is satisfactory that a scheme which is intended to apply until 2010 only makes specific provisions until 2007 and makes plans for a review covering the remaining period, which may entail quite different provisions, thus clouding the future outlook. The scheme should apply right through until at least 2010. -it questions the reallocation of coal aid to renewable energy sources. In the Committee's view, it is desirable that the new scheme make it possible for the Member States to strive for the long-term goal of a stable minimum output of indigenous coal which allows continued access to substantial deposits, thus ensuring the preservation of the infrastructure in working order, skilled core workforce and technological knowhow required for this purpose. The reduction of aid should only proceed to the point at which this minimum level is reached. -the social and regional consequences of further adaptations must be given consideration. Aid for reduction of activity should be limited to the period upto 2007 only insofar as it concerns measures decided upon within the framework of Decision 3632/93/ECSC. -the Commission admits to a fairly vague and thus very broad margin of discretion, particularly in assessing aid to secure resources or the underlying plans for such aid. More stringent assessment and authorization criteria are required. The proposal contains examples of disproportionate requirements, such as providing data on each and every production unit in a coal enterprise or asking Member States to supply all the information regarding reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. -there is no reason to change the procedural rules which have been tried and tested within the ECSC framework and comply with Community law. There is a need to amend the deadlines for the notification, examination and authorization procedure so that the Commission can reach timely decisions.