Structural Fund: use of resources

1997/2189(INI) - 19/02/1998 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

In adopting the report by Mr Rolf BEREND (PPE,D) on implementation of structural fund appropriations, Parliament notes with satisfaction that 1996 marks a turning point concerning the utilization of appropriations. While for the period 1994-1996 around ECU 2.5 billion were not implemented, all appropriations provided for 1996 were committed and, in addition, ECU 423m of the ECU 869m which were rolled over to 1994 to 1996 were also implemented. However, at the end of 1996, appropriations for a period up to 1994 remain to be implemented (ECU 3.4 billion), together with ECU 2.5 billion for Community support frameworks and initiatives in respect of the period 1989-1993. The European Parliament attributes these delays to the late adoption of regulations and decisions concerning eligible areas and all procedures relating to the start up of programmes (allocation of appropriations, submission and approval of programmes etc., It points out in this connection that administrative fragmentation can stand in the way of successful implementation of the structural funds. In order to reform the structural funds, Parliament calls on the Commission to adopt its proposals for framework regulations as soon as possible, and in any case early in 1998, so that the Member State authorities have sufficient time to draw up and submit programmes. It calls for current support to continue for a transitional year should the new structural fund regulations not be adopted until after 1 January 1999. It welcomes the concentration, simplification and reduction in the number of forms of intervention proposed by the Commission in Agenda 2000 and hopes that this will contribute to easing the administrative burden at every level, particularly where Community initiatives are concerned and will thus help to improve the implementation of appropriations. It proposes a widening of responsibilities and a review of the task of the monitoring committees. This should be accompanied by stronger controls and the introduction of Commission sanctions. Also, it wishes to strengthen partnership arrangements at local level and urges the partners involved to make full use of existing opportunities. Concerning budgetary arrangements the option of automatic reinstatement in the budget should remain open, given that the time frames of multilateral programming are out of phase with budget annuality. It hopes very much that the Commission will decide not to make 'economies' to the detriment of the principle of economic and social cohesion and criticizes the Council yet again for increasingly responding to implementation of backlogs by cutting appropriations which may that engender liquidity problems and in case indirectly undermines the expenditure target agreed in Edinburgh. Should uptake difficulties remain at the end of the programming period solutions will have to be found which will allow for the reallocation of resources. It acknowledges the Commission's proposal put forward in Agenda 2000 (COS0619) to introduce a reserve for the regions utilizing the appropriations most effectively and urges that the introduction of such a reserve must not ingender an additional administrative burden. The creation of this reserve must be assessed within the general framework of the discussion of the new ad hoc regulations and at this stage it cannot conclude that its creation will automatically lead to an improvement in the qualitative utilization of appropriations.