Development problems and Objective 1 structural assistance in the United Kingdom, Meyerside. Report

1995/2223(COS) - 24/04/1997 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

In adopting the report by Mrs Arlene McCARTHY (PSE, UK) on development problems and structural interventions in the United Kingdom in the period 1994-1999, the European Parliament stresses the need for the British Government to carry out in-depth consultation and a comprehensive review of current procedures in the Department of the Environment before the implementation of projects receiving structural fund support. Noting the need to address problems associated with administrative and financial procedures, it calls on the Commission and UK Government to investigate administrative best practice and introduce improved procedures. Delays in making payments, particularly under the ESF, are considered to be unjustified and more efficient payment mechanisms should be introduced as a matter of urgency. It notes the problem of debt relating to late payments affecting small organizations and the voluntary sector and calls for the creation of advance global grants for the creation of Intermediary Funding Bodies (IFBs) to alleviate the problem. At the same time, it calls for greater flexibility in the use of the funds to avoid underspending. In addition, the funds should be simplified by introducing a clearer applications process and clear and more transparent project selection methods. The impact of Community initiatives should be examined so as to rationalize them and make the necessary adjustments. Parliament acknowledges the importance of partnerships for the effective functioning of the fund and calls for their nature and role to be better defined. It regrets the decline in the representation of local authorities in favour of quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations and calls for their planning role to be strengthened. It calls on the Commission to take into consideration local partners' wishes in the transport sector and grant them aid on a sliding scale according to the value of their contribution. At the same time Parliament regrets: - the introduction of the 'Regional Challenge' competitive bidding system, - the decision of the UK Government not to participate in funding for the readaptation of workers to industrial change, - the lack of information for the public concerning structural fund aided projects, - the problems of continuity affecting ESF annual programmes and the lack of coherence between the different funds. It recommends the creation of separate funds operating on a regional basis and a review of ESF and ERDF administrative procedures in order to improve their complementarity. Efforts should also be made with regard to selection criteria so as to take better account of industrial change, GDP and the relationship between falling unemployment and non-sustainable employment. Transitional funding mechanisms should be created, together with measures to promote sustainable job creation for industrial regions. Priority should be given to sustainable development and environmental impact assessments should be made a condition for project approval in every case. While welcoming the efforts of the British Department of the Environment to review all current projects in this light, it regrets that this action is being taken at such a late stage. Finally, Parliament regrets the under-utilization of technical assistance funds and urges the government offices in the regions to consider setting up independent secretariats in the English regions.