Future of the European Social Fund (ESF)

1997/2102(INI) - 21/11/1997 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

In adopting the report by Mrs Karin JÖNS (PSE,D), the European Parliament advocates a drastic reduction in the objectives of the Structural Funds and the Community initiatives. In particular, it calls for Objectives 3 and 4 to be combined into a single horizontal objective and for the Community initiatives on human resources support to be reduced to a single initiative promoting equal opportunities for men and women. On the other hand, it calls for the retention of current measures under Objective 3 in favour of the young unemployed, long-term unemployed, women, disabled and socially excluded. Parliament presents a long list of measures to strengthen ESF intervention, including the promotion of local employment initiatives, support for the reorganisation of working time, development of vocational training, and promotion of the mainstreaming of the ESF initiatives. In all cases the social partners should be involved in negotiating the intervention framework between the Commission and the authorities responsible in the Member States. Regarding the reallocation of unused appropriations, Parliament calls on the Commission to make them available first of all to other regions of the same Member State, and then to other Member States, the criteria for selecting such regions and States being a high level of commitment appropriations and the quality of measures. In this case it regards it as desirable for the ESF assistance rate to be changed to 90% in the less-favoured regions where per capita GDP is less than 75% of the Community average, and to 70% in the rest of the Union. Parliament considers that national expenditure on social and employment policy must not fall victim to the efforts to achieve budget savings. It calls for co-financing (Community-Member States) to be maintained and for Member States to be able to decide for themselves how to obtain the necessary funds, including contributions from the regions or private sector.