Economic and social cohesion. 2nd report

2001/2207(COS) - 07/02/2002 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted the report by Francesco MUSOTTO (EPP-ED, I). It welcomes the results achieved in recent years as regards cohesion and the favourable impact it has had on the European Union's regional policy regarding the reinforcement of economic and social cohesion in the Community as a whole. It also points out that the principle of cohesion, and thus solidarity, is sanctioned by the Treaties and constitutes one of the foundation stones for integration of the Union's peoples and territories. It emphasises, however, that the progress made has been uneven and that specifically, although there has been a recovery in terms of per capita income among the Member States, unacceptable regional disparties remain, and these gulfs are widening instead of narrowing, leading to grave concerns about the possible further marginalisation of the most underdeveloped regions. It notes that with enlargement differences and disparities between the regions will substanially increase. The Parliament is convinced that a proper regional development policy must create conditions in underdeveloped areas that will promote new economic initiatives, stimulate the optimal use of regional resources and remove the structural factors responsible for delays, instead of restricting itself to merely reducing their effects through the compensatory transfers of resources. The resolution stresses the need to promote the overall harmonious development of the Community and points out that the European spatial development perspective (ESDP) can make a positive contribution to the development of a polycentric model. It expresses concern at the sharp disparities in unemployment which persists in many regions of the EU, together with the inadequate levels of vocational training and firmly believes that a proper regional development policy with flexibile instruments can create fresh investment prospects and job opportunities in the less-favoured areas as well as helping to make optimum use of existing regional resources. It, on the other hand, deplores that partnership has only been partially applied; in fact, in some sectors (NGOs local authorities) have only been consulted at a late stage or have been given limited time to contribute to 2000-06 programming. The Parliament asks the competent national and regional authorities to apply the "bottom-up" principle at all programming, implementation and evaluation stages, so that local and regional actors are fully involved both in current EU regions and in the applicant countries. It regrets the fact that no penalty can be imposed when Member States infringe the additionality principle. It requests that the Commission present at the earliest opportunity a more detailed analysis of the impact of the principal Community policies on economic and social cohesion on the basis of the socio-economic indicators being drawn up and considers therefore that it is vitally important to implement a system to monitor variations in the impact of the various Community policies on European cohesion. With regard to cohesion policy after 2006, the Parliament welcomes the Commission's second report on economic and social cohesion and considers it to be useful and necessary basis for embarking on a broader debate on post-2006 cohesion policy. It regrets however that insufficient attention is being paid to the challenge posed by the forthcoming enlargement of the Union.Lastly, with regard to the funding for the future cohesion policy, the Parliament reiterates that future cohesion policy must be based on the principle of solidarity, partnership and additionality. It believes that it is not possible to fall below the level of 0.45% of Community GDP earmarked for cohesion policy without jeopardising the success of cohesion policy objectives and also believes that an evaluation of the needs of cohesion policy is necessary in the immediate future in the context of the financial perspectives with a view to enlargement. It reiterates the importance of the principle of additionality, as the only way of ensuring sufficient resources and operational synergies with Member States' governments. With this in view, it believes that the ceiling for Community funds should remain at 4% of national GDP for all Member States.