Refugees, displaced persons, asylum-seekers: creating a European Refugee Fund

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In adopting the report drafted by Mrs. Permille FRAHM (GUE/ NGL, DK), the European Parliament approves the proposal for a Council decision creating a European Refugee Fund. The proposal was subject to some amendments one of which relates to the integration of refugees into society. This could be helped by supporting the actions taken by refugee organisations already present in the Member State and working to achieve social integration. With regard to selection and management of activities under this fund, Member States should have the primary responsibility, but should act in partnership with a range of relevant NGOs, refugee organisations, the social partners and local and regional authorities. In terms of the financial perspective, the Commission shall come forward with the financial estimates covering the whole period of the programme under the current Financial Perspective. These amounts shall serve as a reference only. The allocation for each financial year shall be authorised within the annual budgetary procedure. The Commission shall submit to the budgetary authority by 31 March 2001 a proposal for the revision of these appropriations, and, if needed, for a revision of the Financial Perspective, together with an assessment of the new scheme and its implementation in the Member States. With regard to the conditions for the reception of refugees and displaced persons and procedures, the actions may concern the creation or improvement of infrastructure, the guaranteeing of basic services, the improvement of administrative and judicial asylum procedures (including counselling services), care for people particularly in need of protection (such as unaccompanied minors, elderly people requiring care, the disabled, victims of torture or rape, victims of trafficking or forms of sexual abuse, people requiring special medical treatment), and education and training. Actions may also provide social assistance in areas such as housing, minimum means of subsistence and healthcare, psychological support, facilitation of access to means of legal protection from racist attack, and assistance with employment, education and vocational training and may be aimed at enabling beneficiaries to participate as fully as possible in the society of the Member State. According to the Parliament, the Fund should also be used to finance public information concerning the obligation of Member States to persons seeking international protection, and their obligations in the context of the European Union's asylum policy, including public awareness campaigns to supplement other actions. Lastly, the responsible authority shall, as far as possible, make the final choice of project in partnership with representatives of civil society, NGOs, the social partners, local and regional authorities and international organisations such as the UNHCR. In any case, each Member State shall be guaranteed a minimum share of the funds to cover tasks related to the protection of refugees and promoting public awareness. The Commission shall submit a mid-term report to the European Parliament and the Council by 31.12.2001 at the latest, and a final report by 01.06.2004. It shall consult on a regularbasis within the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant international organisations, the social partners and the NGOs.