Agriculture and rural development: SAPARD programme for applicant countries (Regulation (EC) No 1268/1999). 1st annual report 2000

2002/2007(COS) - 13/06/2002 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution by Willi GORLACH (PES, Germany) expressing its concern that preparations for the accession of the CCEE are being considerably hindered in the agricultural sector by the delay in implementing the SAPARD programme. There was no take-up of funds at all in the financial year 2000, and only insignificant amounts in 2001. This is a sign that Sapard had been poorly organised insofar as its aim is to provide effective development aid prior to accession. Public opinion in most applicant countries was not fully informed about the reasons for the delay in receiving Sapard funding, which has increased scepticism in applicant countries about enlargement. The difficulty experienced by some CCEEs in setting up paying agencies was also noted. Parliament called on the Commission to examine whether it would improve the take-up of appropriations if the Commission were to allocate a certain amount of Sapard funds centrally. Parliament went on to point out that, on average, only 11% of Community appropriations for Sapard are earmarked for the development and diversification of agriculture in the CCEE. There is an urgent need for greater support to create alternative sources of income and strengthen civil society in the CCEE in the context of promoting rural development, as there is considerable overmanning in the sector. This might lead to a massive rise in unemployment following accession if their agriculture is subjected to the full pressure of competition from the present Member States. There should be a reorientation of the Sapard Programme so that greater support is given to the creation of alternative employment possibilities in rural areas, since this would fit in the with the EU's concept of multifunction agriculture and reduce the social problems caused by the inevitable job losses in the CCEE agricultural sector resulting from accession. The Commission is called upon to submit a proposal enabling funding to be used under Sapard for creating additional employment and income and strengthening civil society in rural areas, taking a "bottom-up" approach along the lines of the Leader programmes in the EU. Parliament seeks an agreement with Council and Commission to amend the financial perspective to make additional funds available in rural areas. Implementing such an Inpard programme as of 2003 prior to accession means that structures can be set up for use by the Leader programme following accession and valuable experience can be gained.