

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

2004/0167(COD) - 24/05/2005

The committee adopted the report by Giovanni Claudio FAVA (PES, IT) amending the proposal under the 1st reading of the codecision procedure:

- the scope of the regulation should be enlarged to include island regions, border regions, areas with "serious and permanent" natural or demographic handicaps and mountain regions;
- the objectives as laid down in **Article 2** should also include promoting "social inclusion and equality between men and women", achieving environmental and social improvements through the implementation of Community environmental and social legislation and removing the barriers faced by disabled people in accessing goods and services and built-up areas by ensuring that accessibility is a condition of any project benefiting from the Funds;
- the committee introduced a new **Article 3a** on balanced and sustainable regional development, with the following definition: "Regional development means the preservation, development and, where necessary, reshaping of sustainable living and working in the regions";
- MEPs proposed a new mechanism of support for SMEs in **Article 4** whereby "the products of research financed wholly by public funds via the EC budget or national research institutes, which are not yet patented, may be offered to SMEs free of charge provided that such research is directly transformed into an innovative industrial good". Moreover, the application of a regional or national 'knowledge voucher' should be accessible as a general instrument;
- regions that are starting to join the new category of 'Regional competitiveness and employment', but have not yet completed their actual convergence process, should benefit from some flexibility in the setting of priorities (**Article 5**);
- in order to promote access to and efficient use of information and communication technology by SMEs, funding should be made available for setting up infrastructure in the most remote regions and developing action plans for very small and craft businesses;
- although MEPs agreed with the Commission that housing should not be eligible for a contribution from the ERDF (**Article 7**), they provided for an exception in the case of "expenditure which relates to renovation of social housing with a view to saving energy and protecting the environment in the context of sustainable urban development".