Structural Funds: extension of the duration of the PEACE programme 2005-2006 and new commitment appropriations

2004/0224(AVC) - 17/12/2004 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to lay down general provisions on the Structural Funds concerning the extension of the duration of the PEACE programme and the granting of new commitment appropriations.

PROPOSED ACT : Council Regulation.

CONTENT : the EU is supporting the peace process in Northern Ireland and the whole or part of the Republic of Ireland. Since 1995, the PEACE Programme has a strategic aim "to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and promoting reconciliation". This unique mission among Structural Funds follows the work pioneered by the Special Support Programme (PEACE I), established in 1995-1999 following the announcement of ceasefires by the main paramilitary organisations in the region. In April 1998 the Belfast ("Good Friday") Agreement set a political settlement for a peace process, including the devolution of powers to a Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive Committee, which were set up at the end of 1999.

The Programme's total expenditure for the period 2000-2004 is estimated at EUR 708 million, of which the four Structural Funds contribute EUR 531 million (80% Northern Ireland - 20% Border Region). 15% of the total allocation is attributed to cross-border projects.

On 18 May 2004, the UK and Irish Prime Ministers wrote to the President of the European Commission requesting an extension of the EC contributions to the PEACE Programme for two years (2005-2006), which they consider to be essential for the consolidation of the peace and reconciliation process.

On 16 June 2004, Commissioner President Romano Prodi responded that the Commission was keen to maintain these efforts. He also added that unless the European Council was able to provide a clear mandate in this regard, it would be difficult for the Commission to bring forward budgetary and legislative proposals that would meet these ambitions.

On 17-18 June 2004, the European Council took note of the current difficulties in the peace process in Northern Ireland and confirmed its support for the efforts of the two governments in seeking to re-establish the devolved institutions. In order to support these efforts, the European Council called on the Commission to examine the possibility of aligning interventions under the PEACE II Programme with the programmes of the Structural Funds that come to an end in 2006.

Regulation 1260/1999/EC should therefore be amended accordingly so as to extend the implementation of the PEACE programme by two years, coinciding with the programming period for the Structural Funds. This is the aim of this proposed Regulation.

The a

nnual breakdown of commitment appropriations for 2000 to 2006 (EUR million, 1999 prices) are as follows :

- 2000 : 29 430;

- 2001 : 28 840;

- 2002 : 28 250;

- 2003 : 27 670;

- 2004 : 27 080;

- 2005 : 27 120;

- 2006 : 26 660.