European Social Fund (ESF) 2007-2013

2004/0165(COD) - 06/07/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by José Albino **SILVA PENEDA** (EPP-ED, PT) and made several amendments to the Commission's text. Parliament sought to strengthen some aspects of it such as social inclusion, non-discrimination and gender equality. In addition, it added amendments calling for more trans-national cooperation to be promoted as well as 'innovative actions'. It should be ensured that innovative ideas and measures are promoted and tried out in accordance with the European guidelines and recommendations under the European Employment Strategy, and with the Community's objectives in the field of social inclusion. Innovative activities should account for at least 1 % of the operational programme. For such activities, the ceiling for contributions from the ESF should be raised to 85%. Coordination measures in the framework of transnational, cross-border and interregional cooperation should be 100% funded by the ESF. In the context of the programmes' priorities for innovative actions, a fund may be created to support a limited proportion of programmes for small projects involving local actors. Funding shall be allocated in the form of global subsidies. 'Small projects' shall mean those of up to EUR 300 000.

The ESF will also support information and awareness-raising measures targeting the public, implemented by the Member States with the aim of fighting discrimination and promoting equal treatment and opportunities for women and men in the workplace and society.

In its resolution, Parliament emphasised using the ESF to combat social exclusion, including by improving disadvantaged people's access to employment, and promote non-discrimination on all grounds set out in Article 13 of the Treaty and equality between men and women.

To recall, the Commission's proposal says ESF actions may differ depending on whether they relate to the 'Convergence' or the 'Regional Competitiveness and Employment' objective.

In the convergence objective more action especially to expand and improve investment in human capital, and action aimed at developing institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administrations, should be eligible for funding. Under the convergence objective, at least 1 % of ESF resources will be allocated to capacity-building and measures for the education and networking activities of NGOs, in particular those active in the fields of social inclusion and combating discrimination. Parliament added clauses relating to the improvement of quality of the workplace, including health and safety at work, by giving specific support to SMEs and micro-businesses and their representative organisations at national, regional and local level in the implementation of existing legislation and by promoting an appropriate balance between safety and flexibility.

Under both objectives, the ESF will provide support with a view to anticipating and managing economic and social change. The ESF may also support measures that go beyond a Member State's national employment plan if they are necessary owing to regional and local particularities and if, as a result, the Lisbon employment objectives, social inclusion and social cohesion can be better achieved.

The ESF should also be used to remedy problems relating to demographic changes in the EU's active population. Particular attention should be paid to remedying such problems, in particular through lifelong vocational training.