

Development cooperation: European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights 2007-2013

2006/0116(COD) - 12/12/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by its co-rapporteurs, H el ene **FLAUTRE** (Greens /EFA, FR) and Edward **McMILLAN-SCOTT** (EPP-ED, UK), amending the proposed regulation on establishing a financing instrument for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights).

Parliament has adjusted the instrument's objectives and scope, as well as made it faster and more efficient in responding to urgent developments. Parliament made it clear that the regulation establishes a financing instrument allowing for assistance independent from the consent of third country governments and other public authorities. The objectives have been refocused in order to allow support for non-state players promoting democracy and human rights. Parliament has insisted on new measures to allow the EU to respond quickly and effectively to emergency situations which often face human rights defenders. It introduced ad-hoc measures to allow funding to protect and support human rights defenders in urgent cases without going through a tendering process.

Accordingly, a new clause states that the Commission may allocate small grants on an ad hoc basis to human rights defenders responding to urgent protection needs. The Commission shall regularly inform the European Parliament and the Member States of the ad hoc measures carried out.

In parallel, changes to the Financial Regulation, aimed at allowing funding of unregistered organisations, should allow more flexibility in the operation of the mechanism better to support independent players active in defending freedom in third countries. This should overcome some of the weaknesses in the existing system for which the Commission has been criticised in the past.

In addition:

- Community assistance under the Regulation must be consistent with the framework of the Community's policy on development cooperation and with the European Union's foreign policy as a whole.
- Developing and consolidating democracy under the Regulation should include democratic parliaments and their capacity to support and advance democratic reform processes. National parliaments need therefore to be included as eligible bodies for funding when this is necessary in order to achieve the objectives, unless the proposed measure can be financed under a related Community external assistance instrument.
- A new recital states that EU Election Observation Missions contribute significantly and successfully to democratic processes in third countries. However, the promotion of democracy extends far beyond the electoral process alone. Expenditure for EU Election Observation Missions should therefore not take up a disproportionate amount of the total funding available under the Regulation.

Promoting the equal participation of men and women in social, economic and political life, and supporting equality of opportunity, and the participation and political representation of women is emphasised in the text ;

- The Commission must inform and have regular exchanges of views with the European Parliament, and it must seek regular exchanges of information with civil society, at all levels, including in third countries.

- Where the cost of special measures is equal to or exceeds EUR 3 000 000, the Commission shall adopt them in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 17(2). The amendment lowers the threshold (from EUR 5 million) for when decisions on Special Measures are subject to the Management procedure. For Special Measures costing below EUR 3 000 000, the Commission shall send the measures to the European Parliament and the Member States for information within 10 working days of adopting its decision.

- Community assistance shall not be used for paying taxes, duties or charges in beneficiary countries.

- the Commission must submit an evaluation report Not later than 31 December 2010.

It is hoped that the legislation will be adopted at the first reading stage, and that the instrument will enter into force by the end of the year, thereby preventing a break in EU funding for human rights and democracy, notably the inclusion of electoral observation missions.