Local authorities and development cooperation

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Pierre SCHAPIRA (PES, FR) on local authorities and development cooperation. The report recalled that the Commission has for a long time been committed to giving local authorities a role as full partners in development aid, and acknowledged that their involvement in development policies is essential for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and ensuring good governance as well as ownership of development policies. However, it pointed out that the role of local authorities in development has so far been "under-estimated and under-exploited".

The committee urged the Commission to support and strengthen direct cooperation by European local authorities with their international partners, to refer, in future development cooperation financing instruments and legislative texts, to the role of local authorities and their representative associations as 'political partners' and to ensure that they are involved in all phases of the cooperation process and have direct access to European funding.

MEPs also called on local stakeholders to work together with international organisations to monitor industry and agriculture in order to prevent child labour and cooperate in the construction of adequate school facilities with trained teaching staff and free transport and meals.

The report welcomed the political recognition and the specific funds granted to local authorities by the Instrument for Development Cooperation (DCI) which will allow local authorities to be involved 'upstream' in the definition of the cooperation strategies of developing countries, the elaboration of geographic and thematic programmes, their implementation and their evaluation. It regretted that, to date, local authorities in developing countries have only been involved in the implementation of projects and not in the elaboration of development policies, and pledged that Parliament would carry out "a detailed political follow-up with associations of representatives of the implementation of the DCI within both the EU and developing countries" and would inform local authorities of the new opportunities open to them.

Among its other recommendations, the committee urged the Commission to revise the coming development instruments in 2008/2009 to ensure, inter alia, that decentralisation and local authority action becomes a focus of European aid, sufficient budgetary aid is allocated directly to local authorities for geographic programmes, the budget line of the thematic programme on 'Non-State actors and local authorities' is increased and support for capacity-building of ACP local government is accelerated.

MEPs also called on the Commission to set up an international monitoring centre for local democracy and decentralisation, in partnership with local organisations, to monitor the involvement of local authorities in the process of cooperation with the EU and to monitor and analyse compliance with standards relating to democracy and human rights. Finally, the report proposed using the mechanisms for revision of cooperation strategies, including that of the Cotonou Agreement, to monitor progress made in the involvement of local authorities in the cooperation process.