Contributions of the future regional policy to the innovative capacity of the European Union

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Mieczysaw Edmund JANOWSKI (UEN, PL) on the contribution of the future regional policy to the innovative capacity of the EU. The report emphasised the important role that the regional policy can play in the EU's innovation capacity building, by combining measures in the scientific and technological, legal and financial, economic and commercial, organisational and administrative, and educational and social fields.

The committee called on Member States and the Commission to ensure in the EU regions equal opportunities for all citizens to access education at every level, with the aim of boosting "people's ability to think in an innovative and creative way", and to promote research projects whose findings have practical applications, thus contributing to regional development. The report also said that unhindered and free - or extremely cheap - broadband access to administrative information and scientific, economic, legal and cultural information was an essential precondition for innovation capacity building in the EU. The Commission, Member States and regional and local authorities were also urged to maximise access to information and communication technology (ICT)-based working, which can help to combat unemployment.

Among their recommendations, MEPs advocated broad support for invention-related activities and, by extension, for patent-and licence-related activities, and called on the Commission, the Council and the Member States to step up efforts to introduce a European patent and ensure respect for copyright. The Commission and Member States were also urged to foster the development of innovation clusters in order to establish links between scientific research centres, education centres, business and local communities. Member States should promote cooperation by setting up European technological platforms in order to concentrate innovation activities by forging cross-border and cross-regional links between industry and business and scientific research and financial circles. They should also substantially increase the percentage of GDP they spend in R&D at both national and regional level, and increase the percentage of structural funding resources for development, research and inventions.

The report also urged the Commission and Member States to give comprehensive support to SMEs (the most creative vehicles for technological innovation) by, for example, improving their access to financing from the Structural Funds, reducing red tape and using more public-private partnerships. The Council, the Commission and Member States should set up financing mechanisms that meet real needs, together with a system for managing the risks involved in innovative projects. Information on the EIB/EIF financing initiatives (JASPER, JEREMIE and JESSICA) should be disseminated as widely as possible at regional level. Lastly, MEPs called for the Member States and the Commission to conduct inter-regional compensation policy in a more effective way, having regard to the development of innovation in the regional economies, on the grounds that this would help counter the depopulation of certain areas due to their structural disadvantages.