

3.2 Each Member State will continue to be responsible for the systems under which the recycling targets are achieved. A wide range of requirements, processes, incentives and disincentives are in place across the Community and the EESC urges that work continues by the Commission on establishing best practice and the promulgation of exemplar case studies.

Brussels, 2 June 2004.

4. Conclusions

The Committee welcomes and fully supports the proposal as an important driving force in encouraging national legislation to introduce systems for selective collection in the acceding States.

The President

of the European Economic and Social Committee

Roger BRIESCH

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) No 1268/1999 on Community support for pre-accession measures for agriculture and rural development in the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the pre-accession period'

(COM(2004) 163 final – 2004/0054 CNS)

(2004/C 241/07)

On 2 April 2004, the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 37 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the 'Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 1268/1999 on Community support for pre-accession measures for agriculture and rural development in the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the pre-accession period'.

The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on this subject, adopted its opinion on 6 May 2004. The rapporteur was Mr Donnelly.

At its 409th plenary session (meeting of 2 June 2004), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 182 votes to 2, with 14 abstentions:

1. Introduction

1.1 The accession negotiations in December 2002 provided for accession in 2004 of eight of the countries currently benefiting from the provisions of this Regulation.

1.2 The Commission considers the Regulation should be modified in favour of beneficiary countries not due to join the European Union in 2004, to take account of experience with the instrument it set up, whilst respecting its underlying objectives.

1.3 Modifications are to be made to align certain provisions on those applicable to new Member States. The proposed modifications are the following: (i) an inclusion of a new eligible measure which would enable the rural communities of Bulgaria

and Romania to prepare and implement local rural development strategies; (ii) an adaptation of the aid intensities to levels similar to those granted to countries acceding to the Union in 2004 and (iii) further clarification of the limits on aid rates. The latter modification shall have retrospective effect vis-à-vis all beneficiary countries.

2. Gist of Commission Proposal

2.1 The Community contribution shall not exceed the ceiling of 75 % of the total eligible public expenditure. The Commission proposal will not involve additional spending from the Community budget as it will be financed from the allocations already made.

2.2 The Council Regulation (EC) No 1268/1999⁽¹⁾ as regards limits on aid rates will be clarified and amended.

2.3 This amendment will ensure that in all cases the ceilings laid down in the Europe Agreements are complied with.

2.4 The proposal also involves increased EU contribution level for certain measures on Article 2.

2.5 The aid intensities in hill and mountain regions of Bulgaria and Romania will be aligned from 1 January 2004 similar to Less-Favoured Areas of countries acceding to the Union on 1 May 2004.

3. General comments

3.1 The EESC supports the Commission proposal to implement local rural development strategies in order to strengthen rural economies.

3.2 The EESC endorses the increased aid intensities as a necessary support to agriculture development and to meet standards of food production and protection of the environment.

4. Specific comments

4.1 The EESC is conscious of the problems that beneficiaries may have in raising funds in advance of receiving investment aid.

4.2 The EESC would ask therefore the Commission to find procedures, which will allow those countries to maximise the draw-down of funding.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The EESC fully supports the Commission proposal amending the Regulation.

Brussels, 2 June 2004.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Roger BRIESCH

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 161, 26.6.1999, p. 87. Regulation last amended by Regulation (EC) No 696/2003 (OJ L 99, 17.4.2003, p. 24).