Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a programme to aid economic recovery by granting Community financial assistance to projects in the field of energy’


(2009/C 277/18)

Rapporteur-General: Mr RETUREAU

On 10 February 2009 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 156 and 175 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a programme to aid economic recovery by granting Community financial assistance to projects in the field of energy


On 24 February 2009, the Committee Bureau instructed the Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society to prepare the Committee’s work on the subject.

Given the urgent nature of the work, the European Economic and Social Committee appointed Mr Retureau as rapporteur-general at its 453rd plenary session, held on 13-14 May 2009 (meeting of 14 May), and adopted the following opinion by 129 votes to 5 with three abstentions.

1. Proposals

1.1. At the end of January 2009, with the aim of mitigating the impact of the crisis on the economy, the Commission proposed reallocating EUR 5 billion from the 2008 budget from unspent agricultural structural funds; this proposal sought to facilitate investment in sustainable energy and broadband access in rural areas.

1.2. Discussions in the Council and requests from some parliamentarians led to negotiations on the list of projects to be financed among Member States, whilst the Parliament regretted the lack of investment in energy-saving measures.

1.3. An informal agreement seems to have been reached between the Commission and the two co-legislators in mid-April, relating to the energy aspect, on a sum of EUR 3.98 billion, compared to the EUR 3.5 billion provided for in the draft Regulation. The agreement provides that if the EUR 3.98 billion allocated to energy projects (electricity and gas interconnections; offshore wind energy; carbon capture and storage) have not been fully spent by the end of 2010, they will be able to be used for other projects, for example for improving energy efficiency.

2. General comment

2.1. The Committee welcomes the idea of allocating unused budgetary resources from 2008 to projects aimed at kick-starting the European economy, which has been plunged into stagnation by the systemic crisis that is affecting the world economy and by the unwillingness of financial institutions to provide low-interest loans to businesses, particularly SMEs and start-ups.

2.2. In the current circumstances, it is essential to act as quickly as possible, whilst prioritising specific projects that fit in with the medium to long-term aims of sustainable development, such as renewable energy and the rollout of broadband networks to areas that are not yet connected to the worldwide web by appropriately efficient technologies.

2.3. The Committee therefore supports the general approach of the Regulation, but understands that the expression of different national interests and concerns relating to climate change may lead to some variations on the initial proposal.

2.4. What now needs to happen is for the proposed measures to be implemented as quickly as possible, as time is of the essence when battling this crisis. If political will is not demonstrated, and if measures are taken too late, the objectives pursued may suffer as a result.

3. Specific comments

3.1. However, the Committee regrets that the measures proposed by the Commission to combat the crisis are generally too modest given its rapid and widespread impact on jobs and businesses. It further regrets that stronger proposals and clearer signals were not produced in the months that have already passed.
3.2. The Committee will doubtless be issuing an opinion on other proposals, such as those on regulating cross-border movements of capital or combating tax havens; it will do so at the appropriate time, but it is awaiting strong, effective proposals that are proportionate to a crisis that is already proving to have more serious consequences than any of the others that have gone before.


The President
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