

II

(Preparatory Acts)

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Resolution of the Committee of the Regions on the 'Reform of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund in the context of the political debate on the Agenda 2000 package'

(1999/C 198/01)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to its Bureau decision of 18 November 1998 instructing Commission 1 to draw up a resolution on the reform of the Structural Funds;

having regard to the draft resolution adopted by Commission 1 at its meeting of 3 February 1999 (CdR 1/99 rev. 1; rapporteur: Mr Zaplana);

whereas at its September 1998 plenary session it adopted an opinion on the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds (CdR 167/98 fin)⁽¹⁾; at its November 1998 plenary session it adopted opinions on the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) amending Regulation (EC) No 1164/98 establishing a Cohesion Fund (CdR 235/98 fin)⁽²⁾, the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on the European Regional Development Fund (CdR 240/98 fin)⁽³⁾, the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on the European Social Fund (CdR 155/98 fin)⁽⁴⁾ and the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) establishing an Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession (ISPA) (CdR 241/98 fin)⁽⁵⁾; and at its January 1999 plenary session it adopted opinions on the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) (CdR 308/98 fin)⁽⁶⁾ and the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on structural measures in the fisheries sector (CdR 309/98 fin)⁽⁷⁾;

whereas as it stated in point 1.1 of its opinion on the general regulation, the regulations proposed by the European Commission fall within the general ambit of the Agenda 2000 legislative proposals and there is a close link between the various aspects of Agenda 2000, its legislative proposals and the political decisions to be taken;

whereas as it stated in points 1.2 and 1.3 of the abovementioned opinion, reform of structural policy will play a key role in the decisions on Agenda 2000 because balanced economic and social development of the Community — a basic objective of the Union — can only be achieved if regional imbalances are corrected, pursuant to the solidarity principle;

whereas the discussions at the Vienna European Council in December 1998 regarding the Agenda 2000 proposals require a COR statement on the subject,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 373, 2.12.1998, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 51, 22.2.1999, p. 10.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 51, 22.2.1999, p. 1.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 51, 22.2.1999, p. 48.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 51, 22.2.1999, p. 7.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 93, 6.4.1999, p. 1.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ C 93, 6.4.1999, p. 16.

adopted the following resolution at its 28th plenary session of 10 and 11 March 1999 (meeting of 10 March).

The Committee of the Regions

1. reiterates its support for the promotion of balanced, sustainable economic and social development, founded on the principle of solidarity, as a basic objective of the European Union which can only be achieved by strengthening economic and social cohesion, implementing and developing the principle of subsidiarity and extending partnership arrangements to the economic and social players involved in local development;
2. declares that the citizens of Europe desire a Union based on mutually supportive cooperation between Member States and regions, with a view to the fair redistribution of wealth; and that an effective EU structural policy is the principal Community instrument of European solidarity, as it seeks to reduce disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions, and thus to improve the living conditions of the EU population;
3. supports the Vienna European Council conclusions regarding the commitment to reach political agreement on the Agenda 2000 package in March 1999 in order to achieve its final adoption before the European Parliament elections in June 1999, and points out that sufficient resources — without any reduction — for the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund are essential in order to achieve the economic growth and employment objectives, as it is precisely this investment which generates growth and employment;
4. calls on Member States' political representatives, in their public discussions on Agenda 2000 and in the related revision of the Community financing system, to take account inter alia of the principle of solidarity among Member States and regions;
5. notes the Commission proposal to continue with Cohesion Fund assistance, and thinks that the Fund can also play a useful role in future in reducing the infrastructure deficit in the beneficiary countries;
6. stresses that, following the advent of the single currency, EU political debate must cover all the objectives enshrined in the EU Treaty, such as those geared to the construction of a social Europe, the promotion of balanced and sustainable development and greater cohesion; and that EMU should be viewed as an instrument for pursuing these objectives;
7. affirms its conviction that the policies contained in Agenda 2000 and, in particular, those regarding the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, are fully consistent with other EU policies such as those for promoting employment, competitiveness, research and development and the attainment of a single currency, all of which are designed to further integrate and strengthen the Union;
8. emphasizes the need to strengthen the partnership principle, to ensure local and regional authorities are actively involved in all phases of intervention under Structural Funds and rural policy, especially where this is designed to promote the principle of integrated, pluri-annual global regional programmes, which are framed and administered at local level;
9. calls on the representatives of the Member States who are to attend the Berlin extraordinary summit in March to take account, in their discussions, of the proposals set out in this resolution and in the other COR opinions on Agenda 2000 because, in a field such as structural and cohesion policy which is so vitally important for the future of the regions, it is essential that the Member States and the EU institutions heed the voice of the legitimate representatives of the citizens of the EU's regions;
10. Lastly, stresses the importance of the entire Agenda 2000 package. Enlargement to encompass the new applicant countries is vital on security policy and democratic grounds and will ultimately also benefit economic development in Europe as a whole. The COR considers that the enlargement process must reconcile the pursuit of an ongoing dynamic structural policy in the existing Member States with a guarantee of resources for future Member States.

Brussels, 10 March 1999.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Manfred DAMMEYER