

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the following proposals Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund concerning certain provisions relating to financial management**

COM(2008) 803 final — 2008/0233 (AVC)

**Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 on the European Regional Development Fund as regards the eligibility of energy efficiency and renewable energy investments in housing**

COM(2008) 838 final — 2008/0245 (COD)

**Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 on the European Social Fund to extend the types of costs eligible for a contribution from the ESF**

COM(2008) 813 final — 2008/0232 (COD)

(2009/C 218/21)

On 9 and 15 December 2008, the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

*'Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund concerning certain provisions relating to financial management'*

*'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 on the European Regional Development Fund as regards the eligibility of energy efficiency and renewable energy investments in housing'*

*'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 on the European Social Fund to extend the types of costs eligible for a contribution from the ESF'*

The Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 2 February 2009. The rapporteur was Mr CEDRONE.

At its 451st plenary session, held on 25 and 26 February 2009 (meeting of 25 February), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 164 votes to two with 14 abstentions.

## 1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The Committee notes the three above-mentioned proposals put forward by the Commission in the context of the current financial crisis, aimed at stimulating the real economy during this economic downturn by adapting and simplifying certain Structural Fund provisions.

1.2 The Committee endorses these proposals, subject to the observations set out below.

## 2. Reasons

2.1 The Committee has argued strongly for several years in favour of the administrative simplification of Community legislation and for it to be adapted to real needs on the ground. The Committee therefore welcomes the proposals drawn up by the

Commission, which would enable the EU Structural Funds to react more effectively to the challenges posed by the current economic and financial crisis.

2.2 The Committee points to other existing administrative and financial problems as regards Structural Fund management; it encourages the Commission to draw up proposals to resolve these problems pertaining to levels of project pre-financing; excessive payment periods; the sustainability of the proposed projects; and the de minimis rules.

2.3 The Committee stresses the need for the administrative simplification sought to truly bring about a rapid release of available funds so as to have an immediate positive impact on the recovery of the real economy.

2.4 The Committee also hopes that the funds released as a result of these measures can be prioritised as far as possible to benefit SMEs (e.g. construction industry SMEs, in the case of the proposal on energy efficiency in housing), as well as social economy organisations.

2.5 Finally, the Committee calls on the Commission to swiftly wrap up its deliberations on the issue of Structural Fund simplification in order to speed up the responsiveness of cohesion policy in the face of the current economic crisis and beyond.

Brussels, 25 February 2009.

The President  
of the European Economic and Social Committee  
Mario SEPI

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