



SECTORAL POLICIES

COHESION; MEPs express concern at details of structural reform support programme

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Brussels, 08/09/2016 (Agence Europe) – The structural reform support programme for the period 2017-2020, which was proposed by the European Commission at the end of last year, seems by large to have the backing of the members of the European Parliament, to judge from the exchanges held at the committee on regional development on Thursday 8 September. However, many expressed concern at the way the programme will be funded. The vast majority of the MEPs have concerns that this support programme will set a precedent for the future of the cohesion policy, which is under threat of becoming a sort of "funding reserve" for other policies that do not correspond to the stated aims of the cohesion policy, as Younous Omarjee (GUE/NGL, France) put it.

The two rapporteurs, **Lambert van Nistelrooij** (EPP, Netherlands) and Constanze Krehl (S&D, Germany), therefore sought to clarify the Commission's draft, including cohesion policy objectives amongst those laid down in it, whilst taking care not to over regulate. The Committee of the Regions also expressed concerns at this draft for the same reasons (see EUROPE 11528).

A number of MEPs spoke openly against the plans, among them Rosa D'Amato (EFDD, Italy). She argued that this programme pursues aims which have nothing to do with the cohesion policy and robs from already impoverished member states. In the opposite corner, van Nistelrooij sees it as an opportunity to create synergies. Another member voiced misgivings at the inadequate amount earmarked to allow structural reforms to be carried out. "The funds have not been provided to pay for structural reforms, but to provide states with assistance", Krehl pointed out.

The support programme comes with a financial envelope just shy of €143 million over a period of four years, to be used by request of the member state out of the resources allocated for technical assistance for the funding. These requests may be made in the framework of the economic governance process.

The European Commission's position took its inspiration from the assistance programmes provided to Greece and Cyprus to speed up the process of structural reforms, which appear to have been positive overall (see EUROPE 11491). The support programme will be used for institutional, administrative and structural reforms of the member states in line with the country-by-country recommendations made in the framework of the European Semester.

The MEPs have until midday on Wednesday 14 September to table amendments. (Original version in French by Pascal Hansens)

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