

Development cooperation: decentralized cooperation

1995/0159(SYN) - 11/12/1997 - Commission communication on Council's position

In its opinion on the common position of the Council concerning the proposal for a Regulation on decentralized cooperation, the Commission takes the view that, in many respects, the Council's text is unacceptable. Several declarations have been added to the minutes annexed to the common position of the Council which indicate the Commission's rejection of this text. The main points of controversy between the Commission and Council include: 1) the indication of a financial reference amount in a text adopted under the cooperation procedure (only texts adopted under the codecision procedure are allowed to include financial reference amounts). The amount itself is highly contentious, as the Commission considers it far too small to enable the Commission to carry out the duties entrusted to it by the Regulation. In the Commission's view, the inclusion of a financial reference amount would not in any way affect the powers of the budgetary authority on the matter; 2) the limited period of validity of the Regulation (from 01.01.1998 to 31.12.2000); the Commission takes the view that the nature of the measures for which the Regulation provides is such that they cannot be regarded as 'pilot' projects, which would have justified a limited period of validity. It considers, moreover, that it is incorrect to say that the Regulation will remain in existence for 3 years (until 31.12.2000) because it will not be able to enter into force until mid-1998; 3) the stipulation of a specific procedure (type II(b) committee rather than a type III (a) committee procedure) for projects to which grants exceeding ECU 1 m are allocated: the Commission considers this article to be contrary to the general practice in the field of development and says that under no circumstances may the article be regarded as setting a precedent for other budget headings (it would have preferred a threshold of ECU 2 m). In conclusion, the Commission says that, although the common position represents the only compromise possible after several months of discussion, it does not resolve the underlying question raised by the Regulation, which is of a political nature, namely the future of the budget heading and its real impact with regard to promoting decentralized cooperation at Community level. Originally, the Regulation was conceived as a way of promoting a new approach to European cooperation policy which would focus on agents rather than projects. The introduction of the new approach will take a long time, but this is not reflected in the Council text or the 'pilot' character of the action to be taken.