

Stronger partnership for the outermost regions

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Sérgio MARQUES (EPP-ED, PT) in response to two Commission papers on a stronger partnership for the outermost regions. The report called for support for the outermost regions in areas that were important for their development, i.e. agriculture, fisheries, competition and state aids, enterprise policy, services of general interest and services of general economic interest, taxation, customs measures, environment, energy, research and technological development, vocational training, transport, trans-European networks, new information and communication technologies and regional cooperation.

MEPs urged the Commission to continue to apply specific tax measures for the benefit of the outermost regions and show willingness to propose other arrangements to promote their self-contained development. They also expressed strong support for the special action of EUR 1 100 million for the outermost regions proposed by the Commission.

The report deplored the abolition of sales aid for the sugar sector and called for the restoration of this instrument and full compensation for loss of income in order genuinely to take account of the specific handicaps suffered by the outermost regions. The committee said that "it is essential to ensure that sugar production and refining in the Azores are given access to the national market under conditions equivalent to those prevailing before their incorporation into the EU, in the same way as the Canary Islands, since otherwise it will no longer be viable for the industry to continue in the region".

As for trans-European energy networks, the Commission was urged to treat projects in outermost regions as a priority and make them subject to the co-financing rate laid down for projects deemed to have priority. As regards trans-European transport infrastructure networks, the Commission should enable ports and airports in outermost regions to be co-financed by the Cohesion Fund if eligible.

On the question of state aid, the report also wanted the outermost regions to continue to receive non-degressive operating aid and called for compensation to be authorised for these regions for the additional costs arising from the transport of goods within the EU market rather than only within the national borders of the country concerned.