Specific measures for Greece under Regulation (EU) 2015/1839

2018/2038(INI) - 28/06/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Regional Development adopted an own-initiative report by Pascal ARIMONT (EPP, BE) on the implementation of specific measures for Greece under Regulation (EU) 2015/1839.

Affected by the consequences of the financial and the refugee crisis, Greece had to face liquidity shortages and a lack of public funds for public investment needed to foster a sustainable economic recovery. Moreover, it was vital that the lack of liquidity and public funds in Greece did not hinder investment under programmes supported by the ERDF, the ESF, and the Cohesion Fund and by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), Regulation (EU) 2015/1839 of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 laying down common provisions for European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Fund) as regards measures specifically targeting Greece.

Reiterating the major role of cohesion policy and the ESI Funds as the most important source of direct investment in Greece, Members took note of the report on the use of amounts allocated under Regulation (EU) No 2015/1839 for the 2007-2013 programming period.

According to the data presented in that report, following the adoption of the Regulation as regards specific measures for Greece, the direct impact on liquidity in 2015 was EUR 1 001 709 731.50 and the contributions in 2016 amounted to EUR 467 674 209.45. That together with the increase of the initial pre-financing for the 2014-2020 programming period, Greece received approximately EUR 2 billion in 2015-2016.

Members welcomed the fact that:

- the amounts paid were directed to a wide range of projects: transport and other infrastructures (environment, tourism, culture, urban and rural regeneration, social infrastructures), information society projects, and actions to develop human resources;
- 63 % of total payments to state aid projects concerned aid for enterprises and business projects;
- the liquidity increase represented at the same time an enhancement of financial revenue, by approximately EUR 1.5 billion, and of the public investment programme for 2015-2016;
- the effects of the measures as regards the enhancement of economic activity, the normalisation and consolidation of the turnover and working capital of a significant number of businesses, the creation and preservation of jobs, and the completion of important production infrastructures, reflected also in a significant impact on tax revenue in the budget;
- the Greek authorities undertook to reorganise the project classification and identify major projects to be selected for completion;
- according to the final data communicated to the Commission on 31 December 2016, the amount of payment requests by the Greek authorities was EUR 1.6 billion and that Greece showed, as at 31 March 2018, a 28 % implementation rate for the 2014-2020 programming period.

The report highlighted the significant improvement in the absorption of structural funds has notably improved and, as at the end of March 2016, the payments rate in Greece for the 2007-2013 programming period was over 97 %. In addition, it is estimated that investments supported by cohesion and rural development policies in Greece increased GDP in 2015, at the end of the previous programming period, by more than 2% above the level it would have reached in the absence of the funding provided.

Recalling the importance of adequate structural reforms, the report welcomed Greece's efforts and invited it to continue to make full use of the possibilities for assistance under the Structural Reform Support Programme.

Members acknowledged that by supporting public investment and deploying EU investment in a flexible way, through reprogramming of funds or increasing the co-financing rate, regional policy has mitigated the impact of the financial crisis and sustained fiscal consolidation in several Member States. In this context, they stressed the importance of providing appropriate funding for the next multiannual financial framework.

The Commission is called on, therefore, to consider, as a matter of urgency, in the context of the European Semester and the Stability and Growth Pact, the impact on the calculation of government deficits of regional investments cofinanced through the ESI Funds, especially of those in the less developed regions.