European Social Fund (ESF) 2007-2013

2004/0165(COD) - 13/06/2006 - Council position

The Council adopted the common position by qualified majority. It incorporates most of the 84 amendments proposed by the European Parliament accepted or accepted in principle by the Commission in its amended proposal. Although it agrees with the objectives of the proposal, it has nevertheless endeavoured to improve some of the provisions and to add further features. In particular, in the following areas:

- General provisions : the Council introduced a number of modifications, aiming at a better recognition of the specificities of ESF intervention within the Convergence and Regional competitiveness and employment objectives. The Council introduced therefore some new fields of intervention, including a large part of those proposed by the European Parliament.

- Tasks : the Council has taken in part or in substance the amendments on combating social exclusion and increasing the participation of economically inactive people in the labour market, combating social exclusion ? especially that of disadvantaged groups such as people with disabilities ? promoting equality between women and men and non-discrimination.

- Scope : the Council has followed the request of the European Parliament and enlarged the scope of this provision to the entire territory of the cohesion countries. It has taken also on board in part or in spirit the amendments concerning lifelong learning; sustainable inclusion in the labour market, in particular longterm and youth unemployment; mainstreaming, improve access to employment; combating all forms of discrimination in the labour market; ESF support for disadvantaged groups; combating discrimination, local employment initiatives; visibility for the role of social partners; vocational and tertiary education and training; creation of self-employment and business start-ups.

- Consistency and concentration : the Council has taken in part or in substance amendments on the reference to national action plans for social inclusion; areas particularly adversely affected by business relocations; coordination of the ESF and the Lisbon strategy.

- Good governance and partnership : the Council has taken in part or in substance the amendment on visibility to the role of social partners and non-governmental organisations; references to training, networking measures, strengthening the social dialogue.

- Gender equality and equal opportunities : the Council has taken in part or in substance the amendment which strengthens the gender mainstreaming; promotion of a balanced participation of women and men in the management and implementation of operational programmes at local, regional and national level.

- Annual report and final report :the Council took on board in part the amendments making reference to minorities, disadvantaged groups, people with disabilities and social exclusion.

Lastly, the Council was not able to take certain amendments on board as they would be duplicating other Regulatory frameworks, for example the Council Regulation laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund, the Commission Implementing Regulation or others. In other cases the Council considered that they would enlarge too much the scope of the Regulation. Some other amendments have been made redundant by a reformulation of the text, by substantial changes in its structure or by decisions of the December 2005 European Council relating to financial framework.