

## APPENDIX

## to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee

(in accordance with Rules 47 (3) of the Rules of Procedure)

The following amendment tabled by Mr Masucci was defeated during the debate:

**Points 4.3.1.3. and 4.3.1.4**

Delete these two points.

*Reason*

They would spread assistance too widely, which runs counter to the concentration principle.

*Result of the vote*

For: 18, against: 54, abstentions: 3.

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) — First official draft'**

(98/C 407/15)

On 2 July 1998 the Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 23(c) of its rules of procedure, decided to draw up an opinion on the 'European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) — First official draft'.

The Section for Regional Development and Town and Country Planning, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 17 July 1998. The rapporteur was Mr Boussat.

At its 357th plenary session (meeting of 9 September 1998), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 110 votes to two, with two abstentions.

**1. Introduction**

1.1. At the informal meeting of spatial planning ministers held in Liège in 1993 under the Belgian Presidency, the Member States decided to draw up a European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), in order to provide guidance on EU spatial development policy.

1.2. An initial document entitled 'principles for a European spatial development policy' was adopted at the informal meeting in Leipzig in 1994. This document lays down the general criteria and guidelines for drafting the perspective and is based on a Commission Communication, issued the same year, entitled 'Europe 2000+ — cooperation for European territorial development', on

which the Committee issued opinions in March<sup>(1)</sup> and September 1995<sup>(2)</sup>.

1.3. The Spatial Development Committee (an inter-governmental working group comprising representatives of the Member States and the Commission) drew up a first official draft of the ESDP which was submitted to an informal meeting of the competent ministers in Noordwijk on 9 and 10 June 1997.

1.4. The presidency's conclusions on this occasion stress the importance of the draft as a basis for political discussions on how, in accordance with the practical objectives set in Leipzig, EU spatial policy can help to

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 133, 31.5.1995.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 301, 13.11.1995.

intermesh cohesion, sustainability and global competitiveness and provide a framework for strengthening the links between policies aimed at urban and rural areas.

1.5. These conclusions — like the first official draft of the ESDP — state that the draft must be discussed widely at political level, not only within and between Member States, but also between the Commission and the other EU institutions, including the ESC.

1.6. The ESDP document is a policy paper which takes an indicative rather than prescriptive approach, and will be regularly updated. It is designed to provide a cooperation framework that takes account of the various tiers of political and spatial organization within the EU. It will pursue three equally important fundamental goals: (i) economic and social cohesion, (ii) sustainable development, and (iii) balanced competitiveness of the EU area. The ESDP should be finalized in mid-1999 under the German Presidency.

1.7. The Committee greatly hopes that the work will be completed on schedule, bearing in mind that it has now been under way for five years.

## 2. General comments

2.1. The Committee considers that spatial planning policy — promoted *inter alia* by the ESDP — is essential for balanced, sustainable development of the EU area. A number of Committee opinions in recent years have advocated the framing and implementation of a coherent EU spatial planning strategy, as an important precondition for sustainable development.

2.2. It is clear that the EU spatial model will be difficult to sustain in the future, as population, economic activities and wealth in general are excessively concentrated in certain central areas of the Union. Unless there is a significant reorientation of all policies with a spatial impact (and of economic and employment policies in particular), the prospect of further enlargements can only reinforce this concentration.

2.3. The need for an EU spatial planning policy which respects national allocation of powers follows logically from various articles of the Treaty (in particular Articles 129b, 129d, 130 and 130s), and from several sections of the white paper on growth, competitiveness and employment.

2.4. The Committee thus welcomes and supports the moves to frame such a strategy, as exemplified by the first official draft of the ESDP. It endorses the presidency conclusions adopted at the Noordwijk informal council of spatial planning ministers in June 1997, which stressed the importance of the draft 'as a basis for political discussion on how European spatial policy can contribute to the integration of cohesion, sustainability and global competitiveness'.

2.5. The Committee approves the underlying aims of the ESDP as they are in keeping with the priorities which it too has identified. However, the Committee regrets the failure to recognize that quality of life is an underlying aim of any spatial initiative, and recalls its earlier comment that 'quality of life constitutes both the overriding objective of European spatial planning activity and the principle criterion for identifying appropriate solutions'<sup>(1)</sup>. The difficult socio-economic situation facing many of the EU's urban areas makes this objective particularly important.

2.6. The Committee considers that, broadly speaking, the first official draft represents an advance on its predecessors, as it analyses the main problems more carefully and in greater detail. However, the Committee feels that the document takes a rather academic and declaratory approach, especially in its analysis of spatial issues and in its description of the EU's spatial strengths and weaknesses. The Committee is sorry to see that the document does not base any analysis on the main regional divisions (Mediterranean, Baltic, Atlantic Arc, Alpine Arc, etc.), as these are more relevant than the national level for the purposes of defining and implementing an integrated spatial planning policy; indeed, such an approach was recommended by the Commission itself in its Europe 2000 and Europe 2000+ papers.

2.7. The Committee also regrets the failure of the draft to address the specific problems of the EU's upland,

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 133, 31.5.1995.

outermost and island regions. The Committee points out that uplands account for more than 30 % of the EU area, and have almost 30 million inhabitants; the Community cannot neglect their economic, social and environmental problems.

2.8. The Committee urges that upland areas — and also the outermost and island regions — be fully considered in any discussion of spatial development, and that their special circumstances be recognized.

2.9. On the more specific matter of urban policy, the Committee would refer to the comments and recommendations put forward in its September 1996 opinion on the 'role of the EU in urban matters'<sup>(1)</sup> and in its January 1998 opinion on the Commission communication 'Towards an urban agenda in the European Union'<sup>(2)</sup>. The Committee would however highlight the need for a closer examination of the problem of outlying regions, inter alia with reference to their relations with urban areas, and of the role of towns as a link between rural areas and the big cities.

2.10. A detailed analysis of the document would appear premature at this stage. Before it is finalized under the German Presidency, it will undergo major modifications, in light of the discussions taking place at inter-institutional level and elsewhere and of the findings of the seven transnational seminars culminating at the end of November.

2.11. Nevertheless, some comments may usefully be made already regarding both the method used in framing the ESDP and its actual content. These comments are based inter alia on the principles which the Committee feels should underpin the first official draft of the ESDP<sup>(3)</sup>. They are:

- consideration of regional dynamics, potential and problems;
- respect for the diversity of geographical, socio-economic and cultural situations underpinning regional organization and the preservation of internal balance;
- adoption of a transnational and cross-border approach at national, regional and local level, generating synergy between these different levels while ensuring consistency with the policies of the Member States concerned;

— coordination of decisions on sectoral policies which affect spatial development (economic and employment policy, trans-European networks, structural policies, competition policy and so on);

— convergence of 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' initiatives.

### 3. Widening the debate: closer involvement of the socio-economic partners

3.1. The Committee considers that a partnership with the socio-economic players must be established as a matter of urgency; such a partnership has hitherto been woefully lacking. The Committee is pleased that the Noordwijk meeting recognized the need for a wide debate between all interested parties, and for inter-institutional dialogue, with a view to forging a consensus on the objectives and principles which should underpin the ESDP, the preferred policy options and the means of putting them into practice.

3.2. This is made particularly urgent by the fact that one of the anticipated results of the draft under review is to encourage all regional development players to realize the growing interdependence between different areas, sectoral policies, and tiers of government; greater recognition of this interdependence should enhance cooperation. The draft also emphasizes the need to identify potential partners with whom this responsibility can be shared, and to establish rules and arrangements for the partnership and the scope for joint action<sup>(4)</sup>.

3.3. Despite these intentions, the Committee regrets the way in which the first official draft failed to guarantee the requisite transparency, more especially as regards involvement of the various regional development players. Earlier Committee opinions emphasized that the ESDP should be framed in partnership with all these players, including the socio-economic groupings. For instance, the abovementioned ESC opinion of September 1995 stated that:

'the framing of the ESDP must be seen above all as a partnership process operating at a relevant level, and involving all interested parties, allowing practical account to be taken not only of outside influences on development processes but also of the interactions and synergies between regional development players and decision-makers.'

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 30, 30.1.1997.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 95, 30.3.1998.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ C 301, 13.11.1995.

<sup>(4)</sup> ESDP first official draft, point 1.F.

3.4. This comment illustrates the shortcomings of the intergovernmental approach, and particularly of the working methods of the Spatial Development Committee (SDC), which seem to rule out information and consultation. This again raises the question of bringing spatial planning within the Community remit.

3.5. The Committee reiterates that the very idea of spatial planning presupposes transparency and giving the public a direct say in the decisions made; it also presupposes full involvement of all the relevant players — and chief among them the socio-economic partners (including the non-profit sector) — at all geographical levels.

3.6. Extending the field of debate is vital, as the ESDP will provide a benchmark in years to come for the planning and implementation of Community policies with spatial implications.

3.7. This prospect may seem to conflict somewhat with the affirmation that the ESDP is non-binding, although the ESDP should also provide a reference point for the Member States, at the relevant tiers of authority. Moreover, the Committee thinks that in order to provide a useful reference point, the ESDP should be updated at regular (but sufficiently long) intervals, such as every five to seven years.

3.8. The urgent need to extend the field of debate is underscored by the fact that the pilot projects which will foreshadow the ESDP are already being drawn up without proper involvement of the local and regional stake-holders (see point 6 below).

3.9. The Committee therefore again insists that the partnership principle must underpin the framing, revising and implementation of the ESDP. It also stresses the need to remedy the institutional shortcomings of the intergovernmental approach. This means reviewing the case for bringing spatial planning within the Community remit, institutionalizing the council of spatial planning ministers, and reviewing the status of the SDC.

3.10. The SDC should be made a consultative committee which should work in close cooperation with the local and regional authorities and the socio-economic organizations. The functions and working methods of the SDC also need clarifying, and its membership should be reviewed so as to include representatives of the

socio-economic organizations which have a role to play in spatial development.

#### 4. The ESDP and Community policies

4.1. The first official draft of the ESDP clearly illustrates the interplay between spatial planning and certain sectoral policies, and the synergies which can be achieved in support of economic and social cohesion. The draft stresses that 'the capacity for the ESDP to promote greater consistency of Community policies should therefore be put at the very heart of the debate on European spatial planning' — a sentence which neatly sums up the task ahead.

4.2. The Committee fully approves this view as being consistent with its own analyses. However, in achieving these synergies the aim must be to remove the partitions between policies, reducing potential sources of conflict, and exploiting these policies to optimum effect as part of an integrated approach to spatial planning that will benefit all strands of society.

4.3. The Union and its Member States must shoulder their responsibility for the impact of some sectoral policies (e.g. the CAP, environmental policy). Consistent action at EU level, together with coordinated information campaigns, would make these policies clearer and improve public understanding of them.

4.4. The Committee stresses the importance of trans-European transport and telecommunications networks policy. As well as promoting geographical integration, these networks also — and more importantly — facilitate economic and social integration. The Committee believes that equal access to infrastructure is vital for the balanced development of the EU area.

4.5. The Committee is extremely surprised and disappointed that the draft does not discuss the impact of employment policies on the EU's spatial cohesion, and the role which such policies can play in reducing disparities between regions. This is a serious shortcoming in the draft, and is particularly surprising in view of the fact that no spatial planning initiative — be it at EU, national, regional or local level — can succeed if it neglects the local impact of employment policies, in terms of spatial organization, population distribution and wealth distribution.

4.6. The Committee stresses that the balance of the EU area can only be improved over the long term by a strategy which is able to reconcile competitiveness with economic and social cohesion, economic performance with the principles and objectives of solidarity and social equity, and economic development with social development. Employment policies clearly have a crucial role to play here, and this makes it vital to frame and implement an integrated spatial planning policy. The territorial employment pacts, which are designed to involve all parties concerned with employment at the appropriate geographical level, are an illustration of this type of integrated approach<sup>(1)</sup>, and demonstrate the importance of the spatial dimension in the building of a sustainable Europe<sup>(2)</sup>.

4.7. Research and technological development (RTD) policy is listed among the policies with the greatest impact on the EU area, but — curiously — it is not included among the policies assessed. Yet the disparities between Member States in the RTD field are particularly marked; the first report on economic and social cohesion estimates a ratio of 1:13 (compared with 1:5 for per capita GDP)<sup>(3)</sup>.

4.8. The draft also does not analyse the spatial impact of the single market, or the role of services of general economic interest in promoting social and territorial cohesion, as enshrined in Article 16 of the Amsterdam Treaty.

4.9. Lastly, the Committee thinks that any long term scenario for developing the EU area should also take account of the potential spatial impact of the introduction of the Euro. The introduction of the Euro may be expected to give a further boost to intra-EU trade in goods and services, and to have a major impact on the geographical distribution of economic activities and population, especially in cross-border regions. More

broadly the Euro should help to give a spatial dimension to the EU's economic and monetary area.

4.10. The draft calls for greater account to be taken of long term priorities established under spatial strategies, and stresses the need for greater convergence between structural policies and spatial planning policies. However, the Member States and the Commission rule out the use of spatial criteria for the allocation of Structural Fund support.

4.11. The Committee agrees with this, and stresses that the current debate on the ESDP must not interfere with the institutional procedures for reform of the Structural Funds for the period 2000-2006.

4.12. Nevertheless, the Committee thinks that Structural Fund measures and spatial planning policy share the same aim, namely to boost the EU's economic and social cohesion and competitiveness. The Committee also considers that the prospect of further EU enlargements will, in due course, bring a need for a careful consideration of the interplay between structural policies and spatial planning policy.

4.13. The Committee also stresses the urgent need to include a chapter on the spatial perspectives of enlargement in the draft ESDP. It is pleased that the Echternach ministerial seminar on 9 December 1997 recognized this priority, and that the Commission presented a study — to be used in the drafting of a new ESDP chapter on this subject — at the Glasgow informal council of spatial planning ministers on 8 June 1998. The Committee also supports the UK Council presidency's efforts to involve the candidate countries in the ESDP process, in accordance with the Noordwijk and Echternach conclusions.

4.14. Here the Committee suggests that additional policy options related to enlargement be drawn up at an appropriate juncture, in order to take account of the additional spatial problems which enlargement will entail for both new and existing Member States, and at the EU's borders.

4.15. Enlargement will push the EU's centre of gravity eastward. This will give added weight to the problems already faced by the outlying regions (communications, transport infrastructure, access to economic activities, and so on), and will make it all the more important to secure a new regional balance. Promotion of cooperation

<sup>(1)</sup> See the ESC opinions on: the future of cohesion and the long-term implications for the Structural Funds — OJ C 153, 28.5.1996; the role of the EU in urban matters — OJ C 30, 30.1.1997.

<sup>(2)</sup> On this point, see the Commission's recent communications on: community policies in support of employment (COM(97) 611 final, 12.11.1997); environment and employment (Building a sustainable Europe) (COM(97) 592, 18.11.1997).

<sup>(3)</sup> COM(96) 542 final/2, 8.4.1997.

with the Council of Europe is vital, both in this context and with a view to establishing a framework for cross-border cooperation with non-EU countries, and especially those of eastern Europe, on such matters as spatial planning.

4.16. More generally, and with an eye to the future, the Committee regrets that the draft does not devote sufficient attention to the EU's relations with the world's other geographical groupings. An analysis of this would be useful for considering ways to make the most of the EU's resources and assets, and to ensure that it can compete with its main rivals on world markets.

## 5. The European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON)

5.1. In accordance with principles already agreed in Leipzig in 1994, ministers in Noordwijk renewed their broad support for the setting-up of a European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON), which will provide the scientific and technical base for the implementation and periodic review of the ESDP. The observatory is needed in order to improve EU regional statistical machinery for keeping tabs on spatial developments, and in order to fill the major gaps in comparable, quantified and geo-referenced data and agree on reliable criteria and indicators for establishing the typology of regions and urban areas.

5.2. The Echernach informal meeting of spatial planning ministers examined a draft of the terms of reference, organization, funding and launch of the ESPON. The presidency conclusions confirmed the idea of setting up the network. There would first be a two-year pilot stage (1998-99) that would:

- help to finalize the ESDP in 1999, following the broad debate in the Member States and at EU level;
- define the institutional, legal and financial conditions needed to set up the ESPON;
- launch an ESDP-related study programme, to be conducted by a network of specialist institutes in the Member States; the programme would be put forward by the Commission, in consultation with

the Member States, and would receive 50 % funding from the Commission under ERDF Article 10.

5.3. The Committee notes that it called for the establishment of a spatial planning observatory back in 1991, in its opinion on Europe 2000<sup>(1)</sup>. The Committee regrets that, despite the urgency of the matter, problems of a political, legal and budgetary nature have prevented the observatory being set up hitherto. The Committee is delighted that the European Parliament is willing to consider establishing a specific budget heading for the funding of a Community observatory comprising a network of research institutes<sup>(2)</sup>. The Committee would nevertheless point out that the considerable delay in setting up the network will prevent it from contributing effectively to the finalization of the ESDP.

5.4. The Committee stresses that the ESPON must not be a planning body and must not have decision-taking powers, as spatial planning decisions are a political matter. The Committee points out that its 1991 opinion on 'Europe 2000'<sup>(1)</sup> argued that the observatory should enjoy a certain independence vis-à-vis the national and Community authorities.

5.5. Lastly, the Committee asks that its members — as indeed all the socio-economic organizations — be involved in the follow-up to the observatory's work, once it is operative.

## 6. The implementation of the ESDP

6.1. The draft states that experimental, innovative action must be undertaken in order to 'test the relevance' of the ESDP approach and policy options. Interreg IIC is singled out as the Community's main pilot instrument. Reference is also made to ERDF Article 10, which provides for pilot projects in the spatial planning field.

6.2. The Committee approves this approach, and asks that these initiatives be stepped up.

6.3. In its September 1995 opinion<sup>(3)</sup>, the Committee called for the establishment of transnational spatial planning cooperation programmes extending beyond traditional cross-border activities. It feels that the

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 339, 31.12.1991, point 4.6.

<sup>(2)</sup> European Parliament Resolution of 2.7.1998 on regional planning and the European Spatial Development Perspective (PE 271.026, p. 39).

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ C 301, 13.11.1995.

emergence of large, cohesive geographical areas (Mediterranean, Atlantic Arc, Baltic, Alpine Arc, and so on) implies that spatial planning cooperation should be handled by these interregional groupings (cf. point 2.6 above).

6.4. The Committee considers it vital that the ESDP include an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of these cooperation areas, and of the particular issues that will shape their future.

6.5. With an eye to future EU enlargement, the Committee also thinks that cross-border and transnational cooperation schemes in this field should be devised and undertaken in consultation with the candidate countries in due course.

6.6. The partnership issue (raised in point 3 above) is also of crucial importance for the execution of the ESDP. The Committee greatly regrets the confidentiality and lack of real consultation — at any geographical level — which have hitherto surrounded the framing and implementation of the Interreg programmes. Here too, information, consultation and involvement of all the regional development players are vital.

6.7. The Committee thinks that the Commission should press Member States to ensure that they conduct proper consultations with all the parties involved in spatial planning, and see that all the relevant partners, including the socio-economic organizations, play a full part in the framing, implementation and monitoring of the Interreg programmes.

6.8. The Commission's proposals for the reform of the Structural Funds include ground rules for extending and deepening the partnership. The Committee strongly urges that these be incorporated in the new Interreg programmes.

6.9. The very nature of Interreg and the pilot projects demands that they be formulated and implemented in a transparent manner, with full involvement of all the spatial planning players, including the socio-economic organizations.

## 7. Concluding comments

7.1. The Committee welcomes the efforts made by the Council Presidency during the first half of 1998 to improve the content of the first official draft. This work has led to the extension of part II (the European dimension of spatial issues) and part IV (implementing the ESDP), and has helped to carry forward the debate on the first official draft.

7.2. The Committee particularly welcomes the new passages on research and technological development policy and competition policy in the paper presented by the presidency at the Glasgow informal council.

7.3. However, the Committee must reiterate its disappointment that the first official draft still makes no reference to the employment aspect of spatial planning policies.

7.4. The Committee has noted with great interest the UK presidency's proposed list of future actions for implementing the ESDP. The Committee is especially gratified by the presidency's concern to identify more precisely and systematically the various levels at which action should be taken (EU, transnational, interregional, cross-border, and within Member States).

7.5. Lastly, the Committee warmly welcomes the ministerial commitment, reiterated at the Glasgow meeting, to adopt the final version of the ESDP under the German Presidency in May 1999. The Committee promises to make a contribution to this final version at the appropriate juncture.

Brussels, 9 September 1998.

*The President  
of the Economic and Social Committee*

Tom JENKINS

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