

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0555/02

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Subject: Implementation of the Structural Funds for the 1994-1999 programming period

The activities cofinanced by the Structural Funds for the 1994-1999 programming period were concluded on 31 December 2001. The time taken to approve the programmes meant that it was not possible to make the relevant payments and commitments until 1995. Although the final figures for implementation are not yet available, the report on the arrangements and implementation times for cofinanced measures under the Structural Funds published by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers says on page 213 that, in the case of the ESF, spending for Objective 3 in Italy as at December 1999 was 66% of the total.

A joint study by the London School of Economics and the University of Castellanza has sounded an alarm bell about Italy's spending capacity in relation to the Structural Funds and on 30 June 2001 the Sole 24 Ore newspaper reported non-payment of EUR 5.2 billion.

The total amount unspent by Italy is apparently more than a billion Euro.

The spending capacity of the Funds has been affected by the introduction of new and highly complex procedures involving the regions and provinces to a greater extent in programming and spending.

At the end of the programming period concluded in 1993, a bridging programme was set up for funds not used.

Italy is lagging far behind in terms of training in informatics and telematics and languages and despite having raised training requirements in these areas and having introduced compulsory training for all apprentices, it finds itself in a position where this requirement is being widely ignored owing to lack of funds.

In the light of the above, can the European Commission give details of the total amount of Structural Fund resources not used in Italy during the 1994-1999 programming period and corresponding figures for the other EU countries?

Can the Commission assess the feasibility of a bridging programme which would allow the sums not spent to be used rapidly in three areas (computer literacy, language learning and training of apprentices) on the basis of national plans that could be launched immediately?

Finally, could the Commission assess the feasibility of increasing the funding for those programmes that have demonstrated high levels of efficiency and effectiveness in expenditure?