

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3223/06

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to the Commission

Subject: Structural funds for the period 2007-2013

The allocation of structural funds for the period 2007-2013 will see the territories of French Hainault and Belgian Hainault, which have similar levels of development, no longer receiving the same level of Community aid.

This is because, although its GDP is 73.45 % of the Community average, French Hainault is not eligible for the ‘convergence’ objective because it does not constitute an administrative unit of the type ‘NUTS 2’, which is the reference unit for structural fund eligibility. For the purposes of determining its eligibility, French Hainault now finds itself included in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, which has a higher GDP, and is therefore excluded from the ‘convergence’ objective. Belgian Hainault, on the other hand, which is a NUTS 2 region, will benefit from the transitional measures under the ‘convergence’ objective, given its GDP of just over 75 % of the Community average.

Determining eligibility for funding in this way has significant consequences for French Hainault, which will find itself in a situation where competition with its Belgian neighbour is distorted at a time when the two territories are carrying out joint projects and are engaged in long-standing cooperation. This situation has been acknowledged by the Commission in the past, given that French Hainault was exceptionally declared eligible for the transitional measures under Objective 1 for the period 2000-2006.

Should not the Commission now consider changing its administrative nomenclature to include cross-border regions as reference units when, as in the case of Hainault, these display cultural and social continuity and coherence of development, and, in the interim, reapply the exception made for French Hainault in 2000-2006?