EC/Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

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The rapporteur, Mrs CARRERE D’ENCAUSSE, noted that Russia had clearly taken steps towards achieving democracy and a market economy in a dramatic economic environment. This agreement should help to integrate Russia into the European Economic Area. In this respect, the rapporteur emphasised the importance of regional cooperation, which promoted stability, and respect for democratic principles and human rights. In her view, it was not a preferential agreement but should, in time, lead to the establishment of a free trade area. She also mentioned Russia’s nuclear capabilities as well as its vast economic area, which represented an opportunity for Europe. Commissioner VAN DEN BROEK stated that the partnership and cooperation agreements outlined an economic and political framework for relations with the different countries. In his view, they were a means of extending the cooperation agreements previously concluded. As far as Russia was concerned, this agreement was very important in the context of the elections to the Duma in December. The Commission would be sending observers to support this process of democratisation. He shared the rapporteur’s view that the agreement would lead to a free trade area. He pointed out that the European Union was Russia’s largest partner and highlighted the importance of food aid and the Tacis programme. He also agreed that through this agreement the Union would encourage stability in the country.