Strengthening the Mediterranean Policy of the European Union: establishing a Euro-Mediterranean partnership

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In his speech following the presentation of the report by Mr SAKELLARIOU, the Commissioner, Mr Manuel MARIN, highlighted the new approach proposed by the Commission, which had, since the decisions taken at the Cannes summit, been accompanied by a credible financial commitment. As far as the Commission was concerned, the Euro-Mediterranean partnership should develop within two main frameworks, namely political dialogue and economic and financial relations: - As regards political dialogue, the aim was to create an area of peace and security in the Mediterranean basin while affirming the essential principles common to both regions (respect for human rights and the rule of law, an end to force, etc.); - From an economic and financial perspective, the Commissioner underlined three key objectives: the creation of a free trade area by 2010, financial cooperation to support the economic transition, and sectoral cooperation. Mr MARIN stated that the Commission wished to treat each geographical area in accordance with its specific characteristics. He was in favour of organising sectoral conferences. However, since it was clear that they would not be able to do everything at once, priorities had to be set. The Commissioner proposed organising two sectoral conferences each year. These conferences could cover industry, the environment, transport, fisheries, agriculture, and so on. As regards participation in the Conference, the Commissioner believed that only those countries that had prepared the Conference should be able to attend. Other partners could certainly be invited to participate subsequently in the follow-up to this first Conference. He pointed out that provision had been made for a forum with NGOs and that civil society would be fully involved in the Conference. At parliamentary level, it was up to the European Parliament to determine the method to be used, although he favoured a body somewhere between a joint committee and a joint assembly. It would perhaps be appropriate to develop a structure that was more flexible than a joint assembly. In conclusion, he believed that it would be difficult for anyone to suggest that the European Union had forgotten the South to the benefit of the East. Speaking on behalf of the Council following the presentation of the report by Mr SAKELLARIOU at the October I part-session (1995), Mr Carlos WESTENDORP pointed out that the Conference to be held in Barcelona would play a very important role as it would establish the foundations of a Euro-Mediterranean partnership covering financial, social, human and economic aspects. The Council was preparing for this Conference by drawing up a draft declaration and a draft working programme. The draft declaration contained first and foremost a section on security policy aimed at improving the internal security of the states. This aspect represented the hard core of Euro-Mediterranean relations. In addition, the draft declaration covered economic and financial issues and sought to achieve a Euro-Mediterranean area based on free trade and a plan for regional cooperation. The financial section provided for contributions totalling ECU 4.6 million, assistance from the EIB and the MEDA programme. Finally, the draft declaration included a section on culture, which aimed to combat the phenomena that prevented dialogue between different cultures and religions. To conclude, Mr WESTENDORP recalled that five Members of the European Parliament would be able to participate in the Barcelona Conference as members of the European Union’s delegation. He hoped that the dialogue between the European Union and the Mediterranean would form the basis for cooperation with neighbouring countries.