Baltic Sea region: guidelines for a Union approach in the Baltic region

1994/2201(COS) - 29/05/1995

The Council discussed the European Union’s policy towards the Baltic Sea region and the Baltic states . It adopted the following conclusions concerning the European Union’s policy towards the Baltic Sea region: 1. The Council notes with satisfaction the Commission communication on guidelines for a European Union policy towards the Baltic Sea region. It points out that the European Union has a genuine interest in contributing to the political stability and prosperity of the region, an interest recently reflected in the Stability Pact initiative. 2. The Baltic Sea region has taken on increasing importance for the European Union as a result of the accession of two new Member States with Baltic coasts, the entry into force of free -trade agreements and the signing of Association Agreements with the three Baltic states, to which the pre--accession strategy decided on by the European Council in Essen will thus be applicable. These new links between the Union and the Baltic Sea region come on top of those already arising from the presence of Member States with Baltic coasts, the relations entered into with Norway under the European Economic Area, the Association Agreement with Poland and the signing in 1994 of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the Russian Federation . Political cooperation and dialogue 3. The European Union is uniquely placed to contribute to the development and stability of the region on account of the ties it has built up with the Baltic Sea states, which result in the establishment of many channels for political dialogue. 4. The structured dialogue established with the associated states provides an important framework in this field. The Baltic states , with which a political dialogue has been conducted under the Joint Declaration of 11 May 1992, are in future to participate in that structured dialogue. The Association Agreements and the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia provide for the establishment of a bilateral framework for political dialogue. A dialogue is also being engaged in with Norway under the European Economic Area. Consistent use will need to be made of these various channels with the aim of promoting stability and security in the region. 5. The adoption of the Stability Pact on 20 and 21 March 1995 at the Paris Conference and its transfer to the OSCE represent the successful culmination of joint action by the Union under the CFSP. This initiative should help encourage the putting into practice of the principles and undertakings laid down at the United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The European Union, whose policy towards the Baltic Sea region will contribute to the achievement of the Stability Pact’s objectives, in particular to the constructive development of Russian--Baltic relations, will continue to keep a close watch on the further progress of that process, which comes under the OSCE and which could give rise to the continuation of work carried out in the context of the regional round tables. 6. Permanent consultation between Baltic Sea states within the Council of the Baltic Sea states (CBSS) is also highly important, as borne out by initiatives such as the appointment of a Commissioner on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Besides some Union Member States, the CBSS includes a number of states with which the Union maintains close links: associated states, Norway and the Russian Federation . The Council calls on the Commission to submit to it proposals regarding the role that the Commission may come to play, within its sphere of competence, in the CBSS. Economic cooperation 7. Through strong economic growth and trade liberalisation, the Baltic Sea region will offer fresh opportunities for trade and investment. The further integration of the region into the European and the global economy is in line with the Union ’s interests. It is with this in mind that the Union should contribute to the development of trade in the region and direct its assistance. 8. The Council reaffirms the European Union’s wish to promote the development of trade in the region. The Union is contributing to this through its various Agreements with the Baltic Sea states, which make provision, each under its own particular procedures, for the reduction or elimination of trade barriers. The Union will also endeavour to encourage initiatives to expand trade between Baltic Sea states that are not members of the Union, by providing suitable assistance, e.g. in the customs field. 9. The Council notes that assistance to the region will achieve greater consistency if aid programmes are planned and developed in the light of the regional

context and if a consensus can be found on certain priorities. In this respect the Council highlights the importance of greater coordination of existing bilateral and multilateral assistance programmes, especially, bearing in mind their respective roles, under the G-24 and under the Council of the Baltic Sea States, a particularly appropriate forum for Baltic Sea regional cooperation. In accordance with the Essen European Council conclusions, particularly those on intra--regional cooperation and trans--European networks, the European Union will ensure that its own action makes a complementary contribution to the implementation of regional cooperation and cross--border projects and projects to foster good neighbourliness in the Baltic Sea region. Assistance provided should take due account, in accordance with the specific rules of each instrument, of the following priorities: trade, infrastructure, including transport, investment, the environment, energy and nuclear safety, education, and development of the activities of local communities and of the private sector. 10. The Council requests the Commission to submit to it in the second half of 1995 a report on the progress of and practical prospects for cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.