Customs 2000: Community action programme 1996-2000

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The EP and Council delegations reached a compromise Thursday, under the conciliation procedure on the 'Customs 2000' programme. As the rapporteur, Mr Karl VON WOGAU, pointed out, the compromise was made possible by significant progress in four areas which the EP considered important: the possibility of a European symbol (the 12 stars) on customs officers' uniforms, recognition of the fact that the internal market was now considered a 'domestic market', positive steps towards common training and on the nature of the controls at external borders. The 'Customs 2000' programmes seeks to strengthen national action in the customs field by developing and modernizing customs administrations and making procedures and controls at the Community's external frontier more effective. Throughout the legislative process the EP had two objectives: to make EU citizens more aware of the notion of an EU Customs Service and to make controls more effective. One way of raising awareness would be for the customs officers' uniforms to carry the European symbol of the 12 stars. Another way is to develop the idea of a single European area. The best way of ensuring effective controls is by laying down EU criteria for establishing the natures of controls where it is necessary to ensure a high degree of protection for the EU's financial interests. There is also a commitment to look into the possibility of exchanges of customs officials between the Member States, common training and developing computerized methods for facilitating exchanges of information. Finally, by 1998 Community transit will be computerized and cooperation will be developed with non-member countries, in particular with associate members from central and eastern Europe, in particular with the possibility of extending the MATTHAEUS programme to those countries. As pointed out by Mrs Rosemarie WEMHEUER a member of the EP delegation, this whole series of issues constitutes one of the principal results of the negotiations.