Human rights: activities of the European Union in 1996. Annual memorandum

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OBJECTIVE: the annual memorandum to the European Parliament summarises all the activities of the European Union in the field of human rights throughout the world in 1996. CONTENT: in addition to participating at various international human rights fora, such as the General Assembly of the United Nations, the OSCE or the Council of Europe, at which numerous declarations or resolutions on the observance of human rights have been adopted, the memorandum lists over 40 declarations and 80 measures in which the European Union has taken an official position on human rights violations throughout the world in 1996. Of these main positions taken, note should be made in particular of those relating to: - south-east Europe, especially Albania (with the call for new elections following those held in May 1996), Cyprus (where the violent acts perpetrated there have been criticised) and Turkey (where the European Union has emphasised its insistence on the observance of human rights); - central and eastern Europe, especially the countries of the former USSR (where the European Union has taken a position with respect to Russia and Chechnya and support for humanitarian organisations on the ground); - Asia, with numerous positions taken on the People's Republic of Korea (following the violation of the armistice agreement), Eastern Timor and Burma. In addition, human rights clauses have been included as a fundamental element in cooperation agreements signed with Vietnam, Cambodia et Laos; - the Middle East, with the establishment of the Barcelona process, which places human rights at the centre of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The Union has also continued to apply a policy of "critical dialogue" with Iran with a view to influencing its policy in certain areas affecting human rights; - Latin America, with the implementation of a new 1996-2000 partnership focusing on the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law. In addition, a process of rapprochement has been initiated with Cuba; - Africa, where dialogue continued with all the states affected by the Great Lakes crisis and a European mediator was sent to the region. Several joint declarations were made condemning the atrocities committed in the region and a number of humanitarian initiatives were taken (release of ECU 169 million in addition to the ECU 500 million already granted in emergency aid). Other initiatives have also been taken, especially in Burundi (following the military coup) and Rwanda. In addition, the Union officially called for a regional peace conference for the region. Finally, as far as dialogue with the European Parliament was concerned, the Council had replied to some 120 written or verbal questions raised by members in 1996, a quarter of which referred to the human rights situation in Turkey and Cyprus.