Legal proceedings in the area of protection of financial interests

1998/2042(INI) - 31/03/1998

Commissioner Gradin stressed that the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union further increased the need to establish an area of freedom, security and justice in Europe. She favoured a gradual and pragmatic approach for harmonising 15 different judicial systems with regard to the administration of fraud. Among the programmes which had achieved important results, she cited Grotius for judicial cooperation, Stop to combat sexual exploitation of children and trafficking in women, Daphne to fight violence against women and children, Sherlock on forged documents and Oisin on police and customs cooperation. Another two programmes had just been approved by the Council of Ministers: Odysseus on border controls, migration and asylum and Falcone on the fight against organised crime. Academically speaking, the Corpus Juris was yet another example of how to prepare the ground for further initiatives. As regards budget fraud, Mrs Gradin called for efficient cooperation between investigation authorities and the judiciary in all Member States and stressed that the new Article 280 of the Treaty of Amsterdam provided for a qualified majority which made for a much more efficient decision-making process at EU level. As regards the role of UCLAF, the Commissioner indicated that not a single Member State had yet ratified the various conventions dealing with the protection of the financial interests of the Community. If this position was maintained, the Commission would have to seriously consider how to make progress using the new instruments of the Treaty of Amsterdam (Articles 34 and 280). As regards the Staff Regulations, the Commission wanted to adopt a constructive attitude. Finally, Mrs Gradin noted that the Commission had high hopes that the Corpus Juris would form the centrepoint of a European judicial area, particularly in areas such as taking of evidence, mutual assistance and admissibility of proof. In addition, with Commissioner de Silguy, she would shortly present a communication on measures aimed at protecting the European currency against forgery and counterfeiting.