Association of the overseas countries and territories OCTs with the European Community since 1st March 2001

2001/2033(COS) - 27/11/2001 - Implementing legislative act

PURPOSE : to conclude the Council Decision on the association of Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) with the European Community with a view to improving the EU's association. CONTENT : Council Decision 2001/822/EC. COMMUNITY MEASURE : this Council Decision sets out the future association with OCTs for the period 01.03.2001 to 31.12.2007. It effectively translates into practice the Treaty clauses on the Communities co-operation with those countries including on free access of industrial and agricultural goods of OCTs to the EU market. It represents one of the most important reforms of the arrangements since the entry into force of the Treaty of Rome, particularly regarding the allocation of and use of funds, the focus on trade related sectors, on the private sector and on access to Community programmes. This Decision shall replace the current OCT decision of 1991, extended in 1997 and 2000, which expired on 28 February 2001. The Decision covers all areas of association with the OCTs that have special statute with the EU. On the one hand, they are constitutonally linked with Member States, but on the other hand, they are not part of the Community nor are they subject to Community law, except for this Decision. The broad lines of this Decision were set out at the signing of the Treaty of Amsterdam where a 'Declaration on the Overseas Countries and Territories' was included in the Final Act. This Declaration invites the Council to review the association arrangements with the fourfold objective of: - promoting the economic and social development of the OCTs more effectively; - developing economic relations between the OCTs and the European Union; - taking greater account of the diversity and specific characteristics of the individual OCTs, including some aspects relating to the freedom of establishment; - ensuring that the effectiveness of the financial instrument is improved. The main proposed instruments of co-operation are financial aid and the trade regime. On financial aid, future allocations from the 9th European Development Fund (EDF) (total amount for OCTs shall be EUR 127 million) shall be made on the basis of explicit criteria laid down in the Decision itself country by country. In accordance with the principles laid down in the 'European Community's Develpment Policy' Communication, the main guideline for the poorest sections of the population will receive financial aid. This will be implemented in a progressive manner. Emphasise is also placed on addressing social and environmental issues. Regarding the trade regime, the Decision contains the most liberal regime currently granted by the Community to any partner nothwithstanding the withdrawal of cumulation of sugar due to frequently re-occuring problems which have entailed the introduction of safeguard measures in recent years. New articles on co-operation in trade related areas move beyond traditional fields such as tariffs and quantities to other aspects of access to the EU market. The aim is to strengthen co-operation in areas such as current payments, trade and environment, intelletual property and consumer protection. Community programme have also been opened up to the OCTs more widely than in past, in particular concerning research, education and culture. ENTRY INTO FORCE : 02.12.2001.