Asylum and migration: plans for origin and transit countries (Afghanistan, Albania, Iraq, Morocco, Somalia, Sri Lanka)

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In line with the Council's wishes, expressed in December 1998, the High Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration has proposed a Draft Action Plan for Sri-Lanka which includes : - an assessment of the political situation in the country; - statistical information and information on the causes of migration and flight of the Sri-Lankan population in the direction of the Union; - an inventory of measures and actions undertaken by the Member States and the Community in order to address the needs of the Sri Lankan people. The report also outlines the measures taken by inter-governmental organisations (UNHCR, ICRC) and NGOs in order to help these people, as well as providing a practical evaluation of the situation in a country torn by inter-ethnic conflicts (in particular, opposition to Sri-Lankan Tamils who are of Indian origin). It should be noted that the rates of admission of Sri-Lankan asylum seekers in the Member States are low, although there are significant variations from one Member State to the next (ranging from 1% to 51%), only a tiny proportion of them have the status of real refugees. Furthermore, it is rare that Sri-Lankans are sent back to their country by Member States in view of the instability that reigns in Sri-Lanka and the refusal of the competent Sri-Lankan authorities to accept the mass influx of returnees. The report goes on to present a series of measures to be taken in the future by the Union in view of the situation in Sri-Lanka accompanied by a timetable for implementation. Overall, the report believes that aid must be continued to be given to Sri-Lanka in order to solve internal conflicts. Initiatives are foreseen within the CFSP, such as strengthening the dialogue between parties and the support of budgetary assistance in order to defend human rights. Appropriate cooperation with Canada and the USA is also envisaged in the framework of the Transatlantic dialogue. Other initiatives are envisaged, such as development aid and economic cooperation so as to reduce poverty, as well as landmine clearance measures and improvements in the water supply,... With regard to migration, the report foresees the consideration of measures that aim to simplify the freely consented repatriation of refugees or the evaluation of the assistance programmes for the return of asylum seekers who have not been granted refugee status and illegal immigrants (bearing in mind the sensitivity of the Sri-Lankan authorities concerning the number of returnees). In addition, measures are also provided in view of tackling illegal immigration racketeering and trafficking in children. The Member States should also provide for programmes to integrate Sri-Lankan nationals who are legally residing in the Member States.