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

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PURPOSE : to inform the European Parliament of a final report containing action plans for the implementation of an integrated cross-pillar approach targeted at the situation in the most important countries of origin of asylum-seekers and migrants. CONTENTS : In response to an initiative from the Netherlands, the General Affairs Council on 7 and 8 December 1998 set up the High Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration, and its terms of reference were approved by the Council in January 1999. The Group was instructed to prepare cross-pillar Action Plans for selected countries of origin and transit of asylum seekers and migrants. The final report of the Group, contains Action Plans for the countries such as Afghanistan and the region, Albania and the region, Iraq, Morocco, Somalia and Sri Lanka. By establishing the High Level Working Group and giving it the task of drawing up Action Plans targeted at the situation in the above-mentioned countries, the Council has demonstrated that it is in the interest of both the citizens of the Union and the citizens of the countries of origin and of transit of asylum seekers and migrants to address the root causes of migration and flight, as well as the consequences. The Action Plans are a concrete expression of cooperation within the EU in the field of asylum and migration, as intended by the Treaty of Amsterdam. They will make a practical contribution by suggesting concrete measures to be taken in the framework of an EU asylum and migration policy, which is one of the topics for discussion at the special session of the European Council in Tampere. The special session in Tampere on 15-16 October should come to a decision which would consequently make the proposal definitive. The Action Plans contain operational proposals for measures for cooperation with the countries concerned in 3 integrated categories : - foreign policy; - development and economic assistance and - migration and asylum policy. They can be considered as a first attempt by the EU to define a comprehensive and coherent approach targeted at the situation in these countries. In addition, essential instruments of a coherent approach are dialogue, cooperation and development. Important components of the approach are protection of all human rights, support for democratisation and the rule of law, social and economic development, alleviation of poverty, support for conflict prevention and reconciliation, and cooperation with UNHCR and human rights organisations, observance of refugees' and asylum seekers' right to protection, integration of migrants, and the fight against illegal immigration. In order to safeguard an efficient and parallel implementation of the Action Plans, the Council, the Commission and the Member States need to work closely together in a coordinated manner. The necessary financial and personnel resources will need to be made available in various policy fields. Moreover, the objectives of the cross-pillar approach and the Action Plans can also be promoted by intensifying cooperationwith the countries who have applied for membership of the European Union.