Strengthening the Mediterranean Policy of the European Union: establishing a Euro-Mediterranean partnership

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At its plenary session of 15 and 16 November, the Committee of the Regions welcomed the gradual establishment of a Mediterranean free trade area, to be completed by 2010. However, the Assembly of local and regional authorities of the European Union had stressed that Euro-Mediterranean cooperation should encompass measures on illegal immigration, organised crime, human rights and environmental protection. The Committee of the Regions had adopted its Opinion, presented by the President of the Region of Tuscany, Mr CHITI, on strengthening the EU’s Mediterranean policy only 10 days before the Euro-Mediterranean Conference held in Barcelona (Spain). In its Opinion it called for greater efforts to encourage cooperation between the democratically elected local and regional authorities in the area. It also called for the Interreg programme, which supported projects in the border regions of the Member States, to serve as a reference for cooperation between the Mediterranean non-member countries and between all the countries in the Mediterranean region. Finally, the Committee called for the creation of an environmental agency to deal with the specific problems in the region.