EC/Latvia Europe Agreement

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The Committee unanimously adopted the report by Mrs Elisabeth REHN on the European association agreements between the European Union and Latvia. The Committee proposed that the European Parliament give its assent to this Association Agreement. The prospects for the accession of the Baltic States to the Union are clearly stated. This European Agreement replaces the previous agreements on trade and economic and commercial cooperation between the Community and each of the Baltic States. It fully integrates the free-trade agreement which entered into force on 1 January 1995 and also proposes three additional fields of intervention: - multilateral political dialogue - the fight against illegal activities - cultural cooperation. The Committee called on Latvia to participate fully in the multilateral political dialogue which had been established between all potential new members from Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union. For the first time in a European agreement provisions were made for close cooperation in the fight against illegal activities, in particular against corruption, illegal immigration, trafficking in industrial-waste, counterfeit goods and drugs, and against organized crime. On a cultural level the agreement seeks to provide support for the audiovisual industry, to harmonize rights relating to international broadcasting and to promote language learning for the Russian-speaking population. The Baltic States would also be able to participate in a large number of Community programmes and projects in many different sectors. The Committee drew attention to two important aspects of the agreements: - Respect for democratic principles, human rights and the market economy. These principles are the subject of a suspensive clause (the so-called "democracy clause"), which stipulates that the agreement will be suspended in the event of a flagrant violation of its principles. To this effect, an Association Committee and a Joint Parliamentary Committee will be set up to verify that all the provisions of the association agreements are being implemented. - Intra-regional cooperation between the Baltic States and between these States and Russia, which will help establish stability and security in the region as a whole. The agreements are concluded for an unspecified period. However, in the case of Latvia the agreement provides for a transition period which will run until the end of 1999.