Relations with Turkey: developments since the entry into force of the Customs Union. Annual Report

1996/2214(COS) - 23/06/1998

At a meeting chaired by Tom SPENCER (EPP, UK), the Committee adopted the report by Edward McMILLAN SCOTT (EPP, UK) on developments in relations with Turkey since the entry into force of the customs union. The vote was 36 in favour, 5 against and 1 abstention. Following the vote, Mr McMILLAN SCOTT said he was sorry that Turkey had broken off its political dialogue with the EU. "We wish to strengthen the customs union and see all aspects of it applied", he said. "To do this, the situation as regards human rights and the status of minorities must change." The report is based on the two annual reports drawn up by the Commission. MEPs pointed out that Parliament had given its assent to the customs union "on the understanding that Turkey would introduce political reforms that would bring it closer to fulfilling the criteria for accession to the European Union". In fact, the Commission acknowledges that "no substantial progress has been achieved as regards human rights and the democratic reform process in Turkey". The committee therefore called on the Commission to continue carrying out its annual review of relations between the two sides with its eyes wide open and without showing any indulgence towards Turkey. As soon as the grounds for criticism were removed, all facets of the customs union could be implemented, including the financial provisions. The customs union itself was working satisfactorily. Now it was important that the latest trend towards a better balance of trade between the two sides should continue. As to the management of the MEDA programme, the report welcomed the establishment of the joint working party with the Commission and reiterated that only projects agreed to by the working party should be undertaken. On the political front, the committee called for support to be given to proposals from Turkish civil society aimed at achieving improvements in Turkish democracy and human rights. To ensure this, Turkey must provide constitutional guarantees on a number of matters: human rights, minority rights, responsibilities of the military vis-à-vis the public authorities, etc. This should be done on the basis of the international agreements which it had signed. The committee said that it had no intention of treating Turkey in a more intransigent fashion than other applicant countries and that the situation should be examined in the light of the Copenhagen criteria. Hence the need to relaunch political dialogue through the bodies provided for under the association agreement. Mr McMILLAN SCOTT's report also endorsed the Commission's view of the importance of the following points: continuing democratisation and greater political control of the armed forces; the establishment of good neighbourly relations between Turkey and Greece, as well its other neighbours; and, lastly, observance of international law to settle disputes in the Aegean Sea (in particular over the island of Imia), on the demarcation of the continental shelf and on the Cyprus question, by accepting UN resolutions and offers of mediation.