Action to combat racism, xenophobia, antisemitism in the countries applicant for membership

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The committee adopted a report by Bastiaan BELDER (EDD, NL) on the fight against racism, xenophobia and antisemitism in the candidate countries, saying that adequate funding was essential to ensure the success of the EU initiative to support democracy and human rights as well as projects on human rights and the protection of minorities under the MEDA programme. The committee called on the candidate countries and the Member States to ratify and implement as a matter of urgency not only the international convention on the abolition of all forms of racial discrimination but also the Council of Europe's framework convention on the protection of national minorities and the European charter on regional and minority languages. The report also stressed that racism, xenophobia and antisemitism remained a serious problem in the European Union. It therefore called for close cooperation between the Union and the candidate countries to combat the problem and wanted violent racist crimes to be thoroughly investigated. The committee called on the candidate countries to continue taking action against racism and xenophobia and believed the EU also had a duty to ensure that the process of social change in the candidate countries did not lead to a rise in social tension, with the risk of increasing racism this would entail. NGOs from the EU and the candidate countries, as well as representatives of ethnic groups, needed to be involved (and given sufficient financial support) in these efforts. The report also stressed the important role of the media in disseminating information and values to the whole of society. The committee wanted further progress to be made on the problem of integrating, and granting equal treatment to, the Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia. It also called for a coordinated approach on discrimination against gypsy minorities and regretted the fact that the Commission's paper failed to propose specific measures to combat discrimination against refugees.