Relations between European Union and Russia

2003/2230(INI) - 21/01/2004

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Bastiaan BELDER (EDD, NL) on relations between the EU and Russia. The report called on the Council to review its strategy and ensure that the partnership with Russia was based to a greater degree on respect for shared values, wth no exceptions to this rule. Far from seeking any break with the strategic goals of the EU's current Russia policy, MEPs called for greater consistency in the positions and measures taken by leaders of the Member States, the Council and the Commission. They criticised the fact that "uncoordinated statements by leaders of Member States rendered negotiations with Russia on Kaliningrad transit excessively difficult" and that after the last EU-Russia summit "spectacular statements on Chechnya" were made "which went straight against" well-established EU positions. The report recommended that the European Council should base its revised policy on the following objectives: ensuring good neighbourly relations by appropriate border management and better cross-border cooperation in the fight against crime and illegal migration; promoting human rights, democracy, independent media, the development of civil society, the rule of law and transparency; cooperating in resolving the conflicts in the south Caucasus and encouraging disarmament and non-proliferation; exploiting the potential for increased trade, including in energy products; and supporting efforts to improve public health and other aspects of social development in Russia. MEPs also questioned the EU's role in the Chechen conflict, which had resulted in 200 000 deaths in the last 10 years out of an initial Chechen population of a million inhabitants, as well as tens of thousands of dead amongst the Russian troops. The committee said that the lack of dialogue on Chechnya was "morally and politically indefensible" as well as incompatible with the wish to deepen cooperation on internal and external security. MEPs expressed deep concern and urged the Russian authorities to investigate the disappearances, reports of torture and other crimes and to bring the perpetrators to justice. They also called on Moscow to authorise visits by the UN and to allow humanitarian agencies to work in Chechnya. The Council was asked to encourage a resumption of dialogue between the Moscow authorities and all representatives of Chechen society. Lastly, the committee called on the Council not to accept Russia's refusal to extend the application of the partnership and cooperation agreement to include Estonia and Latvia, and demanded that Russia should ratify without delay the border agreements negotiated with these two countries.