Outermost regions: implementation of Article 299 (2) of the EC Treaty. Report

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PURPOSE: To report on the measures to implement Article 299(2) on the outermost regions of the EU.
CONTENT: This report constitues the Commission's reply to the Cologne European Council's request for a report on the measures to implement the new Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty concerning the outermost regions. The EU includes 7 regions classified as "outermost": - the autonomous Spanish community of the Canary Islands - the four French overseas departments: Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana and Reunion - the Portuguese autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira The EU has recognised "remoteness" as a concept and taken account of the specific features of these regions so that they can play a full part in Europe and benefit from Community policies while co-operating with neighbouring countries and territories. The guidelines for this approach were set out in the "programmes of options specific to the remote and insular nature" of the French overseas departments (Poseidom, in 1989), the Canary Islands (Poseican, in 1991) and the Azores and Madeira (Poseima, in 1991). The three Posei programmes are the backbone of the policy for supporting the outermost regions. However, over time and as result of the changes which the EU has undergone, the need to provide a more solid legal basis for dealing with "remoteness" has emerged. This was introduced by the Amsterdam Treaty, whose new Article 299(2) updates and strengthens the earlier Article 227(2) (which applied only to the French overseas departments) and covers all the outermost regions. This new legal basis shoud make it easier to consolidate what has been achieved under the Posei programmes and provide a firmer basis for addressing the future prospects of European integration. The report reflects this approach. The first part (dealing with "achievements") describes action taken by the Community to date and its effects on the development of these regions: in brief, action has been effective, but needs to be continued because of the handicaps of remoteness are lasting ones. The second part (dealing with the future) deals with the measures planned under Article 299 (2) to continue and strengthen earlier measures. In this part, actions are planned in the following areas: agriculture, fisheries, taxation, customs, SMEs, transport, energy, environment, the information society and research and development. The instruments used to achieve targets in these areas will be the Structural Funds, loans from the EIB, state aids, taxation, and customs. Finally, the Commission remains committed to encouraging regional cooperation between its outermost regions on the one hand and African, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) and overseas countries and territories (OCTs) on the other hand. This commitment is already found in the Lome Convention and its successor, the ACP-EC Partnership Agreement, as well as in the OCT Association Decision. This dimension also constitutes a priority of the Interreg III initiative, strand "B", for the period 2000-2006.