Fight against fraud and protection of the Communities' financial interests. Action plan 2001-2203, annual report 2000

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PURPOSE : to present the annual report 2000 from the Commission on the protection of the Communities' financial interests and the fight against fraud. CONTENT : the Commission's 2000 annual report, which is the second on the new treaty base, therefore summarises in its first part the Community initiatives concerning protection of the financial interests. It reports in its second part on measures taken by the Member States in 1999-2000 and covers in a third and final part the statistical information communicated by the Member States, under the terms of sectoral regulations, on their activities in the fight against fraud in the main Community policies. A first part covers the legislative and horizontal regulatory initiatives, and then the sectoral legislation. For the former, the report mentions in particular initiatives in 2000 to strengthen the penal judicial dimension, more particular those linked to the objective of establishing an area of freedom, security and justice. The operation of the Office, in its reporting activities and in its role amid the institutions, is raised specifically also to illustrate the manner in which it sets up vertical cooperation activities with the competent national authorities and technical and operational assistance.This part also covers some of the actions undertaken by the Community in partnership with the main actors in the protection of financial interests and the fight against fraud. A second part draws the consequences of the ratification of the Amsterdam Treaty and the implementation of the new article 280, paragraph 5 which provides also for the activity of the Member States to be reported. For the first time, the Commission report summarises the resources implemented in 1999 and 2000 by the Member States for the protection of the Communities' financial interests, on the basis of a concerted working methodology. The Member States effectively assume, in practice, the responsibilities conferred on them by the Treaty. A third part contains an analysis of the data gathered from the Member States resulting from the Community's investigation activity to identify the main trends in fraudulent activity or irregular practices as well as the overall results in terms of recovery and financial follow up. In this context it is important to recall that the detection and follow up of cases of fraud and other irregularities committed against the Communities' financial interests must be carried out by the Member States and the Commission in close cooperation. The year 2000 marks a new development in the level of irregularities, including fraud established by the Member States or suspected by OLAF. The figures however must be interpreted in a cautious manner given the heterogeneous character of the data given by the Member States. After a period of stabilisation, the amounts involved are on the increase in several areas (e.g. the EAGGF-Guarantee expenditure and traditional ownresources, structural funds, the direct expenditure sector particularly for external policies,