Fight against organized crime: a European action plan

1997/2091(COS) - 27/10/1997

In her report on the Action Plan to combat organised crime, Charlotte CEDERSCHIÖLD (EPP, S) expressed alarm at the scale of organised crime, particularly in areas such as trafficking in human beings and various offences against children, illegal trafficking in drugs and arms, corruption, money-laundering and large-scale fraud. She also voiced concern at the serious danger of individual EU Member States and the EU itself being infiltrated or subverted in certain areas by organised crime.The report, adopted almost unanimously by the Committee on Civil Liberties deplores the fact that co-operation between police forces and the judiciary in different Member States has not been adapted to reflect the realities of crime in the modern world. It therefore calls for action to be taken by the EU, including swift ratification (by the end of 1998 at the latest) of all conventions and other binding legal instruments.The report regrets the fact that Parliament was not involved in drawing up the programme but welcomes the fact that there is a programme at all, while nevertheless drawing attention to its shortcomings. Above all, it points out that the plan makes no clear decision on the most important issue of all, namely whether organised crime should in future be combatted by harmonising the definition of major criminal offences and provisions relating to criminal procedure, or by improving co-operation between the Member States. The rapporteur therefore proposes that, while priority should be given to improving co-operation between Member States (following the example of the Nordic countries), efforts should also be made to achieve harmonisation in areas where co-operation has not yet produced satisfactory results.As far as the recommendations of the Action Plan are concerned, the committee stresses: the importance of strengthening people's sense of civic responsibility in the fight against organised crime, in both urban and rural areas; the need for close co-operation between Member States and UCLAF (the Commission's anti-fraud unit); the value of measures - apart from codes of conduct - to provide members of professions under threat from organised crime (eg. lawyers) with a legal right to contact the authorities responsible for combating crime; the value of approximation of Member States' laws by setting minimum standards in areas where differing legal requirements concerning interference with fundamental rights hinder efficient cross-border investigations; the need to devise measures to resolve the mains problems encountered in the course of direct contacts between the authorities (e.g. overcoming language barriers); the need, when the Europol Convention is revised, to provide for a central judicial control system for Europol, and for Europol to report regularly on its activities to the European Parliament and national parliaments;the importance of standardising throughout the EU the list of money-laundering offences and including it in the category of serious forms of crime against property; the desirability of setting up a European fund to help victims and prevent crime, as an alternative to sharing confiscated assets.