Common fisheries policy after the year 2002

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During the adoption of the report on the common fisheries policy (CFP) after the year 2002, the rapporteur, Mrs C. Fraga Estevez (PPE, E), noted that the present system consisted of a transitional derogation to the principle of free access to Community fisheries zones and that, as a result, rather than taking the form of a new derogation (unless the Council expressly decided to maintain it as such), the new system which would enter in force in 2003 should be an instrument which complied with the basic principles of the Treaty. Fisheries should not in fact continue to conflict with the single market, i.e. the foundations on which the European Union is built. This premise led the rapporteur to outline a common fisheries policy scenario for the 21st century and to highlight several aspects affected by what she referred to as inevitable change. With a view to completing the single market, Mrs Fraga recommended that the new common fisheries policy include criteria of efficiency, competitiveness and sustainable development. With regard to sustainable development, she outlined a new environmental dimension in which conservation objectives addressed ecosystems as a whole rather than the individual species fished. Deploring the waste of quality protein in the form of fisheries rejects, she called for a reduction in this absurd practice and recommended integrated management of sea and shore areas. On the delicate matter of the balance between the capacity of the Community fleet and resources, the report adopted recommended eliminating overcatches by encouraging a greater sense of responsibility on the part of the users of resources but did not underestimate the extra financial cost which restoring the balance would impose on the Community budget. The rapporteur considered that this was the crux of the debate and emphasized both the need for a limit on the number of fishermen in the European Union and the risk inherent in such a limit, given the current employment crisis. This was why the new system for conserving resources either in terms of catches or in terms of fisheries efforts should be based on extensive consultation and the participation of the sector in question. With regard to the principle of relative stability, this could be used as a basis for allocating individual fishing rights, while specific measures were needed to safeguard the non-industrial fishing fleet. Other points raised were: on the one hand, relations with third countries in the fisheries sector, where a more flexible and realistic approach needed to be applied, depending on the different situations in third countries and, where applicable, new bilateral agreements needed to be authorized outside the present framework of the Commission's external powers and, on the other hand, the need for a new structural policy which aimed to help the beneficiaries of fishing rights rather than the Member States in their efforts to restructure the fleet now that the multiannual guidance programmes were defunct. Mrs Fraga's report examined prospects and uncertainties relating to the development of aquaculture and the fisheries products processing industry in greater detail, emphasized the need to harmonize the future common organization of the market (COM) in fisheries with reforms of other policies by proposing basic rules for the new COM as of now and advocated a real Community control policy, given that free movement was incompatible with regionalized control. A Community-level harmonized common fisheries policy could be decentralized in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity without giving rise to a new wave of renationalization of Community competences.