Baltic region: current state and prospects for cooperation in the Baltic region

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The EU must make efforts to include the Baltic Sea region in its sphere of action, said the external economic relations committee, in unanimously adopting the report by Mr Kyosti TOIVONEN (consultation) on the Commission's report on cooperation in the region. The committee emphasised that cooperation should concentrate on the development of democracy, a market economy and human resources. The Union should make use of the political mechanism included in the association and partnership agreements concerning respect for human rights by associated and partner countries. The committee is calling on the Commission to support the creation of a free trade area comprising the Baltic States, in the hope that it will come into being as early as 1998. The committee also drew attention to the importance of environmental protection, and felt that the Union must take action to help resolve the region's environmental problems. It urged the Commission to pay special attention to building up cooperation with the countries of the region on asylum policy and action against crime. The same approach should be followed to combat trafficking in illegal drugs and dangerous materials. Measures should also be taken to deal with money laundering.