Former Yugoslavia: prospects for developping regional cooperation

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OBJECTIVE: The report seeks to establish common principles for future contractual relations with the countries of the former Yugoslavia. SUBSTANCE: Following the Council meeting of 26 February 1996, the Community defined a regional approach to the conclusion of agreements with the countries of the former Yugoslavia designed essentially to stabilize the political situation in these countries and encourage their economic development. The agreements should be seen as a substantial incentive to reconciliation among these countries and should encourage regional cooperation. The conditions and common principles which should guide the conclusion of agreements with Bosnia, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are as follows: - Conditions: the agreements should include clear political and economic conditions, in particular respect for human rights and minorities, the right to return of displaced persons and refugees, democratic institutions, political and economic reform, readiness to establish open and cooperative relations between these countries, full compliance with the terms of the Dayton agreement and, with regard to Yugoslavia, the granting of a large degree of autonomy to Kosovo. The Council's demands on the former Yugoslavia also include: . mutual recognition among all the states of the former Federation, . full cooperation with the International War Crimes Tribunal, . agreement among all States of the former Yugoslavia on matters of succession (NB these conditions do not apply to humanitarian aid). - Common principles: . type of agreement: cooperation agreements including economic clauses going beyond the provisions of traditional agreements of this kind. With regard to long-term association with the EU, this will entail a higher level of economic maturity and a much clearer political dimension, particularly at regional level; . content of agreements: this will not necessarily be the same for the three countries, since their level of economic development may differ. Nevertheless, the agreements will include some common structural elements: - encouragement of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, - economic cooperation: this will be linked to the parties' readiness to cooperate with their neighbours and will entail a substantial regional cooperation component (in particular, customs cooperation and development of common infrastructures), - cross-border cooperation: action could be taken within the framework of PHARE (PHARE-INTERREG II, multinational programmes, CREDO), - commitment by the countries to cooperate with each other in areas such as energy, telecommunications, transport, research, technology, agriculture, tourism, health, environment, provision of services and free movement of persons, - trade concessions: the Community will offer concessions along the lines of the autonomous import regime for the republics of the former Yugoslavia applied since 1992, but will be made conditional on the willingness of the three recipient states to negotiate reciprocal facilities with their partners, - political dialogue: in a separate joint declaration, the countries would undertake to respect human rights, minority rights and democratic principles, as well as the values embodied in the relevant international conventions,which were violated during the war. The dialogue would be held in a sub-regional format, allowing the countries concerned to meet directly, - evolutionary clause: this clause, which is essential for the future of bilateral relations with the EU, should not, however, encourage these countries to apply for accession prematurely. Its main aim is to spell out the essential preconditions for further development of relations with the Union (in particular, compliance with peace agreements and return of refugees), - institutional framework: a committee will oversee the smooth functioning of the agreement, assisted by a joint programming and monitoring committee (JPMC), - human rights clause: the agreements will include the standard clause on human rights and democratic principles as an essential element of the agreement, but will also include regular reports on compliance (in particular, the introduction of an institutionalized verification procedure). The Commission considers that at present it is difficult to say when negotiations could be opened (in any event not until peace has genuinely been consolidated in the region).