Relations with Turkey: developments since the entry into force of the Customs Union. Annual Report

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OBJECTIVE: first annual report on the implementation of the customs union with Turkey and on the economic aspects and the human rights situation in this country. SUBSTANCE: This report reviews the developments in the relations of the Community with Turkey since the entry into force of the Customs Union on 31 December 1995: - on the functioning of the Customs Union itself, the report confirms that the customs duties and charges having equivalent effect have been abolished, as have quantitative restrictions. The Customs Union is thus functioning satisfactorily and at present there are no longer any quantitative restrictions or import or export duties in the industrial sector in trade with Turkey. - in economic terms the impact of the customs union is still unclear as there is insufficient statistical data to allow a proper analysis to be made. However, European exports to Turkey have risen sharply since 1996 and there has been a smaller growth in exports from Turkey to the Union. The economic health of this country is not at present a matter for concern as growth during the first quarter of 1996 was 8%. The principal concern remains the macro-economic stability and Turkey's budget deficit which continues to grow. - as regards financial cooperation, as the financial regulation has still not been adopted by the Council (no unanimity following the events at Imia) the budgetary aid of ECU 375 million has still not yet been made available to this country. - there is most cause for concern as regards the political situation: the last elections enabled Mr Erbakan (REFAH Islamic party) to take up power in coalition with the DYP party (Mrs CILLER's party, who is currently deputy Prime Minister of Turkey). However, since the establishment of this new coalition legislative activity has been virtually at a standstill, which has also slowed down the expected developments as regards the strengthening of the democratization process. At the same time, the events in early 1996 involving the islands of Imia in the Aegean have considerably aggravated relations between Turkey and Greece and between Turkey and the Union as a whole. The difficult political situation in Turkey and the problems associated with the events on Imia have done little to enusre progress on the problem of Cyprus. The violent incidents in Cyprus in August 1996 clearly helped to worsen the tension on the island and have served to convince international opinion that cohabitation of the Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot communities as part of a single Federal state was 'impossible'. - as regards human rights the situation is hardly improved: because of the political situation the 1995 reforms (constitutional reform, amendment of Article 8 of the anti-terrorism law, etc.) have in the end not had any practical effect as prosecution for expression of opinions still continue to occur (although in smaller numbers). With regard to measures specifically against torture and ill-treatment, disappearances and extrajudicial executions, there has not been any major progress either. These practices have also been the subject of vigorous condemnation on the part of the EU Presidency. The situation in the prisons is also a matter for concern where dramatic hunger strikes have drawn attention to the appalling conditions of detention for Turkish prisoners. Furthermore, the state of emergency in the south-east provinces of Turkey has still not been lifted. Similarly, the Kurdish problem, far from being resolved has become bogged down and associations are now bearing the cost of government repression of the Kurdish cause and in particular its action against the Kurdish party PKK (which the Turks consider to be a terrorist party). While the Commission criticizes the criminal activities of the PKK (combated by several Member States), it stresses that action against this movement must not stand in the way of the recognition of the rights, particularly the cultural rights, of Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin, whilst still respecting Turkey's unity and integrity. In conclusion, although not particularly encouraging, the efforts made by Turkey in recent months should not halt Turkish-European partnership. This is in any case the Commission's wish, which considers that the Union should remain a full partner of Turkey, in particular to deal with the tension in the Aegean and in Cyprus.