Fight against fraud and protection of the Community's financial interests. Working programme 1997-1998, 1996 Report

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OBJECTIVE: presentation by the Commission of the 1997/98 work programme for the fight against fraud. SUBSTANCE: the present work programme strengthens presence on the ground and continues the policy of partnership with national authorities. It also aims at strengthening legislation to ensure compatibility of national judicial norms and transnational cooperation. The efforts will focus on six themes: - detection of irregularities; - recovery of the amounts concerned; - fraud-prevention and fraud-proof legislation; - administrative sanctions and deterrence; - a judicial area for the protection of the Union's financial interests; - the preparation for enlargement and relations with non-member countries. In each of these themes the SEM 2000 principles on financial management will be implemented. The accent will be put on the prevention aspect, especially the quality and applicability of legislation. In the customs area, the principles identified in the 'customs 2000' programme will be implemented. Some priorities should be highlighted: - priority will be given to the European Parliament's recommendations to strengthen customs cooperation in the transit field. Priority will also be given to an improvement of preferential regimes for non-member countries so as better to prevent and combat fraud; - in the field of indirect taxes, strengthened cooperation with Member States at Union level will be put in place so as to improve the functioning of VAT and excise systems in the internal market; - anti-fraud actions will be developed in certain non-member countries, in particular the new independent States as well as the accession candidate countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The Commission notes that since 1994 some Member States have set up specialized structures for the protection of EU finances while others have introduced provisions to strengthen cooperation with the Commission. These are positive and encouraging signs. Some aspects of action in Member States, such as close collaboration and networking, also form part of the work programme.