TACIS: cross-border cooperation

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OBJECTIVE: The communication sets out the Community's policy on crossborder cooperation within the framework of the TACIS programme up to 1999. SUBSTANCE: One of the key factors for crossborder cooperation in the region is the need to ensure the stability of the common frontier of the EU and the former Soviet republics (the 'newly independent states' or NIS) following Finland's accession to the EU, and to lay the foundations of sustainable social and economic development among the frontier communities. This form of cooperation is part of a broader policy for the strengthening of relations between border regions of the EU, the countries of central and eastern Europe (CCEE) and the NIS. Crossborder cooperation is also part of the pre-accession strategy of the CCEE, in the context of complementary funding for border-crossing facilities (in particular, so as to address the increasing concern which has arisen about the inadequacy of the borders concerned, and to promote crossborder relations, especially where problems relating to minorities still exist). In this connection, the Commission considers that crossborder cooperation should be reinforced, and that priority should go to projects characterized by a high degree of local or regional commitment. These projects should concern the following aspects: 1) improvement of the effectiveness of border control and transit, especially via the strengthening of existing networks and the creation of appropriate infrastructure. In particular, the aim should be to facilitate local border transit and to reinforce the crossings linking the EU, the CCEE and the NIS; 2) assistance to help border regions overcome their specific development problems stemming from being on the periphery of their national economies, especially via the establishment of links between border networks and the creation of joint ventures; 3) action to address the two main types of crossborder ecological problem. those for which simultaneous action is needed on both sides of the border (e.g. pollution of border lakes), and those whose effects are felt on the 'other' side only (e.g. upstream waste): in this context, it will be necessary to finance studies of local ecological problems and to make follow-up investment in support infrastructure (for instance, via the continuation of Community actions already begun under the EC's fifth environmental action plan). Concerning the priority aspects, the Commission considers that in its first years the programme should focus on institutional support and the development of crossborder networks (frontier management). Other priorities should include the creation of direct links between border communities (via joint ventures), and ecological projects. Geographically speaking, this cooperation will especially concern the frontiers between the NIS and the Community and between the NIS and the Baltic states. It will also relate to the frontiers between the CCEE and Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. On the approach to be adopted, the Commission considers that local and regional authorities should be involved as fully as possible. Synergies with other Community programmes should be identified (especially with INTERREG and the PHARE crossborder cooperation programme). Special attention should be paid to small-scale projects, local actions and consciousness-raising actions.