Action to combat racism, xenophobia, antisemitism in the countries applicant for membership

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PURPOSE : to give an overview of measures which can contribute to countering racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism in the candidate countries. CONTENT : The scale of the minorities problem was illustrated in Agenda 2000 and continues to be a recurring problem in the following terms: minorities account for 44% of the population in Latvia (where 34% are Russian), 38% in Estonia (30% Russian), 20% in Lithuania (9% Russian, 7% Polish), 18% in Slovakia (11% Hungarian, 5% Roma), 14% in Bulgaria (9% Turks, 5% Roma) and 13% in Romania (8% Hungarian, 4% Roma). The presence of these minorities is the cause of racist and xenophobic sentiments against which so many of the candidate countries, like the Community, intend to mobilise themselves. In addition, it is an opportunity to remember that human rights and fundamental freedoms constitute a general principle of Community law and one of the principle motors of accession. In order to help the candidate countries adopt the necessary measures in terms of the fight against racism, the Union has at its disposal a battery of actions or programmes applicable to candidate countries. This support is channelled mainly through the Phare programme (and more specifically "Phare Democracy" which has now been integrated in the 'European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights') and the Meda programme for Turkey. In the same way, the candidate countries have adopted government plans or programmes to protect and promote minorities and tackle racism. However, there is a lack of resources which are needed in order to deepen the envisaged actions; this is why the Union intends to put in place other possibilities for actions by basing itself on the experience that it has acquired in this area. Also, consistent with the strategies to prepare the candidates for EU membership, efforts should focus on, wherever possible, opening Community programmes, agencies and activities to the participation of the candidate countries, in particular : 1) the Action Plan against Racism (see procedure COS/2068/1999) which prepares the ground for more ambitious action at European level under the new provisions of the Treaty on non-discrimination, in order to integrate the fight against racism in Community policies (a report is awaited from the Commission on the subject and a part of it will deal with actions undertaken in the candidate countries); 2) the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (see procedure CNS/0268/1996) set up in Vienna following Council Regulation EC/1035 /1999 has as its principal objective the study of the extent and the development of manifestations of xenophobia and of anti-Semitism within the Union. Since 1999, (see proecedure CNS/0143/1998) the European Monitoring Centre has signed an agreement with the Council of Europe in order to extend its field of action. This collaboration will enable common activities to be carried out within the EU and in the remaining 25 countries of the Council of Europe, including all the candidate countries. As a first practical measure to implement the agreement with the Council of Europe, the Monitoring Centre has proposed a joint project on the situation of the Roma people. The centre will also work inclose cooperation with organisations in the Member States and also international organisations. In the meantime, the possibilities for establishing informal cooperation between the Monitoring Centre and the candidate countries could be explored; 3) the implementation of the non-discrimination provisions of the Amsterdam treaty (Article 13): in addition to the implementation of legislative measures aiming to prohibit discrimination on grounds of racial and ethnic origin in a range of social and economic fields, legislation that will be applicable to the candidate countries, the Commission is exploring the possibility of proposing incentive measures to combat social exclusion under Article 137 of the EC Treaty. Such measures could also be applicable to participation by candidate countries; 4) the use of programmes concerning Education, Vocational training and Youth programmes as instruments in the fight against racism and xenophobia in candidate countries: programmes such as, Leonardo, Youth and Socrates are already open to candidate countries and may provide support to a wide range of initiatives tackling racism and xenophobia; 5) actions with Social partners and Civil Society: NGOs are principal actors for change in society and the

European Commission will continue to support the development of civil society in candidate countries. However, governments should also be encouraged to involve NGOs in all aspects of their work to combat racism. Finally, the Commission will continue to strengthen its cooperation with other international organisations, and more particularly the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. In addition, the preparations for the World Conference on Racism which will be held in 2001, will provide a good opportunity for the EU to work closely with the candidate countries.