West Bank and the Gaza Strip: future European economic assistance

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Adopting the report by Mr Per GAHRTON (V, S) on the Commission communication on assistance to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Parliament welcomed the implementation of this aid and believed that assistance would contribute to sustainable economic and social development in those territories and consolidate democracy and the rule of law. Parliament regarded as very important the contribution which the European Union could make to Palestine's development and hoped that this initiative would permit the full integration of all forces which reject terrorism. Parliament called for assistance aimed at creating a unified political entity and facilitating the implementation of the future Israeli-Palestinian agreement on the Israeli settlements and the Palestinian refugees. Aid was to be regarded as a contribution to peace, the consolidation of Palestinian administrative structures and the establishment of efficient technical and financial machinery, the strengthening of social infrastructure, family planning etc. Parliament insisted that support should be given to the NGOs but not, on any account, to Hamas or related organizations and that it should promote the strand of public opinion which supports the peace process. The Union's priority aid objectives should lie in the job-creation sectors and benefit the most disadvantaged social categories. Measures should be taken to eliminate the administrative distortions which harmed the competitiveness of Palestinian firms. The European Parliament noted that, although the European Union gives certain Palestinian products preferential access, these concessions were insufficient. It was therefore necessary to strengthen existing facilities, notably through the extension of trade concessions for agricultural products. It also emphasized that respect for human rights must be the driving force behind European aid and called on the NGOs active in this area to step up contacts with their Palestinian counterparts. It insisted that the Palestinians must be free to decide how development operations should be carried out. It called for the following actions to be developed: - conclusion of bilateral agreements with the EU and other industrialized countries so that they open up their markets to Palestinian goods; - regional cooperation in the field of transport and water and energy supply; - the creation of an enterprise climate for the promotion of private investment; - coverage for insurance in respect of investment risks. Relations between the Union and Palestine should be boosted by: - making representatives of the territories fully-fledged participants in a Euro-Mediterranean partnership; - formalizing bilateral relations through the conclusion of an interim agreement as the first step towards a future EC/Palestine association agreement. Finally, Parliament urged that assistance to the Palestinians should include an environmental aspect in order to avoid irreparable errors such as those already committed in the industrialized countries.