EC/Turkey relations: implementation of measures to intensify customs union

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In adopting the report drafted by Mr. Philippe MORILLON (EPP/ED, F) on the implementation of measures to intensify the EU-Turkey customs union, the European Parliament refused the demand of Mr. Pedro MARSET CAMPOS (GUE/NGL, E) in the name of his group, to refer this report back to Committee, following the confirmation of the condemnation to death of Mr. Abdullah Oçalan in Turkey (for Ms. Pernille FRAHM (DK) of the same political group, the adoption of this report must depend on the prior abolition of the death penalty in this country). For the rapporteur, on the other hand, the Union should draw lessons from the success of the customs union with Turkey, which for the Union is represented by a doubling of its commercial balance with Turkey since the customs union. With regard to the fate of Mr. Oçalan, Mr. MORILLON considers that the 'de facto' moratorium applied by Turkey with regard to capital punishment which has prevailed for 15 years, will become a 'de iure' moratorium following the adoption of this regulation and the consecutive unblocking in the Council (taking, in this case, a decision by unanimity) of EU financial aid to Turkey of 15 million euros over 3 years (2000-2002 and no longer 199-2001 because this proposal has been blocked for several years because of the Greek veto). Furthermore, the prospect of the forthcoming Helsinki Summit (December 1999) which should decide whether Turkey will become a candidate country, makes the adoption of this report all the more important. Mr. MORILLON asked what the reaction of the Members if in our countries there was interference between the judicial powers and political powers.... Concerning the details of the procedure, the Parliament made a number of amendments to the Commission's proposal paying particular attention to the importance of respect of human rights, the promotion of democratic practices and the involvement of civil society in this process. The European Parliament also asks that before implementing actions provided for under this Regulation, the Commission should draw up a list of priorities and refer its indicative programme to the committee and the various bodies set up by the EU-Turkey Association Agreement (notably the joint parliamentary committee and the EU-Turkey joint economic and social committee). In particular, it calls for, where obstacles are placed to the implementation of projects, operations or measures (especially in the fields of cooperation seeking to defend and promote democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities), the Council, acting by qualified majority on a proposal from the Commission or the European Parliament, may decide to suspend all cooperation under this Regulation. It calls for the budgetary authority to set the annual funding in relation to the appropriations available for each financial year, taking into account the principles of sound management. In parallel, it stresses that projects be carried out in order to repair damage caused by the recent earthquakes and conservation and protection of the environment on the basis of the principles of sustainable development. The Parliament, furthermore, introduces important amendments with respect to comitology and calls for special provision tobe made by the Commission for a reduction in the obstacles to small, non-profit-making NGOs taking up grants. Lastly, the Parliament asks to be kept informed of the results of discussions within the committee responsible for programming assistance and that once a year a report on the progress with regard to respect for democratic principles, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms and international law. Further regular information is called for by the Parliament which also calls for the annual report on the funded actions be submitted to it during the first quarter of the year to enable it to take note of it and evaluate it in good time before it considers and adopts the Union's annual budget.