

2294. Council - GENERAL AFFAIRS

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Relations with Bulgaria – autonomous measures regarding agricultural products

The Council adopted a Regulation establishing certain concessions in the form of Community tariff quotas for certain agricultural products and providing for an adjustment, as an autonomous and transitional measures, of certain agricultural concessions provided for in the Europe Agreement with Bulgaria.

It should be noted that, in March 1999, the Council authorised the Commission to open negotiations with the ten associated CEECs with a view to establishing new mutual concessions for agricultural products. These negotiations are based on the future-developments clauses in the Europe Agreements, aim at the progressive liberalisation of trade in agricultural products and are set in the context of the accession process.

The Commission was able to conclude the negotiations with Bulgaria and their outcome is due to form the subject of an additional protocol to the Europe Agreement. However, in view of the procedural period required for such a protocol to enter into force, the Commission proposed that, as an autonomous and transitional measure, the Council introduce the concessions agreed at the negotiations through a Regulation to take effect from 1 July 2000. Bulgaria for its part would also take the necessary action to comply with its undertakings arising from the outcome of the negotiations.

Association with Poland – extension for State aid

The Council adopted a Decision on the position to be adopted by the Community within the Association Council established by the Europe Agreement signed on 16 December 1991 between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Poland, of the other part, regarding extension for a further five-year period, in accordance with Article 63(4)(a) of the Europe Agreement.

That provision states that, for the purpose of assessing public aid granted by Poland, that country will, for the first five years after the entry into force of the Agreement, be regarded as an area identical to those areas of the Community covered by Article 92 (now Article 87)(3)(a) of the EC Treaty (i.e. areas where the standard of living is abnormally low or where there is serious under-employment). The Europe Agreement also provides for that period to be renewed every five years by decision of the Association Council.

As the first period has expired, Poland is requesting a five-year extension. The Commission considers that Poland fulfils the criteria used to determine eligibility of a region for the aid referred to in Article 87(3)(a) TEC (including per capita GDP less than 75% of the average GDP of the Community). It is therefore proposed that the Association Council grant the requested extension.

Relations with Bulgaria – participation in the MEDIA II programme

The Council adopted a Decision concerning the Community position within the Association Council on the participation of Bulgaria in a Community programme within the framework of the common audiovisual policy

It should be noted that the MEDIA II programme (encouraging the development and distribution of European audiovisual works and training for professions in the European audiovisual industry) is open to the participation of associated Central European countries in accordance with the conditions set out in the Additional Protocols to the Association Agreements on participation in Community programmes.

Relations with the Associated CEE – participation in the Community programme in the field of youth – Decision concerning Romania

The Council adopted a Decision concerning the Community position within the Association Council on the participation of Romania in the "Youth" Community action programme.

Like the other associated Central and Eastern European countries, Romania participated in the "Youth for Europe" programme, which ended on 31 December 1999; the arrangements for its participation had been established by a Decision of the Association Council. Romania also wishes to participate in the new "Youth" programme, covering the period 2000-2006. A further Decision of the Association Council is required for that purpose; such is the object of this Commission proposal.