

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2473/03

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to the Commission

Subject: Regions adjacent to the enlarged Union's external borders

The current process of enlargement towards the east will, in the near future, alter the EU's political, economic and social makeup, as harmonisation, protection and transitional aid measures are applied in the applicant central European and Baltic countries.

Given their particular sensitivity to this process of economic alignment, during the successive enlargements of the EU the eastern border regions of the Member States and, subsequently, the applicant countries, have benefited from special programmes and aid intended to guard against and mitigate imbalances and socio-economic repercussions within their borders. The western border regions of the European countries neighbouring the enlarged EU, such as Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, are primarily and intrinsically dependent on the interregional economy and trade with their many partners on the EU side of the border. These three eastern European countries, which form part of our continent's history and identity, are directly concerned by the implications of the EU enlargement process at all levels. The current Moldovan and Belarussian governments' predecessors clearly stated their wish to join the EU, and this has remained a priority for the current Ukrainian Government.

On 11 February 2003 the European Parliament adopted a report by Pedro Marset Campos on 'relations between the European Union and Belarus: towards a future partnership', in which it called on the Commission, 'in order to prevent any cracks from appearing in the economic or social structure at the future eastern border of the enlarged EU and to curb smuggling and immigration, to develop Community financial programmes and support for the western regions of the new neighbours to the East, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, on the same scale as those already being implemented in the eastern regions of the neighbouring candidate countries'.

1. What interregional programmes does the Commission intend to implement with a view to providing support for symmetrical social and economic development on both sides of the EU's future eastern border so as to guard against a widening gulf between the new Member States and Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus?
2. What preventive measures does it intend to take in order to protect cross-border trade in this region, a trade which, in Ukraine, accounts for one third of imports and provides a livelihood for 20% of the population, and which is directly threatened by the introduction of visas on 1 July 2004?
3. Would the Commission not agree that in order to maintain and foster the existing social and economic links between the applicant countries and these eastern European partners coordination between the Phare and Tacis and Interreg and Phare-CBC programmes should be optimised and, if necessary, reorganised?