Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Council Decision modifying its decision of 23 November 1994 adopting a specific programme for research and technological development in the field of cooperation with third countries and international organizations (1994-1998)' [1]

(96/C 204/10)

On 3 January 1996, the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 130 i(4) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Energy, Nuclear Questions and Research, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 9 April 1996. The Rapporteur was Mr Bernabei.

At its 335th Plenary Session (meeting of 24 April 1996), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion by 111 votes, with one vote against and four abstentions.

1. Recommendations by the Economic and Social Committee

The Committee,

1.1. whereas research and technological development work (RTD) in the former Soviet Union, already in decline at the start of the 1980s, has suffered a dramatic collapse following the fall of the communist regime;

1.2. whereas the brain drain to Western and other countries is seriously endangering the development of RTD infrastructure in the New Independent States (NIS), and threatening the existence of highly regarded science centres of excellence;

1.3. whereas in recent years the EU has become the leading trading partner of the NIS and cooperates in the energy, nuclear safety, environment, training, science and technology sectors;

1.4. whereas INTAS (international association for the promotion of cooperation with the scientists of the new independent states of the former Soviet Union) falls within the sphere of international scientific and technological cooperation by the EU;

1.5. having regard to the compromise reached between the Council of Ministers and the Commission on continuing and strengthening the work of INTAS under the fourth RTD framework programme;

1.6. noting the positive (in both qualitative and quantitative terms) development of INTAS ever since its inception;

1.7. regretting having been unable to take a stand on the matter earlier since it was not consulted on the May 1995 Commission communication on prospects for cooperation in science and technology with the New Independent States,

Approves the draft Council Decision and recommends:

1.8. further enhancement of the effectiveness of, and a higher profile for, cooperation through INTAS, which it sees as a flexible and fairly rapid instrument for the preservation of existing scientific resources in the NIS;

1.9. predetermined and transparent guidance criteria for selecting projects and for grouping projects systematically to avoid dissipation and duplication of effort and ensure that measures taken with EU help are in the common interest;

1.10. transparency of publicity procedures for calls to tender, access, selection mechanisms and management; and reduction of costs by standardizing and simplifying regularly held calls for tender, in conjunction with the fourth framework programme and in line with its procedures;

1.11. consistency and coordination between INTAS projects and other Community and European schemes in support of economic and technological development in the NIS, so as to avoid duplication, generate synergies and raise the Association's profile to an adequate level;

1.12. A training programme for researchers and scientists, aimed at instilling a scientific culture based on local and international cooperation between research and industry in collaboration with the European Training Foundation in Turin and the International Science and Technology Centre (ISTC) in Moscow;

[1] OJ No C 21, 25. 1. 1996, p. 26.

1.13. close coordination between the Tacis programme and INTAS, which — through a multiregional credit line for exploiting the results of INTAS schemes — would contribute to economic and social progress and the creation of an enterprise culture in the NIS by encouraging Tacis to become involved in promoting technological innovation in these economies in transition;

1.14. refining and formalising Memoranda of Understanding between INTAS and the beneficiary NIS countries in order to simplify the allocation of funds, the protection of industrial property and the dissemination of research results;

1.15. expanding the secretariat, in part by new staff from the beneficiary countries;

1.16. making the Scientific Committee more evenly balanced; all the beneficiary countries should be represented, and new members appointed biennially, subject to allowance for continuity as necessary;

1.17. an annual conference of representatives of the 12 NIS to enable medium term strategic planning in harmony with Community RTD actions and to monitor completed projects and their effectiveness; the outcome of the conference will be summarized in an interim report;

1.18. a biennial report to be presented to the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, with particular attention being given to the potential payoff from INTAS projects in terms of the economy, employment and competitive innovation;

1.19. coordination of INTAS actions with Member States' bilateral measures and the American Civilian Research and Development Foundation for the Independent States of the former Soviet Union (CRDF);

1.20. a balance between INTAS' own actions and bilateral projects between INTAS and individual NIS, to avoid prejudicing participation by countries not in a position to provide funds;

1.21. extending and developing the Cordis, Cosine and EIMS networks in the NIS, and following the example of the VALUE centres, particularly for locating partners;

1.22. a study of the feasibility of an 'INTAS mark' for scientific and technological excellence, with the aim (inter alia) of making it easier for research partners to enter into joint ventures involving technological and industrial collaboration with Community enterprises and for new technology enterprises to be set up in the NIS.

2. The RTD situation in the former Soviet Union

2.1. The scientific and technological infrastructures of the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union (NIS) developed in very different ways from EU countries and the west in general: the State's close control of research and technological development (RTD) activities led on the one hand to the creation of a large number of research centres and the training of scientific and technical staff of very high quality (in the 1980's there were more than three million research workers in the Russian Federation, as against fewer than one million now) [1], and on the other hand to the gearing of research activity to government objectives, especially of a military or security-oriented nature.

2.2. RTD activity in the former Soviet Union, already in decline at the beginning of the eighties, collapsed following the fall of the Communist regime. In the Russian Federation, for example, government expenditure on civilian RTD fell from 2,03 % of the GDP in 1990 to 0,32 % in 1995, with dramatic consequences for the employment and salary levels of scientific staff. The decline in research work carried out in the Russian Federation is still more evident if it is realized that over the same period the GDP fell in absolute terms from ECU 429 to 230 billion.

2.2.1. Moreover, in the Russian Federation, the trend in world-circulation scientific publication was from more than 30 000 per year in the eighties to little more than 10 000 in 1993, while the only sector to resist the decline has been the aerospace sector. In addition, the number of patents registered in the USA by the NIS in 1993 was less than 25 % of that registered in 1981.

2.3. Traditionally, RTD infrastructures in the former Soviet Union have been shrouded in secrecy and highly hierarchical, hampering the free exchange of ideas in scientific circles and the spread of technological innovations. The OECD's recommendations for adapting RTD in the NIS to a market economy included stimulating access to technological information, codifying rules on ownership of patents and licences and promoting quality control standards.

2.4. The need to convert infrastructures and human resources, traditionally used for military research, to

[1] *Source:* CSRS, Moscow (NIORK classification).

civilian RTD activities, encounters special difficulties in the Russian Federation because of the concentration of military research centres in 'closed cities'. Although these could be transformed into science and technology parks, in most cases the collapse of research activities calls for rapid measures for the alternative employment of local workers resident in the closed cities.

2.5. The 'brain drain' to the west threatens the development of RTD infrastructures, and threatens to bring about the disappearance of science centres of excellence. There is also an internal 'brain drain' of scientific staff from specialized sectors to activities which are more profitable in the short term.

2.6. The NIS differ considerably in terms of RTD; the Russian Federation, the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia and Georgia still possess considerable scientific infrastructure and staff, while, as the Commission notes, the trans-Caucasian republics need major assistance because of the instability of the region. Access to European markets, technology and investment is therefore a priority for these countries [1].

3. Cooperation between the EU and the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union

3.1. The EU has become the main trading partner of the countries of the former Soviet Union: in the first half of 1994, 37 % of the total foreign trade of the of the Russian Federation was with the EU, as against 5 % with the USA, 4 % with China and 3 % with Japan. In 1994 the export of the Russian Federation to the EU amounted to ECU 18,4 billion and imports from the EU to ECU 12,2 billion, with a surplus of ECU 6 billion in favour of the Russian Federation.

3.2. In the context of economic and trade cooperation, the EU has signed ambitious partnership and cooperation agreements with a large number of the independent states and in particular with the Russian Federation and the Ukraine, while the political dialogue and coordination measures on technical assistance and in the food and health sectors have intensified.

3.2.1. As regards measures in the RTD field, as early as 1988 the EU began to implement 10 'post-Chernobyl' research projects involving about fifty European scientific teams. In 1990 the Chernobyl Center for International Research (CHECIR) was set up on the initiative of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and in 1992 the European Commission signed an agreement with the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus for the relevant scientific and technological cooperation. In the field of controlled Thermonuclear fusion, the ITER programme (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) continues, with the Russian Federation, Japan and the USA involved.

3.3. In the sectors of energy, development of human resources, nuclear safety, food production and distribution, transport and telecommunications and services for firms, the Tacis programme was launched in 1991; its budget for 1995 amounts to MECU 506 85. It also provided some of the funding for the International Science and Technology Centre mentioned below in point 3.7.

3.4. Since 1992 the EU has been cooperating actively with the NIS, especially the Russian Federation, in the energy field, concentrating on promotion of energy technologies and energy saving through the Thermie programme and various energy centres of which three are situated in the Russian Federation, as well as through the Synergy programme, on which the ESC regrets that it was not consulted and has hence been unable to give its Opinion.

3.4.1. The Treaty on the European Energy Charter, signed in Lisbon in December 1994, lays down a framework for long-term cooperation in that sector among the signatories, particularly the EU and the NIS.

3.5. In the environmental field, too, three centres for administration of environmental technology (ECAT) have been set up in the Russian Federation, and the EU also contributes through the LIFE programme.

3.6. In the training field, the Turin-based European Training Foundation has extended its activity to the countries benefiting from the Tacis programme through Regulation No 2063/94, while the Tempus programme has also been extended to certain independent states, such as the Russian Federation, Belarus and Ukraine, and since 1995 the Youth for Europe III programme also involves third countries, including the Russian Federation. In addition, the EU has promoted two mobility programmes (Go East and Go West) to intensify contacts and exchanges between the scientific and industrial communities of western and eastern Europe.

[1] Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Prospects for cooperation in science and technology with the New Independent States (NIS) (COM(95) 190 final, 16. 5. 1995).

3.7. In scientific and technological cooperation proper, in November 1992 the EU signed an agreement with the USA, Japan and the Russian Federation on the setting-up of the International Science and Technology Centre (ISTC) in Moscow, which became operational in 1994 [1], to retrain scientific staff previously employed in the military sector for work in civilian and industrial spheres.

3.7.1. Also in 1994 the INCO-Copernicus action was extended to the new states of the CIS. This was intended to support joint research developments and concerted actions in the information technology, language communications technology, manufacturing, production and processing of materials, measurement and testing, food industries and biotechnology. The CEEC action which funds NIS participation in five specific programmes of the framework programme was also extended.

3.8. Under the umbrella of the Sprint programme the European Innovation Monitoring System (EIMS) was launched to assess support activities and infrastructure, primarily in central and eastern Europe and the Baltic states, but also extended to the Russian Federation. The latest EIMS report summarizes the conditions for technology transfer in each country and recommends six types of action:

— promoting the development of technologically advanced small businesses;

— assisting the restructuring of applied research institutions;

— promoting interaction between SMEs and technological organizations;

— promoting the mobility of experts and access to information;

— promoting training in innovative processes;

— aiding the development of national technology transfer policy.

3.9. NIS participation in certain COST actions and the Russian Federation's membership of Eureka are likewise aimed at extending European scientific networks and facilitating technological and industrial cooperation initiatives.

4. INTAS and the new Commission proposals

4.1. The International Association for the Promotion of Cooperation with Scientists from the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union (INTAS) action falls within the sphere of scientific and technological cooperation.

4.1.1. INTAS was founded as an international non-profit making organization in June 1993 by the EU and its Member States plus Austria, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland and Norway as a response to the collapse of the research system in the NIS and to prevent the dispersal of scientific and technological resources, both human and infrastructural, by promoting scientific cooperation on the basis of a common interest.

4.1.2. According to its statute, the aims of INTAS are to carry out international measures to promote scientific research in the New Independent States as an essential factor in their economic and social progress and the consolidation of their democracy, and to encourage scientific cooperation between scientists in these countries and the international scientific community.

4.2. Since its establishment, INTAS has organized the financing of some 1 000 projects, each of which involved, on average, three scientific institutions from western Europe and two from the NIS. The total cost of these projects was more than MECU 60, 80 % of which was awarded to NIS research workers taking part in the projects. INTAS calculates that total resources of MECU 200 were raised for the projects funded. Overall, more than 2 500 laboratories and groups of scientists in the NIS have received financial assistance from INTAS.

4.2.1. So far these projects have received 90 % of their funding from the Community budget.

4.3. So far INTAS has become involved in research in the following sectors:

— physics, astronomy and astrophysics (25 %);

— chemistry (16 %);

— life sciences (13 %);

— environment and energy (12 %);

— human, social and economic sciences (12 %);

— mathematics, telecommunications and information technology (11 %);

— mechanical engineering and aerospace (11 %).

4.4. The growing interest shown by beneficiary countries in cooperating through INTAS is demonstrated by the increase from 3 400 projects (500 funded) submitted in 1993 to 4 700 projects (470 funded) at the second call for applications in 1994. Most recently, the call for applications of 15 December 1995 restricted to the Russian Federation and that of 30 January 1995 restricted to Kazakhstan and the Ukraine have elicited 1 730 proposals which are currently being assessed.

[1] OJ No L 409, 31. 12. 1992, p. 1.

4.4.1. In addition to the increasing number of proposals, a significant improvement in their quality has been noted.

4.4.2. On this topic, the ESC regrets the limited resources of INTAS, which means that worthwhile schemes cannot be properly funded.

4.5. The organs of INTAS are the General Assembly, the Scientific Council and the Assembly. These are assisted by a Coordinating Bureau.

4.5.1. The General Assembly, composed of the individual members of INTAS, determines the Association's general policy and is responsible for managing the appropriations.

4.5.2. The Scientific Council has 26 members, including eight drawn from the NIS, whose responsibilities are divided by subject matter, not geographically, assists the General Assembly. It makes recommendations on short-term scientific matters and assesses proposals for projects on the criterion of scientific excellence. A secretariat is based in Brussels with 30 staff from the INTAS member countries, i.e. from western Europe. The Secretary-General is nominated by the European Commission.

4.5.3. The various parts of INTAS are linked through a Coordinating Bureau comprising the presidents of the General Assembly and the Scientific Council and the Secretary of INTAS.

4.6. For the period beyond 31 December 1995, the EU Council stipulated that continuing Community participation in INTAS would be subject to the conclusion of an agreement between the members of the association on its future work and a Council Decision authorizing Community participation, as set out in the Council Decision on the specific programme of research and technical development, including demonstration in the field of cooperation with third countries and international organizations (1994-1998) [1].

4.7. In May 1995 the Commission submitted a Communication on the prospects for scientific and technical cooperation with the NIS (COM(95) 190 final — not referred to the ESC) in which it set out a critical analysis of the operation and activities of INTAS since its inception. The conclusion drawn by the Commission from this analysis was that in its current form INTAS had been unable to achieve the aims defined when the organization had been set up, and therefore the Commission expressed its opposition to continuing Community involvement in INTAS and to the association's continuing existence.

4.8. The Commission therefore proposed that the functions of INTAS and all the work on cooperation with NIS scientists should be taken over by the Commission's departments in order to ensure that such work was carried out under the normal regulatory conditions laid down for the implementation of RTD programmes.

4.9. At its meeting on 9 June 1995 the Council of Ministers responsible for research asked INTAS to set up a working party comprising representatives of its General Assembly, with the involvement of the European Commission, to consider ways of improving the functioning of the association; the General Assembly gave its consent on 12 July 1995. At the same time, the Council urged that an agreement be reached on the future of the Association, in the light of the findings of the working party.

4.10. Following the submission of the working party's report in September 1995, at its 30 October 1995 meeting the Council of Ministers responsible for research advocated the continuation of INTAS in its current form. This view was also taken by the European Parliament, whose resolution of 27 October called for Community involvement in INTAS to be continued beyond 1995 up to the end of the fourth framework programme [2].

4.11. The Council specifically decided to continue Community participation in INTAS up to 31 December 1998, to reinforce the association's funding under the specific RTD programme in the field of international cooperation, and to enhance the role of the European Commission in the association as the representative of the Community, with a view to reflecting the level of EU funding for INTAS more closely.

4.12. With this aim in view, the compromise reached by the Council Presidency and the European Commission provides for the presidency of the INTAS General Assembly to be vested in the Commission and for the Commission to be given a right of veto over decisions by the General Assembly, once changes have been made to the statutes of INTAS.

4.13. Under the above compromise INTAS would be awarded approximately 50 % of the allocations earmarked for scientific and technical cooperation with the NIS, i.e. between ECU 14 and 18 million per year.

4.14. Subsequently, on 14 November 1995, the INTAS General Assembly decided that the remit of INTAS be extended to 31 December 1998 and amended the Association's Statute.

[1] Decision 94/807/EC — OJ No L 334, 22. 12. 1994, p. 109.

[2] OJ No C 308, 20. 11. 1995, p. 469.

4.15. The draft decision under review gives legal form to the provisions of the compromise reached by the Council and the Commission and to the decisions taken by the Council of Ministers responsible for research and by the INTAS General Assembly. It includes:

— the extension of Community participation in INTAS to 31 December 1998;

— an enhanced role in the Association for the Commission, as representative of the Community, including taking the chair of the General Assembly and a right of veto over its decisions;

— an increase in the Association's funding, with a Community contribution of around 50 % of the budget for scientific and technical cooperation with the NIS, i.e. between MECU 14 and 18 per year.

5. General observations

5.1. The Committee endorses the terms of the Commission proposal, and commends the progress made by INTAS, which has made an appropriate response to the need to preserve and build up the resources of the NIS, in line with general levels of EU/NIS cooperation.

5.2. However, the Committee regrets that, as it was not consulted on the May 1995 Commission Communication on the prospects for scientific and technical cooperation with the NIS, it was unable to take a stand on the matter at an earlier stage and hence have an input into the compromise reached between the Council and the Commission, the basis of the proposal under consideration.

5.3. At this juncture, therefore, the Committee can only comment on the future arrangements for INTAS activities, and make a number of observations and suggestions for improvements.

5.4. The Committee would like to see further enhancement of the profile and effectiveness of cooperation through INTAS, which it sees as a flexible and relatively rapid instrument for the preservation of scientific activity, particularly at the level of human resources, in the NIS, permitting projects judged eligible to be chosen and funded without the need for the lengthy and complex procedures of the fourth RTD framework programme.

5.4.1. The Committee feels, however, that this stabilization phase has to give way to a propulsive phase, with the aim of strengthening (infrastructure included) networks of centres of scientific excellence and mechanisms for accelerating the transformation of innovations into marketable products. This would help to integrate RTD work more closely into the economic fabric of these countries, giving a mutual advantage.

5.5. The Committee is impressed by the mechanism which ensures that while the main contractor is from one of the INTAS member countries, 80 % of the funding is directed to the NIS, and by the bottom-up approach to selecting sectors in which funding should be concentrated. The Committee feels that such a mechanism should, however, gradually give the NIS involved the capacity to draw up and coordinate joint projects with the EU.

5.6. The Committee notes that a similar initiative, the US Civilian Research and Development Foundation for the Independent States of the FSU (CRDF), was set up in the USA in August 1995, and urges a formal collaboration between INTAS and the CRDF in order to create synergies between their operations.

5.6.1. Similarly there is a need for bilateral projects of individual EU Member States and the NIS to be tightly coordinated. Workshops should be run periodically by INTAS in order to maximize the synergies and coherence between all the relevant EU actions and intensify their impact.

5.7. The Committee feels that the INTAS secretariat ought to include staff from the beneficiary nations, in order to ensure an adequate awareness of local scientific conditions. Furthermore, costs should be reduced through standardizing publicity procedures for calls for application, and selection, evaluation and checking criteria, so that these can continue to be simplified and harmonized (at least in terms of deadlines and transparency) with those set up for the RTD framework programme.

5.8. The composition of the Scientific Council should be more evenly balanced, ensuring that all the beneficiary countries are represented, with membership renewed biennially; some members should be able to continue for a further term to guarantee adequate continuity.

5.9. The Committee recommends calling an annual conference of representatives of the 12 NIS, which could propose medium term strategic guidelines to the General Assembly and monitor completed projects and their effectiveness in terms of interaction between industry and research, widespread development of innovative processes, and the utilization of the networks and centres of excellence created.

5.9.1. This conference's work, along with that of the coordinating bureau, will be summarized in an interim version of the biennial report mentioned below in point 5.11.

5.10. INTAS initiatives need to be consistent and coordinated with other Community schemes supporting the economic and technological development of the NIS. Specifically, overlaps should be avoided and synergies sought with the Tacis programme, research projects funded under the Copernicus programme, other RTD actions of the framework programme (particularly the human capital and mobility action) and with the Eureka and COST initiatives.

5.10.1. The Committee feels that close ties must be maintained — through the committees of the relevant programmes — with EU internal operations, in terms of information exchange and intervention areas.

5.10.2. It would moreover be useful — in collaboration with other international Community initiatives — to initiate a training scheme for research workers and scientists, including those formerly involved in military research, in order to develop a more market-oriented RTD culture which is open to internal and international cooperation, and capable of originating projects that are self-sustaining and competitive.

5.10.3. The ESC recommends that there should be close ties between the Tacis programme and INTAS schemes which further Tacis involvement in promoting innovation. Tacis should include action — using a special multiregional credit line, and involving these economies in transition to ensure that the result of INTAS schemes are not merely exploited for technological purposes but also have a real impact on employment and the market, thus helping to develop an enterprise culture.

5.11. The flexibility and speed of the INTAS mechanisms should not be allowed to hinder the transparency of access procedures and selection and management criteria. In order to provide the needed improvement in transparency, a biennial report should be presented to the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, dealing not merely with the internal aims of the projects themselves, but also the potential payoff — for instance from use of the Tacis multiregional credit line — in economic, employment, infrastructural and competitive innovation terms.

5.12. The selection of eligible projects should be subject to certain predetermined constraints, such as:

— an overall geographical balance between the beneficiary countries, although account needs to be taken of their varying degrees of development;

— participation in each initiative by at least two NIS partners and two INTAS Member States;

— measures to be taken to accelerate the transition from research results to innovations;

— mutual advantage for the EU and the NIS;

— respect for prenormative conditions based on common standards;

— the establishment of networks connecting centres of scientific excellence;

— the strengthening or creation of interlinked basic RTD structures which can become self-sustaining in the short-medium term.

5.12.1. When projects are being selected according to these criteria, the Committee feels that account should be taken of the need to develop inter-linked groups of projects so as to avoid dissipation of resources, achieve a critical mass, raise their profiles, limit management costs and guarantee coherence with all EU external work.

5.13. In order to promote the dissemination of RTD project results and generate multiplier effects, the Cordis, Cosine and EIMS networks should be developed and extended to the NIS, and information and advice points should be set up following the example of the VALUE centres, particularly for locating partners.

5.13.1. When the INTAS Actions have had their full effect, the Committee feels that it would be appropriate to consider the feasibility of setting up an 'INTAS mark' of scientific and technological excellence, which could inter alia have the aims of improving:

— access to means of finding partners for joint ventures involving technological and industrial collaboration, including the existing networks such as BC-Net and the office for bringing enterprises together, promoting the formation of consortia for exploitation of research results, marketing and commercial development;

— the creation of new high technology enterprises in the NIS — involving existing financial channels, notably the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) — with AAA-rate loans for market-application technology schemes whose financial viability is guaranteed by the scientific excellence certified by the INTAS mark.

5.14. The Committee endorses the new bilateral agreements on part-funding by the States of the former Soviet Union, which guarantee their institutions a say in the identification of shared priorities in the technological development field, and help to ensure the success of INTAS initiatives.

5.15. However, it feels that these initiatives should not prejudice the chances of those NIS currently not in a position to provide funds, or restrict the work done by INTAS in its own right. They should in any case be open to participation by other NIS.

5.16. Finally, it would be appropriate to formalize the position of INTAS work in Memoranda of Understanding with the NIS, particularly in order to simplify the distribution of funds, protect intellectual property, and enable the distribution, exploitation and application of results.

Done at Brussels, 24 April 1996.

The President

of the Economic and Social Committee

Carlos FERRER

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) amending Council Regulation 2686/94 establishing a special system of assistance to traditional ACP suppliers of bananas'

(96/C 204/11)

On 11 March 1996, the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Union, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Agriculture and Fisheries, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 11 April 1996. The Rapporteur was Mr Mayayo Bello.

At its 335th Plenary Session held on 24and 25 April 1996 (meeting of 24 April), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion by 96 votes to 6, with 15 abstentions.

Done at Brussels, 24 April 1996.

The President

of the Economic and Social Committee

Carlos FERRER
