The European Union and Hong Kong: beyond 1997

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John Cushnahan (D, EPP) will be reporting on a communication from the Commission dealing with the EU and Hong Kong beyond 1997. The Commission paper dates from April 1997 or two months before the handover of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China. It sets out the opinion of the Commission on what the transfer of sovereignty will mean for the EU and its interests in Hong Kong and contends that the EU's already close ties with the former British colony could be developed still further. Hong Kong is currently the EU's tenth largest trading partner. Mr Cushnahan notes that the Basic Law of 1990 guaranteed that after the transfer of sovereignty, the previous capitalist system and way of life would remain unchanged for 50 years. Although he is content in a number of areas with the actions of the Chinese government, he regrets that the Legislative Council which was elected in 1995 was abolished and replaced with a nominated Council. Nevertheless he is content that elections took place in May 1998 for a new Legislative Council. However he also has concerns about some measures which appear to restrict personal freedoms. Mr Cushnahan also supports the Commission's desire for strong ties with Hong Kong within a framework of respect for human rights and a level playing field for business. He goes on to call on all Member States to grant visa-free entry to holders of Hong Kong passports, as they are currently only allowed such access to the United Kingdom and Ireland. This, he believes, would help Hong Kong to remain a real "special administrative region".