EC/China relations: building a comprehensive partnership

1998/2067(COS) - 01/12/1998

The report by Pierre BERNARD-REYMOND (EPP, F) on the Commission paper "Building a comprehensive partnership with China" has been unanimously adopted by the Committee. The motion for a resolution contained in the report welcomes the economic development which has taken place in China and stresses the need for the EU to take this into account in its policy towards the country. The committee endorses the "five approaches" proposed by the Commission but is still concerned at the persistence of serious problems, especially on the political front (e.g. human rights). It therefore puts forward a list of issues which it says need to be resolved before a comprehensive partnership with China can be established. On the political front, the resolution restates the democratic principles - such as respect for human rights, trade union rights, freedom of association, freedom of expression, political pluralism and abolition of the death penalty - on which it says modern economic and political systems have to be based. It also mentions specific issues such as the situation of prisoners and child labour. The situation in Tibet and relations with Taiwan are other sensitive points dealt with in the report. On Tibet, the report calls for negotiations to be started on the basis of recognition of administrative, cultural and religious autonomy for the Tibetan people and calls for the principle of "one country, several cultures" to be applied to Tibet as it is to other regions of China. On Taiwan, the committee hopes that tensions will be relaxed and cooperation developed in all sectors. Instead, the committee adopted an amendment tabled by the rapporteur welcoming the visite to Beijing of a representative of Taiwan and advocating a developpment enabling Taiwan to retain its government, its armed forces and its democratic system while sectors, again participating fully in the destiny of the Chinese nation. On the international front, the report calls on China to take a number of steps, such as ratifying UN Conventions on economic, social and cultural rights and those on civil and political rights as well as signing and ratifying the Ottawa Treaty banning anti-personnel mines and the Statute of the International Criminal Court. Although its demands are addressed to the Chinese Government, the report also emphasises the role the EU can play in the transition to a more democratic Chinese society, in particular through its trade policy. It therefore calls for a human rights clause to be included when the 1985 trade and cooperation agreement is renewed. On the economic front too, the committee makes a number of demands. It calls for better protection of foreign investment and intellectual property rights, a reform of the fiscal and legal system and respect for ILO rules, in particular those governing work by prisoners and child labour. Mr BERNARD-REYMOND welcomed the adoption of the report. "Our relations with China", he said, "should be governed by two principles: vigilance and constructive dialogue".