Relations EU/Asia: enhanced partnerships, strategic framework

2002/2120(COS) - 11/07/2002

The committee adopted the report by Jules MAATEN (ELDR, NL) on the Commission communication. MEPs highlighted the need to take greater account of geopolitical tension in the region and its impact on Europe but called on the Council to define clear priorities for the EU's policy towards Asia. In particular, relations with countries which had made significant progress on democracy and human rights should be consolidated. The committee recognised ASEM (the Asia-Europe Meeting) as a valuable potential instrument for practical cooperation but felt that its objectives needed to be clarified. It was regrettable that democracies such as India and Taiwan were not part of the organisation and the EU was urged to find ways of bringing Taiwan into ASEM. At the same time the committee called for regular parliamentary oversight of ASEM by the Asia-Europe parliamentary meeting. The report also urged Europe and Asia to hold a dialogue on global challenges post-September 11 and to try to reduce tension between India and Pakistan. Mutual respect between cultures and religions should be encouraged. MEPs also criticised the fact that certain anti-terrorist measures taken following the attacks of September 11 had had a detrimental effect on human rights and fundamental freedoms. On the economic front, the committee gave its backing to economic cooperation programmes, especially for SMEs, but was critical of the relatively low level of EU aid to Asia and believed that these resources should in any case be better distributed. It welcomed the fact that new EC delegations were to be opened soon in the region, but repeated its demand for a trade office to be opened in Taiwan and called on the Commission to start the negotiation process needed to conclude an EU-Taiwan free trade agreement. The committee also emphasised the need to strengthen ties with civil society. It welcomed the release in Burma of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Sakharov prize winner, and called for greater democracy in Burma. Finally, China was not spared criticism, with MEPs urging it to end summary executions and human rights violations, and to abolish the death penalty.