The European Union and Hong Kong: beyond 1997

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The European Union continues to attach great importance to its relations with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China. The European Union has therefore watched closely, with genuine and friendly interest, the evolution of the HKSAR in general and the implementation of the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle in particular. As in the Commission's two previous annual reports, this report aims to assess the state of development of the Hong Kong SAR and its relations with the European Union. The report concludes that the year 2000 was rich in debate and controversy both on the implementation of the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle and on the safeguarding of some collective and individual rights, which are guaranteed by the Basic Law. These are the foundation for safeguarding Hong Kong's future and prosperity. The Commission welcomes the fact that the debates, disputes and deliberations were at times accompanied by public manifestations and protests, from various sectors of interest and opinion. This demonstrates a healthy regard for freedom and democracy, although it also reveals the need for continuing vigilance. Some unwelcome remarks by Hong Kong based mainland officials, pertaining to Hong Kong's liberty to act autonomously, triggered concerns both in Hong Kong and in the international community. The swift reaction of the Hong Kong SAR Government contributed to the safeguarding of Hong Kong's autonomy. However, the controversy concerning the presence of the Falun Gong movement in Hong Kong poses a new challenge to the Hong Kong authorities to continue to ensure that the rights and freedoms under the Joint Declaration - including freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of religion ·are maintained and respected under the law. This issue will no doubt warrant close attention in the months ahead. The fair and free LegCo elections also showed the maturity of Hong Kong citizens and politicians in the exercise of their basic political rights. This constitutes a further sign of the readiness of Hong Kong people to run Hong Kong in accordance with the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle. The lively debates and discussions on the exercise of basic rights constitute the best proof that Hong Kong remains a free society. There were a large number of demonstrations and protests during the year, which mostly took place in a peaceful manner and, in general, in conformity with the laws and regulations. The Hong Kong police continued to handle these demonstrations professionally and according to the law. The European Commission welcomes the impressive recovery of Hong Kong's economy so soon after the serious Asian financial crisis. The economic recovery will no doubt help Hong Kong to face the new challenges and opportunities that will be created by China's accession to the WTO. The European Commission is confident that the capacity and ingenuity of Hong Kong people will allow them to adapt their economy once more to meet the challenges of the welcome and fullintegration of China into the world economy.