Relations EU/Asia: enhanced partnerships, strategic framework

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PURPOSE : to present the communication from the Commission on a strategic framework for enhanced partnerships between European and Asia. CONTENT : the Commission first set out an overall framework for EC relations with Asian countries in its 1994 Communication "Towards a New Asia Strategy". The present Communication updates that strategy, taking account of key developments in the intervening years, and establishing a comprehensive strategic framework for our relations with Asia and its subregions in the coming decade. After commenting on the major economic, political and social changes in Asia, Europe and the world in recent years, the Communication takes stock of the development of EU-Asia relations since 1994. Political dialogue with key partners in the region has intensified, and trade and investment relations have expanded (notwithstanding the impact of the East Asian Crisis). There has been a modest growth in development and economic cooperation with Asian countries. But much remains to be done, for example in deepening and broadening political dialogue, in enhancing bilateral trade and investment relations and strengthening cooperation in the WTO, and in ensuring that aid programmes in Asia can achieve their full potential. The degree of mutual awareness between the two regions remains insufficient. Taking account of the above, the present Communication proposes that an overall strategic framework for relations with Asia in the coming decade should be set out based on the core objective of strengthening the EU's political and economic presence across the region, and raising this to a level commensurate with the growing global weight of an enlarged EU. In particular, the Commission should work to: - contribute to peace and security in the region and globally, through a broadening of engagement with the region; - further strengthen mutual trade and investment flows with the region; - promote the development of the less prosperous countries of the region, addressing the root causes of poverty; - contribute to the protection of human rights and to the spreading of democracy, good governance and the rule of law; - build global partnerships and alliances with Asian countries, in appropriate international fora, to help address both the challenges and the opportunities offered by globalisation and to strengthen our joint efforts on global environmental and security issues; - and help strengthen the awareness of Europe in Asia (and vice versa). These general objectives and priorities are elaborated further in a series of specific action points for the region as a whole, and for each of the four key sub-regions (South Asia, South- East Asia, North-East Asia, Australasia). This overall strategic framework (which may subsequently be amplified through specific subregional strategies as appropriate, as well as through the Country Strategy Papers focusing on development cooperation), will also serve as an important input for a proposed revision of the ALA Regulation in the first semester of 2002 (following on an overall evaluation now commencing). Looking forward, it will be important to take stock of progress on a regular basis, and it is suggested that thestrategy may usefully be reviewed, and adapted as necessary, in five or six years' time. For this strategic framework to be fully effective, it is essential that there is a proper consistency between the objectives being set, and the resources available to meet them. The first priority is to ensure that the available resources are used in an effective and timely fashion, implementing fully the ongoing reform of our external assistance. Once this has been achieved, it will be better able to address the longer-term question of whether and to what extent the level of resources available for our cooperation activities with Asia should be increased.