The European Union and Hong Kong: beyond 1997

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This document consists of the fourth annual report from the Commission on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR). As in the Commission's previous annual reports, this report aims to assess the state of the development of the Hong Kong SAR and its relations with the European Union. In its report, the Commission believes that after four and half years after the hand-over, the implementation of the "one country, two systems " principle continues to draw the close attention and interest of the European Union. The report considers that the "one country, two systems" principle continues to function well, although its implementation causes some debate and concerns, notably in relation to the right of abode but also in relation to the exercise of other rights and freedoms. Institutional developments such as the introduction of the so-called accountability system, the election of the Chief Executive by an Election Committee and democratic development were also reported to be the subject of concern or public debate. The EU intends to strengthen relations with Hong Kong in all areas where it has retained its autonomy as provided for under the Basic Law of the Special Administrative Region. As a first step, the EU and Hong Kong signed a Customs Cooperation Agreement in May 1999, providing mutual administrative assistance including the exchange of information on possible breaches of customs law and establishing a Joint Committee to oversee its proper functioning. Moreover, the Commission welcomes the commitments given by the Central People's Government and the Hong Kong SAR Government to maintain and safeguard the "one country, two systems" principle. The implementation of the principle during 2001 showed that in broad terms, Hong Kong maintained its unique and separate identity within China. The Commission acknowledges the statement of President Jiang Zemin that the HKSAR Government should handle such issues as the Falun Gong. The safeguarding of Hong Kong's system of values and its high degree of autonomy require the full and unequivocal commitment and vigilance of both the Mainland and Hong Kong authorities. The report highlights that it is inevitable that in the coming years public attention in Hong Kong will increasingly focus on the question of democratic development. The Basic Law stipulates that the ultimate aim is universal suffrage. It also includes provision for the Hong Kong people to have their say, in 2007, in deciding the timetable according to which this should be achieved. A free and open debate on this question in the next few years will be an valuable re-affirmation of the concept of one country, two systems, and offer further re-assurance both within Hong Kong and outside that Hong Kong people really are running Hong Kong with the promised high degree of autonomy. The EU will continue to watch developments very closely, particularly concerning the possible introduction of anti-cult legislation and its effect on freedom of expression in Hong Kong.