EU/Mexico relations: closer relations

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The Committee adopted the draft report by Mrs MIRANDA de LAGE (PSE, E) on closer relations between the European Union and Mexico. It stressed the need for the European Union to promote political relations with Mexico and to consider the possibility of negotiating a free-trade agreement with Mexico. According to the rapporteur, the North-American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which entered into force on 1 January 1994, has had an adverse impact on political, economic and trade relations between the EU and Mexico. The Committee on External Economic Relations also proposed that the EU and Mexico strengthen commercial relations between the two partners by negotiating a preferential agreement, the final objective of which would be to: - gradually establish a free trade zone for the majority of products (mainly in the industrial and service sectors) and - progressively and reciprocally liberalize agricultural trade, taking account of the sensitivity of certain products and in accordance with the rules of the WTO and investment conditions. The rapporteur took the view that this form of free zone could only be established on the basis of an asymmetrical timetable governing the dismantling of customs tariffs and the elimination of tariff trade barriers. Mexico should be able to continue to benefit from a reasonable preference margin in its access to the Community market for its manufactured and industrial products under the SGP (system of generalized preferences), thereby enabling it to compete with the CEECs and the CIS which exported similar products. As far as services were concerned (transport, telecommunications, tourism, financial services, insurance, culture, audiovisual), the future agreement should guarantee Community enterprises the same treatment and the same access to the Mexican market as American and Canadian enterprises. The Committee on External Economic Relations called for the new agreement to be accompanied by a significant increase in financial aid in order to encourage private European investment and technical and financial assistance for rural development projects, allow Mexico to join certain R&D and other Community programmes and enable environmental protection, infrastructure and energy projects to be cofinanced. In addition to an economic and commercial agreement, the Committee called for regular, institutionalized political dialogue between the EU and Mexico on bilateral and international questions of common interest. Respect for the fundamental principles of a democratic country, especially respect for human rights, should be governed by a democratic clause. Similarly, the legitimate rights, both economic and social, of the indigenous communities of Chiapas should be respected by implementing a programme of technical and financial assistance to promote the rural development of the region.