Europe/Japan relations: the next steps

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OBJECTIVE: the purpose of this communication is to take stock of economic and commercial relations between the European Union and Japan and present a series of proposals to improve the efficiency of Union policy towards Japan, including in the field of cooperation. Finally, it suggests how the Union should develop political relations with Japan. CONTENT: past relations between the Union and Japan have been mainly economic and have been informed, on the Community side, by the conviction that unacceptable obstacles are impeding access to the Japanese market. At the same time, Japan's balance of payments surplus is considered to be excessively high (2.5% in 1995 and 1996). It should be possible to redress this real imbalance in economic relations between Japan and the Union through a more targeted strategy giving greater access to the Japanese market, which is why the Commission communication suggests that relations between the Union and Japan should be examined in the light of a new development, i.e. Japan's higher profile on the international scene. The Commission communication chooses the option of advocating stronger political relations both for their intrinsic benefits and in order to counterbalance the American influence. The Commission is convinced that the emergence of a new Japan cannot but be advantageous and will help to achieve the objectives of global peace and security and an open, multilateral, commercial environment. More solid political relations will also impact on bilateral economic relations and help reduce current commercial tensions. The Commission therefore calls for political dialogue between the Union and Japan to be strengthened, mainly by: - identifying specific areas of cooperation in the political sector, - exchanging regular and privileged information on political discussions between the Union and Japan, - establishing regular working contacts between senior civil servants in order to prepare for ministerial meetings, - introducing annual EU/Japan summits alternating between Europe and Japan and setting out a timetable. Several lines of approach are also proposed at economic level, the most important being to: - develop the TAM (exchanges between experts in the European Union and Japan on questions relating to market access), - foster dialogue on deregulation, competition and industrial cooperation, - improve the climate conducive to European investments in Japan and industrial relations between the Union and Japan, - develop ways of redressing the imbalance in scientific knowledge (especially in the context of the sixth research framework programme and information society projects) and fostering cultural contacts and exchanges between intellectuals on both sides. Proposals in this direction should take concrete form, including at budgetary level, as early as 1996, within the limits of the resources available.