European Union's relations with the New Independent States of central Asia

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PURPOSE: to present a communication identifying the interests of the EU in the New Independent States of Central Asia, pinpointing the prospects for success of the partnership and cooperation agreements currently being negotiated and determining possibilities for the development of an overall strategy with regard to this region, taking account of the large existing divergences between these States. CONTENT: According to the communication, the transformation of the former republics into independent States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) has proved difficult, notably in political terms but also in economic terms. From an economic point of view, the success of the transition process is dependant upon the exploitation of the region's natural resources - something which the EU is particularly interested in as a potential energy consumer as well as a provider of services and equipment for the exploitation of this energy. From a political point of view, the EU's primary objective is to maintain stability by: - developing representative democratic institutions; - minimising areas of conflict; - economic reform. The achievement of these objectives will take a long time and will require the EU to assert itself more strongly in the region. The communication proposes a series of measures to achieve these objectives, catered to the differing needs of each of the 5 republics. - technical assistance and cooperation: partnership and cooperation agreements (PCAs) have already been or are on the verge of being ratified with certain republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan). Sectoral agreements may also be signed, notably with regard to steel and trade in nuclear materials. Food aid actions could also prove useful in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as humanitarian assistance in all 5 republics. At the same time, the TACIS programme should pursue its actions by including projects involving the reinforcement of democracy. - new contractual relations: the communication states that all of the political conditions have not been met in Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan to allow the conclusion of PCAs (in particular, respect for the principles expressed in the CSCE documents). As a result, the communication proposes a regular dialogue to enable the partners concerned to measure the progress in meeting the political and economic conditions. The EU will only approve such an agreement once significant progress has been made in these areas. Beyond this regular informal contact, formal contacts should continue in the context of the general agreement made with the USSR in 1989 or other sectoral agreements still in force. - political and diplomatic relations: the PCAs and the dialogue with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan would also be the principal vehicles for promoting the EU's objectives. But there should also be a possibility for such dialogue at regional level. The Union should also use its influence to support the efforts of the UN and the OSCE to maintain the momentum of the Inter-Tajik peace process. Political issues affecting Central Asia, including Tajikistan and access to energy, should be discussed as part of ongoingpolitical contacts with Russia, Turkey and Pakistan, both bilaterally and in multilateral fora. In order to strengthen its political presence in the region, the Commission will consider the possibility of reinforcing its diplomatic representation in the region, budgetary means permitting.