EC/developing countries relations: support for regional economic integration efforts

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OBJECTIVE: this communication deals with regional economic integration efforts among developing countries and the support which the Community can give to regional programmes, especially given its experience in this area and the positive effects which integration can have on these countries. A strategy is proposed to promote integration, including at the commercial level. CONTENT: the communication addresses the problem of regional integration, mainly from the economic point of view, and attempts to set it within the wider context of regional cooperation. The Commission sees regional integration as the most effective means of reducing obstacles to the free movement of goods, services, capital and people (abolition of tariff and non-tariff barriers and easier payments), whereas regional cooperation covers areas of common interest such as transport, telecommunications, the environment etc. As far as the regional integration of developing countries is concerned, it is clear from European experience that this depends on a number of factors: . complementary economies, geographical proximity and similar cultural and historical backgrounds; . political commitment, peace and security, respect for the rule of law and democracy; . a favourable economic climate and macro-economic stability; . strong and relatively flexible institutions allowing for different rates of progress ("variable geometry") and the efficient application of subsidiarity. The Union supports the regional integration of third countries and considers that it should come under both development cooperation policy and commercial policy. . At the commercial level, the Union plans to apply cumulative rules of origin to several groupings and to sign trade agreements subject to the implementation of regional liberalization measures; . At the cooperation level, 3 sets of measures are planned: - development of regional capacities, including training, research and technical assistance (with designing sectoral policies, harmonizing standards etc.), - adjustment aid to allow the private sector to exploit the new potential for integration, - in certain regions (sub-Saharan Africa in particular), support for governments which move along the path towards integration.