The European Union and Russia: the future relationship

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OBJECTIVE: this communication sets out the strategy behind the future relationship between the EU and Russia, which will be geared to the following objectives: . stronger political and economic stability; . sustainable development, resulting in improved living conditions for the people; . stronger cooperation on regional and international questions. CONTENT: according to this communication, relations between the EU and Russia have never been fully exploited, especially given its proximity to the Union now that Finland is a member. The main cause of this relative failing is the slow process of political and economic transformation since the break up of the Soviet Union and, closer to home, events in connection with the war in Chechnya. The Commission therefore proposes that relations be strengthened on the basis of the following priorities: . Russia should be involved in the implementation of a European security structure; . democratic rules and institutions should be created; . economic reform should continue, focusing on the integration of Russia in an enlarged European Economic Area; . cooperation should be stepped up (including justice/home affairs, crime, crisis prevention); . an open dialogue should be instituted on all subjects of common interest (including security). In this context, the Commission proposes a series of initiatives, the most important of which are as follows: - security: in-depth discussion on the implementation of the future security structure in Europe within NATO; greater cooperation in the fight against illegal trafficking in fissile materials etc.; - political relations: in addition to implementing the EU /Russia partnership and cooperation agreement (not before 1997), the EU should approve the interim trade agreement. It must also continue to promote the restoration of democracy through TACIS democracy (especially in the context of legislative and presidential elections). Finally, efforts must be made so that Russia can join the Council of Europe (once the Chechnya conflict has been resolved); - economic relations: numerous points are still causing problems (especially the increase in Russian customs duty on certain goods, whether or not the most favoured nation clause will apply to mobile satellite services from 1996 onwards, the gradually opening of inland waterways to international inland waterway and maritime traffic at the end of 1996, the signature of an agreement on the trade in fissile materials by 1997). Nonetheless, a market economy has been introduced relatively quickly and efficiently (privatization) even if problems persist with social support and the reform of the financial markets. In the food and farming chain, food distribution has also improved but the restructuring of collective farms has hardly begun. Finally, priority also needs to be given to the education and research system. At the regional level, TACIS infrastructure and trans-European network projects need to be implemented (mainly in the Baltic zone), as do cross-border projects (ECOS-TACIS); - other forms of cooperation: these relate mainly to the environment and nuclear safety, information technologies and telecommunications and the development of human resources, transport and science, with priority being given to telecommunications and trans-European networks. The energy sector is also seen as a top priority in order to guarantee the rational and fair exploitation of resources.