The European Union and Latin America: the present situation and prospects for closer partnership, 1996-2000

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OBJECTIVE: to present a list of proposals and priority lines of action with a view to extending relations between the European Union and Latin America between now and the year 2000, based on a diagnosis of existing relations and a review of cooperation between 1991 and 1995. CONTENT: the first section of the Commission communication sets out the strategic interest for the Community of strengthening relations with this region of the world. Some of the main factors which support closer relations are historical and cultural, but there are also political and economic factors (especially the consolidation of democratic institutions, the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts, the beginnings of economic growth offering important trade prospects for the European Union, making the region a potential investment area etc.). In the second section of the communication, the Commission highlights the progress made by the region in the light of Community cooperation projects implemented over recent years (1991-1995): humanitarian aid, rural development, regional integration (support for the Andean Pact and MERCOSUR), support for the development of the sea fisheries sector. More recently, cooperation has focused on actions to promote the sustainable and lasting development of Latin America and modernize its economy. In most cases, the regional approach has been preferred (strengthening relations between the EU and MERCOSUR and with other regional groupings). In the third section, the Commission addresses new forms of partnership between the Community and Latin America. The main strategies which the Commission considers should be implemented are: - closer political links, - stronger action in the field of free trade and integration, - more relevant, flexible and targeted cooperation in 3 priority areas: . institutional support and consolidation of democratic processes (including sectoral policies such as education, health and rural development), . the fight against poverty and social exclusion, . support for economic reform and improving international competitiveness (promoting external trade, strengthening industrial promotion). At the same time, three horizontal issues will be dealt with for each of these priority areas: regional cooperation and integration, education and training and management of north/south interdependencies, especially in the environment, energy and drug sectors. Finally, the communication addresses the means to be used to implement this cooperation. It calls for existing Community projects to be made more efficient through more active involvement of beneficiaries (search for complementarity or cofinancing with the countries themselves), better coordination between projects implemented by the Member States of the Union, more decentralized cooperation and projects concentrated in multiannual horizontal programmes. In addition, Community projects should be more visible.