Trade and environment

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OBJECTIVE: to lay down the Commission's guidelines on relations between trade and the environment.
SUBSTANCE: the Commission communication lays down the guidelines for an appropriate Community policy which takes into account the current international discussions in preparation for the first WTO ministerial conference, which is scheduled to take place in Singapore in December 1996. The key idea which emerges from the Commission document is that trade policy and environmental policy may complement one another in pursuit of the objective of sustainable development and that economic performance and environmental performance are not necessarily incompatible. While recognizing that achieving environmental benefits may in some cases entail additional short-term costs, the Commission considers there to be a wide range of 'win-win' opportunities in the design and implementation of environmental policies: efficient use of resources, competitiveness and employment. Similarly, differences in environmental policies cannot justify the introduction of eco-duties levied on imported products as a means of compensating for the unfair competitive advantage which could result from the existence of lower environmental standards in the exporting countries than in the importing countries. According to the Commission the most effective way of tackling international environmental problems is to conclude international multilateral agreements and not to adopt unilateral trade measures. It also considers that the situation and the particular needs of developing countries and economies in transition should be taken into consideration as regards the question of trade and the environment. The EU is called upon to provide these countries with technical assistance which will enable them to adopt cleaner technologies.