Creating a new dynamic in EU-ASEAN relations

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OBJECTIVE: the document seeks to propose a new dynamic in EU-ASEAN relations based on an active partnership which both involves business circles and strengthens political dialogue. CONTENT: a partner of long standing, ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations, consisting of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) represents a major economic challenge for Europe, since its global volume of trade has tripled in ten years (the EC is the third largest trading partner of this region after Japan and the USA). The basis of EC-ASEAN relations is an agreement which has linked the two groups since 1980 on a donor-recipient basis. Today, relations are characterized more by a balanced trade relationship geared towards economic development and cooperation, which is why the Commission is attempting in this communication to define the outlines of a new approach to bilateral relationships based on partnership. The objectives of that partnership may be summed up as follows: - a stimulated political dialogue: topics of mutual interest would be addressed such as disarmament, peace-keeping operations, respect for democracy and human rights; - strengthening the interregional dynamic: the EC and ASEAN could build a partnership of equals to promote their respective regional market and create links of solidarity (where similar programmes exist, reciprocal participation in these programmes by traders from the other region would be envisaged); - upsurge in trade and investment: progress should be made in the following areas: . facilitating and liberalizing trade on the basis of the principles defined by the WTO; . facilitating investment (the European contribution is still inadequate): definition of statutory or administrative obstacles and assistance for the abolition of such obstacles; - reorientating cooperation: development cooperation should be targeted on the less-favoured areas and categories, while a new type of economic cooperation should be established with other countries which would: . emphasize regional integration in the following fields: customs, statistics, standards and other technical barriers; . define priority fields (industrial cooperation, the information society and transport); . support SMEs (joint ventures); . select new initiatives aimed at creating links between the EC, its Member States and ASEAN (promotion of trade, cultural links etc.). Cooperation would also relate to other areas, in particular environmental protection, bringing the two societies together, the fight against organized crime and science and technology. In order to attain these various objectives, the Commission proposes two approaches: - strengthening the existing (1980) agreement relating to interregional cooperation: this would take the form of a protocol to the 1980 agreement which would include interregional objectives, strengthen economic cooperation and redefine development cooperation; - creating an active partnership based on a joint declaration signed by the heads of state defining the general objectives of such new cooperation. This more flexible formula would enable the private sector to be very closely involved with development in the region: . either by isolated work by the business sector which would subsequently report to the bodies of the Agreement; . or by direct participation of industry within the different committees. The Commission favours the second option and proposes that it be made the subject of a joint declaration at the next EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting, scheduled to be held in February 1997.