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EC-ASEAN RELATIONS INTENSIFY

At the conclusion of the Second Conference on Industrial Cooperation between the European Community (EC) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Jakarta, February 26-28, Wilhelm Haferkamp, Vice-President of the EC Commission, said: "The results are gratifying... we have reached the goal we set ourselves...the establishment of contacts between industrialists of the two regions."

Hundreds of businessmen had come together from the nine EC countries, from Spain and Austria which are not EC members, and from the five ASEAN countries to explore possibilities for capital investment in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Those from Europe had been specially selected by the Commission and by four European banking groups -- Abecor, Ebic, Europartners and Inter-Alpha -- for their interest and ability to invest. These European bankers and industrialists met in sectoral discussions and in private meetings with their counterparts from the ASEAN countries. The contacts were designed to lead to joint ventures in electrical, chemical, agricultural, engineering, timber, transport and communications industries.

In his final speech Mr. Haferkamp spoke of the need to realize the idea that was agreed on at the November meeting in Brussels of EC and ASEAN ministers: to set up a Trade Investment Forum that will ensure continuing contacts between the business communities of the two regions.

"We," he said, "and the ASEAN governments can be no more than honest brokers...to bring the right people from the business community together and leave them to decide how cooperation can best be realized."

At the same time the two regional organizations will be working to build a political framework within which problems can be faced and cooperation encouraged. A second round of official talks on a Cooperation Agreement between the EC and ASEAN will take place shortly. Mr. Haferkamp expressed confidence that negotiations for the Agreement would be concluded well before the end of the year. Later this year, too, a Commission delegation will be set up in Bangkok.

Interest in EC-ASEAN relations has grown since 1972 when a special coordinating committee of ministers of trade and ambassadors to the Community from ASEAN governments first met with the Commission to discuss trade problems. In 1975 a Joint Study Group composed of representatives of the Commission and of the five ASEAN governments was set up. This has met regularly ever since to discuss improvement of the Community's Scheme of Generalized Preferences, international commodity problems, the transfer of technology and industrial cooperation and investment.

These meetings led to requests for a dialogue between the ASEAN committee in Brussels and the EC's Committee of Permanent Representatives and for a ministerial meeting. The latter took place on the 21st and 22nd of November 1978. At that meeting guidelines for the Jakarta Conference were set.

Although the emphasis in EC-ASEAN relations has been on economic growth, Mr. Haferkamp stressed at the Jakarta Conference the opportunity ASEAN has to act as a moderating influence on events in Southeast Asia. He said that, because the EC -- like ASEAN based on regional cooperation -- had made recurrence of the traditional wars and conflicts in Europe impossible, the Community is "convinced of the very important role which ASEAN has to play in ensuring that stability and peace are maintained in the region."

"Peace and stability," he said, "constitute the bases for economic and social progress and for the freedom of the the individual."