

14/07/1998

Opening new areas for co-operation in bilateral relations

Edouard Braine

LAST year, while the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was attending, as guest of honour of the French President, Mr Jacques Chirac, the traditional parade on the Champs Elysees on the occasion of the 14th of July, I stressed my hope to further strengthen the ties between our two countries.

And actually, in one year, we have experienced an acceleration in the French-Malaysian relationship.

The political dialogue between the authorities of our two countries has deepened, as shown by the visit of President Chirac in Langkawi in November 1997 and by the numerous bilateral ministerial meetings which took place over the past few months.

On major international issues, such as Iraq, the Middle East, the Balkans and Africa, which are now the subjects of a real consultation between us, we often share the same views.

We also support each other. As it is often said: "It is during a time of hardship that we recognise our friends."

France, together with her European partners, has played her role in helping Asian countries to face the recent monetary and financial turmoil.

As a whole, the European contribution to the IMF assistance programmes for Thailand, Korea and Indonesia (30 per cent) exceeds by far the contribution of any other country, and the European banks are the most involved foreign banks in Asia.

The main European companies are committed to keep investing in the region, entering into new partnerships with local groups, especially in Malaysia.

"Europe is standing by Asia": this is what all the European leaders said during the second Summit Europe-Asia, which took place last March in London, and which gave us another opportunity to demonstrate our support to our Asian friends and express our strong confidence in the capacity of their economy to recover.

The French-Malaysian relationship now needs to blossom. My feeling is that we need to open new doors for co-operation, especially in the cultural field, so that our two peoples know each other better. This is the key for future progress in our partnership.

Discovering France through the World Cup is not enough; enhancing French language classes in Malaysia, developing co-operation between French and Malaysian schools and universities, managing any other project which could promote an even better understanding of each other: these are the main avenues which need to be explored.

The French-Malaysian co-operation today has become an example for the partnership that we want to build between Europe and Asia: a relationship of friendship and of mutual understanding for the benefit of both parties.

What could be a better expression of this solidarity between our two peoples than the immediate assistance which was offered last September by the French firefighters to Malaysia, then facing an air pollution crisis?

Actually, what has been a spontaneous gesture has then become a permanent commitment, with the signature last May in Paris of the French-Malaysian agreement on co-operation for disaster prevention, management and public safety.

To this message of hope for the future of our links, I would like to add my most sincere wishes of happiness and prosperity to the Yang di-Pertuan

Agong Tuanku Jaorldafar, to the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, to the Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, and members of the Government, to the people of Malaysia and to the French community in Malaysia.

(END)