

academic and non-government communities. Indeed, a major conference of the North Pacific Co-operative Security Dialogue and its successor processes will be held here in Vancouver next month.

Another example of where we have brought Canadian experience and tradition to bear has been in the efforts to find peaceful solutions to the territorial disputes in the South China Seas, one of the potential sources of real conflict in the region.

These are all issues that are very much part of our agenda with our Asia-Pacific partners. In my participation at successive meetings of the Post-Ministerial Conference of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), I have encouraged the expansion of the agenda to include regional security issues. We were thus pleased to note the recent decision of ASEAN members to confirm this new direction.

As the void in the regional security dimension is being gradually filled, on the economic front we are part of the very rapid and welcome emergence of the APEC forum.

In Japan and Hong Kong next week, I will be exploring ways in which we can collectively advance the APEC agenda. APEC, the first institution in which China, Taiwan and Hong Kong all sit as member economies in their own right, has become the primary vehicle for regional economic discussion and co-operation. We believe that its potential for strengthening ties and reducing misunderstandings is significant.

While the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and any institutional arrangements that may emerge from the Uruguay Round will continue to serve as the cornerstone of the world's trade policy framework, APEC can meet regional needs. It can promote transparency in domestic policies and regulations, and may hopefully lead to harmonization of trade-related standards and practices. While the agenda has yet to be fully elaborated, possibilities exist for APEC-wide arrangements to protect investment, codes of conduct for customs and administrative practices that inhibit free and open trade, and perhaps even understandings on intellectual property and dispute settlement.

Perhaps most importantly, APEC could act as a shock absorber for the region, and, in the process, help to limit collateral damage from, or indeed let some of the steam out of, strained bilateral relationships.

There are other issues and challenges besides those that I have touched on today. Even if I have not covered the entire waterfront, what I would hope to leave you with is the assurance that what we do in the Asia-Pacific region -- from encouraging the habit of discussion and the discipline of the rule of law,