

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON WIDER EUROPE –
NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD

1. The enlargement of the European Union on 1 May 2004 represents a historic step for the entire European continent and presents a unique opportunity to strengthen co-operation with its neighbours to the East and to the South. The Council recalls the Declaration adopted by the European Conference in Athens on April 17th, 2003.-

2. Noting that geographical proximity will generate converging interests and increase the importance of working together to address common challenges, the EU wishes to define an ambitious new range of policies towards its neighbours based on shared values such as liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. This should be seen as separate from the question of possible EU accession that is regulated by article 49 of the Treaty on European Union.

3. The Council welcomes the Communication of the Commission “Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: a new framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours” as well as contributions made by the High Representative, and considers that they provide a good basis for developing a new range of policies towards Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya ¹, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and, at the same time reinforcing EU-Russia strategic partnership. At a later stage, the Council will examine whether the Southern Caucasus countries could also be covered within these policies.

¹ Libya has been invited to accept the Barcelona acquis in order to join the Barcelona Process.

4. The new neighbourhood policies should not override the existing framework for EU relations with Russia, the Eastern European countries, and the Southern Mediterranean partners, as developed in the context of the relevant agreements, common strategies, the Northern Dimension Initiative and of the Barcelona Process. They should encourage and support policies of the New Eastern and Southern Neighbours aimed at coming closer to the EU. Implementation of existing agreements remains a priority.

5. The overall goal of the new policies will be :
 - a. To work with the partners to reduce poverty and create an area of shared prosperity and values based on free trade, deeper economic integration, intensified political and cultural relations, enhanced cross-border co-operation and shared responsibility for conflict prevention and conflict resolution.
 - b. To anchor the EU's offer of concrete benefits and preferential relations within a differentiated framework which responds to progress made by the partner countries in defined areas, in particular political and economic reform as well as in the field of JHA.

6. The EU's approach could therefore be based on the following incentives:
 - a. More effective political dialogue and co-operation.
 - b. Intensified co-operation to prevent and combat common security threats.
 - c. Greater co-operation in conflict prevention and crisis management.
 - d. Perspectives for participating progressively in the EU's Internal Market and its regulatory structures, including those pertaining to sustainable development (health, consumer and environmental protection), based on legislative approximation.
 - e. Preferential trading relations and further market opening in accordance with WTO principles.

- f. Enhanced co-operation on matters related to legal migration.
- g. Enhanced co-operation to tackle drugs trafficking, trafficking in human beings and organised crime, through, inter alia, support for border management and cross-border co-operation.
- h. Enhanced cultural co-operation, mutual understanding and people-to people contact.
- i. Perspectives of integration into transport, energy and telecommunications networks and the European Research Area.
- j. New instruments for investment promotion and protection while preserving the respective competences of the Community and the Member States.
- k. Support for WTO accessions and integration into the global trading system.
- l. Enhanced and improved assistance, better tailored to needs, including improved interaction of all relevant sources of finance, including IFIs'.
- m. Promotion of intra-regional, sub-regional and cross-border co-operation.
- n. Enhanced co-operation in the field of education, training, and science.
- o. Enhanced co-operation in environmental protection.

7. Differentiation will be the basis for the new EU policies towards its neighbours, which will be implemented by Action Plans. Action Plans will become key policy instruments of the EU for relations with the neighbouring countries over the medium term. These should be political documents, building on existing agreements and setting out clearly the over-arching strategic policy targets, common objectives, political and economic benchmarks used to evaluate progress in key areas, and a timetable for their achievement which enable progress to be judged regularly. They should be concise, complemented where necessary by more detailed plans for sector-specific co-operation, and should inform EC country assistance.

8. On the basis mentioned above, the Council invites the Commission with the contribution, where appropriate, of the High Representative, to:
- a. launch dialogue within existing frameworks on achievements and failures of meeting agreed targets under existing agreements;
 - b. from 2004 onwards, present proposals for Action Plans for all countries concerned as appropriate, commencing i.a. with Ukraine, Moldova, and Southern Mediterranean partners with Association Agreements;
 - c. examine measures to improve the interoperability between the different relevant instruments for support to the border areas and further alignment of TACIS, PHARE, CARDS, MEDA and INTERREG programmes and report thereof to the Council;
 - d. present a communication on a new Neighbourhood Instrument, focussing on promoting sustainable economic and social development of the bordering countries and pursuing regional and trans-national co-operation, including people-to-people contacts, and on ensuring the smooth functioning and secure management of the Eastern and Mediterranean borders, based on the evaluation of existing instruments and as an integral part of the consideration of the relevant financing instruments in the new financial perspectives after 2006.
9. At the appropriate time, on the basis of evaluation of implementation of existing agreements and taking into account the principle of differentiation, the EU will examine the scope for new or enhanced agreements. These would supplement existing contractual relations where the EU and the neighbouring country have moved beyond the existing framework.
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