

Brussels, 28 November 2003

Sixth Euro-Med Ministerial Conference: reinforcing and bringing the Partnership forward

The sixth Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers takes place in Naples on 2 and 3 December. It will be the last ministerial meeting before the enlargement of the EU in May. Ministers will discuss the political and economic prospects for the region offered by the EU's Wider Europe policy. This initiative offers the EU's neighbouring partners, in exchange for tangible political and economic reforms, gradual integration into the expanded European internal market and the possibility of ultimately reaching the EU's four fundamental freedoms: free movement of goods, services, capital and people. Ministers are also expected to back the Commission's proposal¹ to set up a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue of Cultures, a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and a reinforced European Investment Bank (EIB) lending facility to encourage private sector investment in the region. The Naples meeting is particularly important in light of the stagnation of the Middle East Peace Process, the struggle to win peace in Iraq and the deadly terrorist attacks in Istanbul, Saudi Arabia and Morocco, all of which highlight the threats to stability in the region and underline more than ever the urgent need for Europe to support political and economic reform in the region.

In Naples, Europe will reaffirm its solidarity with its Mediterranean partners, who are of geo-strategic importance to Europe, especially as regards security, environment, energy and migratory flows. Efforts in Naples will reinforce even further the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process), which has made substantial progress since 1995. Association Agreements have been signed with all partners except Syria, with which there is increasing hope that negotiations will be concluded shortly (next negotiation round will take place on 8-9 December 2003 in Damascus). Parallel steps have also been taken towards regional integration, including on trade, infrastructure interconnection and harmonisation of regulations.

However, much more remains to be done. The recent UNDP report on Arab Human Development² underlined that the strengthening of democracy, respect for human rights and good governance are crucial for political and economic development. There is a correlation between weak governance and stalled growth. Insufficient growth rates in Arab countries during the last decade were coupled in most cases with limited progress regarding political reform.

¹ [IP/03/1391](#): Commission calls on Council to take new steps to reinforce relations with Mediterranean partners

² <http://www.undp.org/rbas/ahdr/>

The Commission will draw attention to its March Communication on guidelines for policy on human rights and democratisation in the Mediterranean³, which proposes ways to use some of the resources of the MEDA programme for the benefit of those Mediterranean countries making faster progress on these issues.

The Naples meeting will provide tangible outcomes on a number of issues. On the political front a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly will be established to allow partners to meet on a more formal basis with a view to exchange ideas and experience on how a democratic system should function. A reinforced lending facility by the European Investment Bank (EIB) will be agreed in order to stimulate growth in the private sector and offer an acceptable future to the growing population. Finally, with a view to building popular support and increasing the understanding of their different cultures, a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue of Cultures will be set up. This foundation will act as a catalyst for initiatives aimed at increasing dialogue and promoting exchanges, co-operation and mobility between people at all levels, targeting in particular young people.

As this will be the last Euro-Med Ministerial before EU enlargement next May, the Commission will stress the political importance of the partnership and emphasise the potential for closer integration between Europe and Mediterranean countries, as offered by the EU's Wider Europe policy. This initiative will open the possibility of access to a wide range of EU policies and programmes and participation in Trans-Euro-Mediterranean transport, energy, and telecommunications networks. It will also provide further support for the process of trade liberalisation and economic reform. Ultimately, a share in the EU internal market and the possibility to benefit from the four freedoms is offered but the Commission will stress that the pace of progress and the depth of integration with Europe of each of the Mediterranean partners will be defined by their respective commitment to and implementation of political and economic reforms.

Further information on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership at

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed/index.htm

³ [IP/03/732](#): Promoting respect for Human Rights and democracy in the Mediterranean