

Brussels, 20 May 2008

“Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean”. Commission adopts proposals to enhance the partnership between the EU and its Mediterranean neighbours

The European Commission adopted today, May 20 its proposals for upgrading relations with its Mediterranean partners through the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean. Following the decision of the Spring European Council the Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner presented the outline of the structures of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean which aim at giving renewed vitality and visibility to the EU's relations with Partners in the Mediterranean region. These structures include the setting up of a Secretariat and the creation of a permanent committee of Euro-Mediterranean representatives. The policy paper also outlines ideas for the kind of projects that would constitute visible and tangible efforts at improving the lives and livelihoods of the region's citizens. This latest initiative underlines the EU's continued commitment to the Mediterranean region, an area of vital strategic importance in both political and economic terms. The proposals contained in the Communication will be presented at the inaugural Summit of Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean in Paris on 13 July, 2008.

President Barroso said: *“This is a pivotal moment for the EU and our Mediterranean Partners. The Barcelona Process has proven its value to build bridges between Mediterranean partners. The impulse by the next French Presidency of the EU is an opportunity to strengthen and complement this cooperation. But it will take stronger political will, in both sides of the Mediterranean, to seize this opportunity to enhance understanding, peace and prosperity among all our nations, cultures and religions, for the benefit of our citizens.”*

Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner added: *“The Barcelona Process has its champions and critics. While we recognise that much has been done in our near 13 years of Partnership, we are also aware that much remains to be done if future achievements are to match expectations. We are deeply committed to the Mediterranean region. Today's proposals underline that commitment, and our desire for a more coherent partnership based on co-ownership of the process.”*

Today's Communication takes stock of the achievements of the Barcelona Process and envisages the new initiative to build on and reinforce these successes, while also acknowledging the shortcomings that have compromised more rapid development.

While the European Neighbourhood Policy already addresses the needs in the region by a differentiated approach in the bilateral relations with Mediterranean partners, the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean will complement this by building on the strong points as the expression of regional political commitment.

The policy paper responds to the request of the European Council of 13/14 March, which approved the principle of a Union for the Mediterranean and invited the Commission to present proposals defining its modalities. The Barcelona Declaration, and its acquis remain the cornerstone of the new initiative and its goals and cooperation areas remain valid.

However, the upgraded political relationship extends and enhances the political level and framework for cooperation. It foresees biennial summits of Heads of Government, and the establishment of a co-Presidency to manage these summits and annual Foreign Affairs ministerial meetings, to sectoral ministerial meetings as well as senior officials and Euromed Committee meetings. A joint secretariat will be established to promote and follow up projects, while the Commission also proposes the creation of a permanent committee of Euro-Mediterranean representatives.

Projects are at the heart of the new initiative. The Commission has identified possible areas for projects that strive to promote growth, employment regional cohesion and economic integration. These areas include energy and energy security, environment, civil protection and transport.

The implementation of such projects will be dependent on the mobilisation of additional funding outside the traditional existing budget allocations. Financial resources are expected to come from the private sector, international financial institutions and bilateral cooperation and contributions from EU member States and Mediterranean Partners.

Background

Since its launch in 1995, the Barcelona Process has been the central instrument for Euro-Mediterranean relations, representing a partnership of 39 governments and over 750 million people. It has been the engine for movement towards peace, security and shared prosperity in a region where long-running conflicts and tenuous reform efforts have often impeded progress. Against this background the Partnership provides a framework for continued dialogue, engagement and development. The European Commission has supported the Barcelona Process with the provision of over €16 Billion from the Community budget since 1995.

More information at:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/index.htm