Strengthening the European neighbourhood policy

2007/2088(INI) - 18/06/2007

The Council held an exchange of views and adopted the following conclusions on the European Neighbourhood Policy:

- Firstly, it welcomed the significant progress that has been made in strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), a core priority within the EU's external action, under the mandate agreed by the European Council of December 2006. It endorsed the Presidency's Progress Report which takes stock of the substantial accomplishments to date and looks forward to the future development of the strengthened ENP. It reaffirmed the crucial importance of the ENP to consolidate a ring of prosperity, stability and security based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the EU's neighbourhood. Continuous efforts should be made so that all partner countries truly embrace a strengthened ENP.

The Council recalled the key principles of the ENP:

- ENP is a strategy based on partnership and joint ownership to promote modernisation and reform;
- ENP is a single, inclusive, balanced and coherent policy framework;
- performance-driven differentiation and tailor-made assistance remain essential for EU relations with the neighbouring countries;
- ENP remains distinct from the question of EU membership and does not prejudge any possible future developments of partner countries' relationship with the EU.

- The Council welcomed the work achieved so far in deepening the ENP's economic, financial, thematic, regional and civil society dimensions. It underlined that deeper economic integration is an essential building block of the strengthened ENP, to be achieved in particular by the progressive adoption of deep and comprehensive free trade agreements. The opening of negotiations on such agreements will be preceded by the accession of our partner countries to the WTO. It particularly welcomed the opening of negotiations on an Enhanced Agreement with Ukraine, certain aspects of which could serve as a model for other ENP partners in the future.

- The Council welcomed the Commission's ongoing work to establish a Governance Facility, with objective and transparent allocation criteria, to better encourage partners' reforms, and took note of the ongoing work to set up a Neighbourhood Investment Fund, which should be fully compatible with FEMIP. It underlined the importance of the progress made on the opening of Community agencies and programmes to partner countries.

- The Council underlined the importance of the extension of the Global Approach to Migration to the neighbouring Eastern and South-Eastern regions and considered that further initiatives could be explored to facilitate mobility for certain categories of people from ENP countries to the EU, in particular for participation in ENP-related events.

- The Council equally welcomed the decision to invite Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia on a case by case basis to align with EU declarations, demarches and positions on CFSP issues. A similar possibility should be pursued for the EU's Mediterranean partners.

The Council welcomed the adoption and the beginning of implementation of the Egypt and Lebanon ENP Action Plans, which will allow the strengthening of relations with these two countries.

- The Council welcomed that work on a strengthened and coherent EU engagement towards the Black Sea area has started and recalled the Council Conclusions of 14 May 2007 on the Black Sea Synergy Initiative. In developing this initiative, the EU can build on the experience gained in the context of the Barcelona Process and consider the lessons learnt in the Northern Dimension and build upon synergies with other regional cooperation processes.

- Lastly, the Council underlined that the efforts to develop the strengthened ENP as a core foreign policy should continue dynamically and invited the incoming Presidencies and the Commission to take forward this work in the relevant bodies.