Strengthening the European neighbourhood policy

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TUNISIA – EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY – STATE OF PLAY

This Commission working document accompanies the Commission’s communication on strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). This document reports on overall progress made on the implementation of the EU-Tunisia Action Plan.

The Action Plan, which was adopted in July 2005 and became operational in 2006, is now a coherent framework for dialogue between the European Union (EU) and Tunisia. It has enabled an in-depth dialogue to be launched on economic and business matters and on various sectoral policy issues. Five subcommittees met during the first seven months of 2006 (economic dialogue, agriculture and fisheries, transport, environment and energy, research and innovation, customs cooperation).

Improving living standards remained a constant priority of government policy, in line with the ENP objective of creating an area of shared prosperity.

Good progress has been made on most of the economic and social reforms and the sector-specific measures indicated in the Action Plan, including in the transport, energy and scientific research fields.

On a more general note, there is a high degree of cohesion between the Action Plan and Tunisia's own priorities. These priorities focus on creating productive employment by making the Tunisian economy a knowledge-based economy, and hence more competitive. This objective is all the more relevant in view of the challenge that high growth in unemployment among young graduates, and the social unrest and migration which it generates, presents to Tunisia and Europe.

There has been less progress on the political front in recent months, however, particularly as regards cooperation and dialogue on political and security issues. Preparations by the Subcommittee on Human Rights and Democracy are still focused on its rules of procedure. A start should be made on implementing the modernisation programme for the justice system, which was signed at the end of December 2005. Civil society projects with the EU have so far proved problematic, especially as regards implementation of the Tunisian League of Human Rights projects.

As regards aid, there is a high degree of cohesion between cooperation programmes for 2007-2010 and the Action Plan's economic and social priorities. This is reflected in the large number of twinning programmes and the institutional reforms linked to budget aid.