

European neighbourhood policy

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PURPOSE : to present the Commission's European Neighbourhood Policy strategy paper.

CONTENT : EU enlargement in May 2004 altered the external borders of the EU bringing with it new security and economic challenges. One of the EU's main objectives now is to ensure that the new countries bordering the EU can benefit from closer EU economic and security related ties. To meet the new challenges the Commission, in consultation with other EU institutions, is in favour of setting up "The European Neighbourhood Policy". Over the past year, the Commission has held talks with partner countries in Eastern Europe and the Southern Mediterranean to assess their views on the creation of the ENP. The objective of this Commission Communication is to convey to the Council and the European Parliament, the results of its work over the past year and to map out the next steps in carrying forward the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Since the concept of the ENP was first launched one of its main priorities has been to share the benefits of the EU's 2004 enlargement with neighbouring countries by strengthening stability, security and well-being for all. It is designed to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and to offer them the chance to participate in various EU activities through greater political, security, economic and cultural co-operation. The method proposed is to define a set of priorities, which will bring the partner countries closer to the EU. The priorities, in turn, will be incorporated in jointly agreed Action Plans – covering a number of key areas such as political dialogue, trade measures, energy, transport etc. The new partnership should be based on a commitment to common values including the rule of law, good governance, the respect for human rights, the free market and sustainable development. Although all Action Plans will be founded on the same principles, they will be different according to the existing state of relations with each individual country, its needs and capacities. Progress in meeting the agreed priorities will be monitored in the bodies established by Partnership and Co-operation Agreements or Association Agreements. Action Plans will be put forward by the Commission, with contributions from the High Representative on issues relating to political co-operation and the CFSP. Additional assistance is also being offered through support instruments such as technical assistance and twinning arrangements. In addition the ENP will seek to reinforce existing forms of regional and sub-regional co-operation as well as providing a framework for their further development. To the south, the ENP will encourage the participation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership – or the Barcelona process – for the promotion of infrastructure connections such as in the energy sector.

To conclude, the ENP vision involves a ring of countries, sharing the EU's fundamental values and objectives, drawn into an increasingly close relationship. The Report suggests that such a vision will bring enormous gains to all involved in terms of increased stability, security and well being. The Commission, therefore, invites the Council to consider the approach outlined in the Communication and to draw up conclusions on the way to carry this initiative forward. The Commission, for its part, is ready to complete exploratory talks with the countries identified and to present draft Action Plans.