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**EURO-MEDITERRANEAN MID-TERM MEETING
OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
(DUBLIN, 5-6 MAY 2004)**

PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Dublin Mid-Term meeting of Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers took place as a reaffirmation of the Partners' continuing commitment to the Barcelona process. It confirmed the importance of partnership and co-ownership as essential elements of the process.
2. The meeting took place against the background of a number of initiatives concerning the countries of the Mediterranean region and beyond. The Union has proposed to include Mediterranean partners in the Neighbourhood policy. In addition, on the basis of mandates from the December 2003 European Council, an Interim Report on "An EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East" was welcomed by the European Council in March 2004. On the basis of this Interim Report, work is now in progress to develop for the European Council in June an agreed view on relations with the area which extends from Mauritania to Iran - the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

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3. Ministers unreservedly condemned terrorist attacks including those at Casablanca, Istanbul and Riyadh, as well as the appalling terrorist attack in Madrid on 11 March, and expressed solidarity with the victims. These events reinforced the relevance of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as the framework for solidarity and co-operation between the EU and its Mediterranean partners in tackling common security threats. It should stimulate the partners to reinforce all their joint activities, in particular in the fight against terrorism in all its forms, co-operation on justice and home affairs, and the inter-cultural dialogue.
4. Ministers therefore confirmed their attachment and commitment to the Barcelona Process as the main framework for a coherent set of privileged relations within the Euro-Mediterranean neighbourhood. They acknowledged the solid and substantial range of co-operation activities which has been established in a spirit of partnership on issues ranging from political and security questions, including human rights, political reform and good governance, through trade liberalisation, economic reform and infrastructure networks to culture, education and the movement of people. They therefore firmly committed themselves to implementing the Naples agenda in order to reinvigorate the Barcelona Process while seeking ways of improving the sense of co-ownership of the process.
5. The meeting also recognised the potential of the European Neighbourhood Policy to build on the Barcelona Process and to further it on the basis of jointly agreed Action Plans, as well as the opportunities and benefits offered to the Mediterranean partner countries through this policy. Within a differentiated approach, the EU can offer a more intensive political dialogue and greater access to EU programmes and policies, including their gradual participation in the four freedoms particularly the Single Market, as well as reinforced co-operation on justice and home affairs. Such close and co-operative relations will depend on a better mutual understanding of security concerns and the strengthening of commitments to common values and common principles, such as promoting human rights, combating terrorism, and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The level of EU support to the implementation of reforms should be related on a mutually agreed basis in a spirit of co-ownership, to the intensity of the efforts of the partners assessed under the framework of agreed evaluation instruments. Articulation of MEDA and EIB credits should be further reinforced, as well as co-ordination within the EU and with other donors.
6. Against this background, Ministers took stock of progress in implementing the Valencia Action Plan and the conclusions of the Ministerial meeting in Naples. In the perspective of the Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers meetings to be held under the Dutch and Luxemburg Presidencies as well as the 10th anniversary next year of the launching of the Barcelona Process. Ministers requested the Euro-Mediterranean Committee to draw up firm proposals and guidelines for moving forward. They acknowledged that progress on the implementation of the Valencia Action Plan had been insufficient and needed to be speeded up. There should be more focus on deliverable achievements rather than on process. Final decisions were taken on the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue of Cultures which will ensure its establishment in line with the agreed timetable.

7. At Naples, Foreign Ministers mandated senior officials to examine the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's working methods. The Presidency has carried this work forward and, following an extensive consultation process with Partners, published its Working Paper on the Improvement of the Working Methods of the Partnership. This has met with the approval of the Senior Officials of the 35 partner countries. Ministers welcomed agreement on improving the working methods of the partnership, which includes the setting up of ad-hoc groups to prepare discussion, proposals to increase the sense of co-ownership by giving a greater role to the Mediterranean partners, and certain technical improvements. In addition, arising from this paper, two ad-hoc thematic groups have been set up and had their initial meetings on 5th and 7th April respectively, with a view to preparing work-plans on Partnership-Building Measures and the European Neighbourhood Policy. These draft work-plans were welcomed by the Ministerial Meeting.
8. Good progress has been made within the association process which lies at the core of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Association Agreements are now in force with Morocco, Tunisia, Israel and Jordan and on an interim basis with the Palestinian Authority. There are interim agreements in place with Egypt and Lebanon as well. The ratification of the agreement concluded with Egypt is now finalised and the first meeting of the EU-Egypt Association Council is scheduled for June 2004. The ratification processes of the agreements with Lebanon and Algeria are also well underway. All partners were again encouraged to expedite the ratification process of those Association Agreements not yet in force. The EU is also encouraged by the progress made towards concluding an Association Agreement with Syria, and is hopeful that the few outstanding points will be resolved soon, allowing Syria to join the group of Euro-Mediterranean countries which have signed Association or Interim Agreements with the Union, thus completing the network of Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements. These are important developments for the fulfilment of the objectives of the Barcelona Declaration and for the reinforcement of South-South cooperation.
9. Ministers drew attention to the priority they attach to the promotion of gender equality and the promotion of the role of women in society, in the framework of pursuing the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Ministers acknowledged the important contribution of women in all sectors, including: education, the public service, the administration of justice, business, agriculture and rural development. They adopted the promotion of the role of women in society, north and south of the Mediterranean, as one of the major ambitions in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

II. EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

10. The setting up of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly in Athens on 22-23 March was welcomed as a means to improve co-operation on democratisation and to provide an input into all areas of the Partnership. The President of the Assembly addressed the meeting of Foreign Ministers. It was agreed that the views of the Assembly on the major issues of the partnership would be welcome. Ministers agreed that the appropriate articulation between the institutions should be established without setting up an over-burdensome formal consultation procedure.

III. EU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST

11. The EU presented an overview of its internal discussions on its proposed Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean and the Middle East and encouraged partners to make comments and suggestions on the Strategic Partnership and follow up actions relating to it. The EU stressed that the most recent European Council underlined the importance of intensive consultation with the countries involved. Ministers welcomed the opportunity provided by the Dublin Mid-Term Ministerial meeting to discuss with Partners the proposed EU Strategic Partnership with regard to its Mediterranean dimension and also to underline its commitment to the Barcelona Process and its wish to develop this further including through the European Neighbourhood Policy.
12. In this respect the European Union and Mediterranean partners discussed issues relating to reform and democratisation in the region. Existing instruments such as the Association Agreements and the national action plans under the European Neighbourhood Policy should be fully used to support reforms and modernisation.
13. The EU indicated that it will continue to pursue its specific EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East, based on the existing frameworks and in particular the Barcelona Process as far as the Mediterranean is concerned, and aiming for the appropriate articulation between the different frameworks. The EU also stated its readiness to cooperate with other actors, with a view to achieving complementarity with other initiatives, notably with the US and in the framework of the G8 and NATO Summits in June. The EU expressed its willingness to cooperate closely with initiatives coming from the region, including taking account of the outcome of the Arab League Summit.
14. Ministers agreed that the clear commitment to pursuing the Middle East Peace Process through the implementation of the Road Map was central to the success of such a policy. Progress on the resolution of the Middle East conflict cannot be a pre-condition for confronting the urgent reform challenges facing the countries of the region, nor vice versa. But it is clear that it will not be possible to build a common zone of peace, prosperity and progress unless a just and lasting settlement of the conflict is in place.

IV. MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

15. Ministers reviewed developments since their last meeting in Naples and view with great concern the situation in the Middle East. The Presidency informed partners about the meeting of the International Quartet in New York on 4 May. They noted with appreciation the statement issued by the Quartet after the meeting and welcomed the programme of action outlined therein. The Quartet should play an active role in pursuing the goal of a comprehensive regional peace and encourage the parties to move ahead vigorously on the basis of the principles outlined in their New York statement.

16. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to a negotiated two-State solution agreed between the parties which would result in a viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with an Israel living within recognised and secure borders. They reaffirmed their belief that the Roadmap represents the only route to achieving such an outcome. They called on both sides to fulfil their obligations under the Roadmap. They stated that any change to the pre-1967 borders can only be arrived at by agreement between the parties. Ministers noted that the refugee question and the manner in which the right of return may be realised is also a Final Status issue and that the Roadmap states that a final and comprehensive permanent status agreement that ends the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must include an agreed, just, fair and realistic solution to this question. Ministers emphasised the principle that Final Status issues are a matter for negotiation and agreement between the parties themselves and must not be prejudged. Issues such as borders and refugees must be mutually agreed to by Israelis and Palestinians based on Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, the terms of reference of the Madrid peace process, the principle of land for peace, previous agreements and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Beirut Arab League Summit; and be consistent with the Roadmap.
17. Ministers took note of the announced intention of Israeli Prime Minister Sharon to withdraw from all Gaza settlements and parts of the West Bank. They agreed that such a withdrawal must bring about a full Israeli withdrawal and complete end of occupation in Gaza, and can be a step towards achieving the two-state vision; it could represent a significant step towards the implementation of the Roadmap provided that it is carried out in accordance with certain conditions, as set out in the conclusions of the March 2004 European Council. They consider that such a step should provide a rare moment of opportunity in the search for peace in the Middle East. Such an initiative should be properly orchestrated with the international community so as to ensure that an orderly situation in Gaza results which will permit the maintenance of security as well as rehabilitation and reconstruction. Ministers urged all parties to undertake urgently preparations towards this end. Ministers stressed the need to avoid a political vacuum, and the dangers which that would involve, in the interim period between now and the beginning of any withdrawal. They recalled that there are a number of measures which need to be adopted in the period immediately ahead in the political, security and humanitarian spheres in order to prevent further deterioration and to resume progress. Ministers urged an end to violence and terrorism as well as the resumption of a ceasefire embracing all parties and groups. They called on both sides to resume negotiations on the peace process without further delay.
18. Ministers stressed the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Beirut Arab League Summit of 28 March 2002 to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East which must include Syria and Lebanon.
19. Ministers recalled that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace must meet the legitimate aspirations of both the Israeli and Palestinian people. Ministers called on all States in the region to exert every effort to promote peace. They also urged all states to act to combat terrorism.

V. IRAQ

20. The Euro-Mediterranean partners stated their determination to assist the Iraqi people as they enter a new era in the history of their country.
21. Calling on all parties in Iraq to work together to establish a sovereign, independent, democratic and peaceful Iraq whose territorial integrity is preserved and which lives in peace with its neighbours, the Euro-Mediterranean partners committed themselves to continue to help the Iraqi people rebuild their country and regain its proper place in the regional as well as the international family.
22. They welcomed the consensus reached by the various parties in Iraq in signing the new Transitional Administrative Law on 8 March and expressed the hope that this encouraging development would permit the transition process to move ahead expeditiously.
23. They noted that the security situation in Iraq remained a major impediment to successful political and reconstruction processes.
24. They condemned all violence and terrorist attacks, including the kidnappings and brutal murder of hostages. They deplored the taking of hostages in all circumstances and called on those responsible to release immediately and unharmed all remaining hostages and to desist from any further such activity.
25. The partners condemned any incidents of abuse of prisoners in Iraq by occupying forces which have taken place as contrary to international humanitarian law. They noted the prompt response by the UK and US authorities in instigating investigations into reports of such abuse and their commitment to rectify any failure to adhere to international humanitarian law.
26. Convinced that a strong UN role in this political transition process is an essential element for its success, the Euro-Mediterranean partners welcomed the decision of the Iraqi Governing Council to invite the UN to help with the transfer of sovereignty at the end of June 2004 and future national elections and the acceptance of this invitation by the United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan. They looked forward to the UN playing a vital and growing role endorsed by the UN Security Council in the run-up to transition and beyond and expressed their support to UN Special Advisor Mr Lakhdar Brahimi in his endeavours.

VI. POLITICAL AND SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

Political and security dialogue

27. Ministers expressed their determination to give greater substance to the political and security dialogue despite the obstacles posed notably by the absence of progress in the Middle East Peace Process. They noted the work programmes presented by the ad hoc working groups and looked forward to progress being made on the areas covered by the groups.

EuroMeSCo

28. Ministers noted the upcoming EuroMeSCo/EuroMed Senior Officials seminar to be held in Dublin on 1 June. They acknowledged that EuroMeSCo continues to make an important contribution to the promotion of ongoing dialogue in the Political and Security chapter of the Barcelona Process which is recognised by the Euro Mediterranean Partnership's adoption of EuroMeSCo as an official confidence building measure.

Diplomatic Seminars

29. Ministers noted with appreciation the 16th Seminar that was recently held in Malta. Ministers agreed that these Seminars are an important contribution to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and expressed their support for this ongoing activity.

Human rights and democratisation

30. Ministers underlined the importance of taking forward the recommendations in the Commission Communication on reinvigorating EU actions on human rights and democratisation with Mediterranean partners. They reaffirmed that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is based on respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy and that these form an essential element both of the bilateral Association Agreements and of the multilateral framework governing relations between the EU and Mediterranean partners. They also acknowledged the need for further progress in the region with regard to respect for human rights and democracy. This could focus on extending and strengthening political pluralism, regulatory reform for the implementation of international commitments, improving the judicial and penal systems, greater transparency, education and awareness raising, as well as full acceptance of and improving conditions for activity by civil society. They confirmed the need for full adherence to international law by all parties.
31. Ministers noted that contacts have taken place with a number of partners to draw up joint action plans in line with the Commission's Communication on the subject and an allocation is envisaged for the countries that adopt action plans. An EU-Morocco Association sub-committee on human rights, democratisation and good governance is being established; other partners were encouraged to do the same to allow for structured discussion and follow-up; the EU indicated that human rights will be an important component of the political chapter of the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans, and two regional workshops will be held this year on the rights of the child (including matters relating to family law and parental responsibilities) and on racism and xenophobia. Ministers noted that activity under the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights has also been stepped up with a focus on strengthening civil society and improving governance and the fight against corruption.
32. Ministers expressed the conviction that addressing these issues is essential to achieving lasting economic, social and human development and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's goal of a region of peace, stability and prosperity.

Fight against terrorism

33. Ministers deplored the recent terrorist attacks which have demonstrated that the fight against terrorism must be a priority objective. Ministers therefore took this opportunity to stress that progress in cooperation on the fight against terrorism should be stepped up. The need to move to the stage of concrete operational joint activities has been heightened by these attacks.
34. The EU, in the European Security Strategy adopted at the European Council in December 2003, identified terrorism as one of the key threats to EU interests. The European Council on 25/26 March 2004 adopted a Declaration on Combating Terrorism. The European Council urged full implementation of measures to combat terrorism as a matter of urgency and called for the development of an EU long-term strategy to address all the factors contributing to terrorism. It also agreed updated Strategic Objectives to enhance the EU Plan of Action to Combat Terrorism which was adopted in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks and subsequently supplemented by many important initiatives.
35. Cooperation should be intensified both at regional level and bilaterally. In the latter context, Ministers mandated the Justice and Security sub-committees existing or currently being established under the Association Agreements to take forward such joint activities at expert level with the aim of improving and assisting the development of counter-terrorism standards and capabilities. The fight against terrorism should also be pursued in the framework of the Action Plans to be agreed under the ENP.
36. Ministers also noted that the informal Ad Hoc Senior Officials and experts' meeting on Terrorism on 21 April concentrated on an exchange of views on the possibility of engaging in operational joint activities.

Non-proliferation

37. Ministers instructed Senior Officials to explore possibilities for enhancing dialogue and cooperation on non-proliferation issues, in particular in order to promote universal adherence and effective compliance with all relevant multilateral agreements, and the implementation of effective export/end use control policies. The development of a cooperative mechanism should be examined, as well as the designation of points of contact between Euro-Mediterranean partners. On the EU side, the Personal Representative of HR Solana could assist in this process. The final objective should remain a mutually and effectively verifiable Middle East Zone free of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical and biological, and their means of delivery, as set out in the Barcelona declaration.

ESDP

38. Ministers noted the report on dialogue and cooperation on ESDP between the EU and Mediterranean partners prepared by the relevant EU body and undertook to discuss the issue further at official level.

39. Ministers noted ongoing efforts to deepen this dialogue in the framework of the Barcelona Process, as agreed at Valencia. These efforts should focus on means to raise the visibility of this dialogue, establishing contact points on a voluntary basis and exploring the possibility for cooperation with Mediterranean partners in concrete activities on conflict prevention and crisis management. This could be done through possible cooperation in the Senior Officials' meetings and in other appropriate formats, including on a subregional or country basis; this would be fully coordinated with the activities of the Euro-Mediterranean Process. These general efforts would be made with a view to encouraging participation of Mediterranean partners, on a case by case basis, in crisis management operations.

VII. ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL PARTNERSHIP

World Trade Organisation

40. Ministers recalled the need for all partners to work towards the successful outcome of the current round of WTO global trade negotiations, the Doha Development Agenda, recognising the benefits which accrue from an effective rules-based multilateral trading system

Trade and economic integration

41. Ministers confirmed their support for the trade and economic integration initiatives undertaken in the Mediterranean. The conclusion in March 2004 of the Agadir Agreement opens the way to a major step forward in South-South regional integration. While backing the conclusion and early implementation of this agreement, Ministers encouraged the participation of other Mediterranean partners. Ministers confirmed a common understanding that Mediterranean partners that have concluded agreements with the EU should become part of the Agadir Agreement, in accordance with its provisions, or should conclude free trade agreements among themselves, as important steps towards the realisation of the Euro-Mediterranean free trade area by the target date of 2010. Ministers took note of the rapid implementation of the MEDA €4 million programme to support the Agadir Agreement and its Secretariat. Ministers welcomed the signature by Turkey and Morocco of a free trade agreement.
42. All the necessary procedures for the incorporation into the Association Agreements of the common pan-Euro-Mediterranean origin protocol, agreed in the Trade Conference of Palermo in July 2003, should be well advanced by the time of the forthcoming Euro-Mediterranean Trade Ministerial Conference (to be held in July 2004). Ministers reiterated that the objective should be that all Agreements include the common pan-Euro-Mediterranean protocol of origin by 2005. For the Agadir Agreement countries, this would be well before the end of the transition period of the Agreement. This would imply the effective functioning of a substantial number of compatible and interconnected free trade agreements on the road towards the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area.

43. Ministers welcomed the progress made in implementing the Palermo Action Plan aimed at facilitating the free movement of industrial products. Ministers at Palermo endorsed a list of recommendations concerning customs and trade facilitation. Several Mediterranean partners have already identified the priority sectors for which they wish to obtain improved access to the EU market through the implementation of EU-harmonised legislation and the future conclusion of agreements on conformity assessment. Ministers noted that the gap analysis between the partners' approach to technical regulations, standardisation and conformity assessment and EU legislation was underway. The Working Party on regional integration will present a progress report to the next conference of Euro-Mediterranean Trade Ministers. Ongoing activity in this area will be reflected by the European Neighbourhood Policy, in the context of which additional relevant measures can be incorporated within the Action Plans, and the focus and flexibility of assistance improved.
44. Ministers recognised that free trade in services, where a great part of future economic activity in Mediterranean partners will take place, will open the way for promising opportunities for investors and growth for sustained job creation. An ambitious, modulated approach to services liberalisation, accompanied by regulatory approximation, is at the heart of the economic agenda of the Barcelona Process and the Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans. In this respect, all partners should work towards the adoption of a common protocol for the liberalisation of services, a major dimension of the Free Trade Area. The protocol should be used as the common basis for the negotiation of future bilateral agreements fully compatible with WTO-GATS obligations.
45. Ministers noted with appreciation the study prepared by the FEMISE network on further liberalisation of trade in agriculture which could be taken into account in further discussions. Ministers invited the European Commission to start consultations with all partners concerned on further agricultural liberalisation, within the framework of the Association Agreements. Mutual liberalisation of agricultural trade should remain a priority for the deepening of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area. Furthermore, following the positive results of the first Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Agriculture held in Venice in November 2003, Ministers acknowledged that the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation should be extended to non-trade aspects notably in the field of sustainable rural development, organic farming and geographical indications. Ministers expressed their common commitment to achieving a free trade area, including trade in agriculture, by the target date of the Barcelona Declaration of 2010. They also mandated senior officials to develop a comprehensive approach regarding non-trade aspects, on the basis of a roadmap building on existing arrangements to achieve an appropriately higher level of reciprocal liberalisation of trade in agricultural products, to be submitted by the Commission in 2004.
46. Ministers also expressed their commitment to achieving a free trade area by 2010, including trade in processed agricultural products. Negotiations for further liberalisation in this sector should be pursued. Preliminary discussions on improved reciprocal concessions have already been held with Morocco. During recent meetings, Israel, Tunisia, Lebanon and Egypt have expressed their willingness to obtain a better access to the EU market. It is also in the interests of EU industry to improve access to the markets of all Euro-Mediterranean partners. The roadmap referred to in the previous paragraph should take appropriate consideration of trade in processed agricultural products.

47. Ministers welcomed the launching of the sustainability impact assessment of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area. The study could become a reference for assessing the overall impact of free trade and an instrument to design future trade policies to ensure economic, social and environmental sustainability. Ministers encouraged all interested parties to actively contribute to the study in order to take into consideration, as comprehensively as possible, all points of view and areas of concern. The sustainability impact assessment could become an instrument of reference for all partners to help achieve completion of free trade in the Euro-Mediterranean region in a harmonious manner.
48. Ministers noted that the forthcoming Euro-Mediterranean seminar on economic transition scheduled for June 2004 in Brussels will be an excellent opportunity to discuss the priorities for reform in the framework of the agreed objectives of National Action Plans in the European Neighbourhood Policy, and in the framework of National and Regional Indicative Programmes, as appropriate. They also welcomed the initiative by Morocco and the UK to hold a conference in Marrakech on the social consequences of economic reform in May 2004. In Naples, Ministers agreed to consider establishing on a long-term basis regional economic dialogue. To that end, meetings of Economics/Finance Ministers should be convened in principle every two years, taking account also of the FEMIP Ministerial meetings, and prepared through high level Officials' meeting of the regional economic dialogue.
49. Ministers welcomed the new initiatives launched following the meeting of the working group on Euro Mediterranean industrial co-operation that took place in Rome in October 2003. The ongoing work towards the adoption of a Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Entrepreneurship and the implementation of a programme to promote best practice in enterprise policy (MED BEST) are two examples of the renewed co-operation with a focus on regulatory and administrative reforms. Ministers encouraged the commitment to concrete policy actions during the forthcoming conference of Euro-Mediterranean Industry Ministers.
50. In line with the conclusions of the Naples Foreign Ministers' meeting, the opening of the European Research Area to the Mediterranean Partners is taking place through a policy dialogue between the EU and these countries under the auspices of the Monitoring Committee on Science and Technology. Scientific agreements have been concluded by the EU with Tunisia, Morocco and Israel, while an agreement has been initialled with Egypt. The Commission recalled that sub-committees on 'Research and Innovation' have been set up under the Association Agreements with Morocco, Tunisia, Israel and Jordan; and this dimension is included in the draft Neighbourhood action plans. MEDA and the Framework Programme work in synergy: some structural activities have been recently launched by the Commission to increase Mediterranean partners' participation in EC RTD activities and to improve the efficiency of national research systems.

Sub-regional co-operation

51. Ministers stressed that sub-regional cooperation should be encouraged and reinforced. The need to establish closer cross-border relations and to create closer sub-regional links, institutional and in infrastructure, both in the Maghreb and the Mashraq, should become an increasingly high priority in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The implementation of this policy could begin with the three central Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia). The latter could constitute a "pilot experiment" in that respect, aimed at being extended to other partner countries. To this end, the Commission is ready to provide financial support for sub-regional co-operation, and fully exploit, as has been the case for energy cooperation, the sub-regional potential of current and future regional programmes. New neighbourhood programmes, which have been the subject of a Commission Communication on 1 July 2003, could be a major instrument for intra- and inter-regional cooperation with all neighbours including, inter alia, in the field of infrastructure and judicial co-operation.

Transport and Energy

52. Transport and energy will continue to be two sectors in which regional integration should act as a catalyst for investment projects. Cooperation in these fields could take account of the two Commission Communications adopted in 2003, on the development of energy policy for the enlarged European Union, its neighbours and partner countries, and the one on the development of a Euro-Mediterranean Transport Network. The implementation of the conclusions adopted by the two Euro-Mediterranean Energy Ministerial conferences held in 2003 should prompt concrete progress by the working groups on electricity interconnections in the Maghreb and the Mashraq, and the tri-partite Energy Working Group between Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the Commission.
53. On transport, growing support to the Galileo project in the region should provide a solid basis for future co-operation for the improvement of global navigation conditions in the Mediterranean. Participation of the Mediterranean partners in the GALILEO project should be encouraged. Ministers welcomed the launching of two programmes in the transport field in 2004, one on the Galileo global navigation satellite system and the other on maritime safety and security (SAFEMED) with a total EC contribution of € 9 million. The Commission drew attention to the proposal to open negotiations on comprehensive aviation agreements ("Euro-Mediterranean aviation agreements") with certain Mediterranean Partners. The Commission indicated that both the transport and energy sectors would be considered high priority under the New Neighbourhood Instrument to enhance cross-border cooperation from 2007.

Sustainability and Environment

54. As regards the environment, Ministers called for the rapid ratification by the all parties concerned of the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution, under the Barcelona Convention on the Protection of the Mediterranean, noting that the European Community had recently completed its ratification procedures. This ratification, along with the participation of the European Commission in the Bureau of the Barcelona Convention, should improve the effectiveness of the Convention. Exchange of experiences in the area of sustainable development should be sought in line with the Plan of Implementation from the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and primarily with the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea Regions as stated in the Athens Declaration by the Euro-Mediterranean Ministers for the Environment. Also contributing to the improvement of environmental cooperation in the region will be the implementation in 2004 of the new MEDA Environment regional programme. In addition, following the presentation made at the Mid-Term Euro-Mediterranean conference held in Crete in May 2003, Ministers reiterated their support for the Mediterranean component of the EU Water Initiative, launched at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. Ministers noted the Commission's report on the current status of the Short and Medium Term Priority Action Programme for the Environment (SMAP).

Information Technologies

55. Ministers noted the importance of information and communications technologies for all parties on both sides of the Mediterranean. They noted that a conference of officials and experts would be held in June 2004 in Dublin which will accentuate the importance of information and telecommunications for the competitiveness and the sustainable development of all partners, and expressed their hope for the success of the meeting. Ministers stressed the role of regulatory reform and the transfer of technology through investment, in developing modern information technology sectors in Mediterranean partners. It is proposed that, as a follow up to this conference, Ireland will host a Euro Mediterranean ICT Ministerial meeting in 2005. Both events will provide an important contribution of the Euro Mediterranean Partnership to the Information Technology summit to be held in Tunis in December 2005.

Financial Co-operation

56. Ministers took note of the report on the state-of-play that was presented by the Commission regarding the recently adopted orientations of the MEDA National and Regional Indicative Programmes for the Mediterranean partners. Ministers noted that the main thrust of regional cooperation in the coming two years will be the support of regulatory reforms for the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean free trade area and the European Neighbourhood policy priorities. Another major priority under regional cooperation will be an enhanced dialogue between Euro-Mediterranean peoples and cultures with specific support for the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for Dialogue of Cultures, the setting up of cooperation between municipalities and local authorities and the continuation of the Youth programme. These priorities, together with the continued support to the networks EuroMeSCo (foreign policy institutes) and FEMISE (economic institutes), will constitute the major areas of regional cooperation in the period 2005-2006. In addition, New Neighbourhood programmes are foreseen for the years 2004-2006 and a New Neighbourhood Instrument is under development for the period after 2006, to promote network integration and cross border co-operation along the external borders of the enlarged EU, and this will be the subject of a Commission proposal in the coming weeks. The New Neighbourhood Programmes and Instrument will complement existing activities.
57. Ministers noted the results in the implementation of MEDA, that were confirmed by the Commission. Particular emphasis was placed on the progress achieved in the payments/commitments ratio which reached 90% in 2003 (already 90% in 2002, 68% in 2001); commitments in 2003 reached 100% of credits available (€777 M).
58. Ministers agreed on the strategic importance of providing appropriate financial support to the economic and social development, in particular in the framework of the future financial perspectives of the EU.

Encouraging Private Investment

59. Ministers acknowledged the success of FEMIP activities. They noted that the EIB had recently opened an office in Cairo and was considering the opening of additional offices in other Mediterranean Partner countries. The importance of private investment as the main engine of growth and job creation in the region was recognised. It is essential that the efforts of the EIB through FEMIP, whose lending reached €2 billion in 2003, and those of other instruments and institutions, are accompanied by decisive regulatory reforms to facilitate investment, including foreign investment. Private investment is crucially dependent on the political, economic and social environment. Ministers agreed to work to improve the climate for encouraging private investment. A consistent effort to introduce regulatory reforms to provide a stable business-friendly environment is fundamental to promote productive investment. FEMIP should continue to develop its focus on private investment development including SMEs, and helping additional employment creation. In this respect, they also welcomed the work of the ANIMA network of investment promotion agencies which, subject to a positive evaluation, should continue to be supported. Regulatory reforms in the field of investment should be the subject of special attention in the Neighbourhood Action Plans and in the services liberalisation negotiations.

Regional Cooperation

60. Ministers confirmed the particular importance of cooperation among regions of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as being instrumental in providing the Barcelona Process with further visibility as well as in bringing the partnership closer to the civil societies of the region. In this context, they welcomed the various ongoing activities in the framework of the pilot project MED'ACT and took note of the conclusions of the meeting of Euro-Mediterranean mayors and of their representatives which was held in Brussels, on 16-17 February last, aiming at the implementation of a specific programme regarding the cooperation of Euro-Mediterranean local authorities.

VIII. SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND HUMAN PARTNERSHIP

Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures and Civilisations

61. Ministers agreed that the Foundation should be known as “The Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue of Cultures”. They accepted with gratitude the offer of Egypt and Sweden that it should have its headquarters in Alexandria Library in tandem with the Swedish Institute in Alexandria. Ministers noted that the Foundation would serve as a forum for frank and open discussions, open to all parties.
62. In recognition of the offers made by Cyprus, Italy and Malta, Minister also agreed that, in its activities with the network of networks, the Foundation would be particularly attentive to supporting events in those countries.
63. Ministers instructed the Euro-Mediterranean Committee to prepare as a matter of urgency a revised timetable for completing the work on all outstanding matters concerning the Foundation.
64. On the question of the financing, the importance of all parties contributing financially towards the cost of its establishment was recalled as indication of their political commitment and common ownership of the Foundation.

Education

65. Ministers underlined that education is one of the most important pillars for intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It is also of key importance in permitting the partners to participate fully in the knowledge economy. In this respect, Ministers took note of the successful implementation of the TEMPUS programme which, beyond the initial forecasts, has already become an important instrument in most countries. This programme, working through networks involving higher education institutions, ensures a lasting impact on education systems of the Mediterranean partners and helps to strengthen dialogue between cultures. In the same field, Ministers welcomed the substantial bilateral programmes financed under MEDA devoted to education and also agreed that this should continue to be a priority.

66. Concerning other MEDA regional actions in this area, Ministers noted the progress made: the launching of the Euromed Youth Platform for dialogue among representatives of youth organisations and the development of subsequent sub-regional meetings, such as the one that took place in Amman in March; the preparation of phase II of Euromed Audio-visual and the corresponding annual conference in Marseilles in April 2004 with a special emphasis on the legislative framework for a better circulation of audio-visual products in the region; the successful implementation of Euromed Heritage phase III and the organisation of a Conference to be held in June 2004 in Rome in order to cement its positive results. Ministers recalled the achievements within these existing regional actions and the need for the Euromed Foundation to avoid any duplication of effort with the ongoing MEDA programmes. They agreed to facilitate the participation of the civil societies of the region in the development of those programmes. According to the Naples Conclusions, Ministers confirmed their willingness to create a Euro-Mediterranean area of higher education based on the experience of the EULAC Common Space for Higher Education and on the Tempus-MEDA programme.

Justice and Home Affairs Issues

Migration

67. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of migration and expressed the view that, if carefully managed, migration can be a positive factor for the socio-economic growth of the whole region.
68. Migration can have an impact on the recipient society and on migrants themselves, e.g. the social conditions which migrants face and the attitudes of the host population. Migration is linked to the social, cultural and political integration of migrants. Promoting the successful integration of migrants in any country is therefore necessary but requires time and understanding; it is an area which needs to be pursued urgently.
69. In this context, Ministers reaffirmed the importance of a comprehensive approach towards migration and the social integration of legally residing migrants. They ensured that the dialogue and cooperation on migration which has started with some Mediterranean Partners would be extended to all partners. The dialogue should cover possibilities for intensified cooperation regarding the root causes of migration and the fight against illegal migration. Ministers confirmed an approach balancing the legitimate concerns of all partners.
70. It remains of key importance to tackle illegal migration via the Mediterranean Sea as well as associated criminal offences, including cross-border human trafficking. Concerted efforts by all members of the Barcelona Process should lead to a prevention of transporting illegal immigrants by sea, which has led to tragic accidents and loss of life in the past. Ministers agreed that the dialogue aims to ensure concrete and operational co-operation by all the relevant partners and their authorities in the region. Ministers renewed their commitment to the conclusion of re-admission agreements.

71. Ministers took note of developments in the first year of implementation of the regional programme covering the justice, police and migration sectors which permits experts and trainers from Euro-Mediterranean countries to work together in judicial co-operation in civil and penal matters, in the fight against terrorism, drugs and organised crime and in a joint approach to migration. In these sectors Ministers encouraged and supported the implementation of the actions identified respectively with the European Institute of Public Administration of Maastricht, the European Police College (CEPOL) and The European University Institute-Robert Schuman Centre of Florence. Ministers welcomed the creation of networks through these programmes, renewed their full support for their implementation and looked forward to the further development of this co-operation in the second phase of the programme due to start in 2005.

Civil Society

72. Ministers welcomed the work developed by civil society organisations since the Naples Ministerial meeting, in order to guarantee the continuity and impact of the work of the civil forums in the partnership. The aim has been to associate in a process of continuous co-operation the organisers of the previous civil forums, those of the upcoming ones and a permanent structure representative of the main themes of the partnership. In this respect, Ministers welcomed the organisation, through extensive and open national consultations, of the General Assembly to be held in June 2004 and the official launching of the Euromed Civil Forum Platform. The Commission indicated that the platform will be responsible, together with the Presidency's national representatives, and the Commission competent services for organising future civil forums.

Information and Visibility of the Barcelona Process

73. Ministers stressed their particular regret concerning the information deficit which still exists concerning the Barcelona Process. They gave their full support to the recently launched regional Information and Communication programme, and agreed that they would encourage all efforts at national and multilateral level to strengthen the visibility of the Barcelona Process and its perception by the general public, notably by facilitating the work of the programme with opinion leaders, with the media, official institutions, the business community and civil society.

IX. CONCLUSION

74. The meeting took place at a crucial time in the EU's relations with the Mediterranean region and beyond. It reaffirmed a strong political commitment to the Barcelona Process and all its activities. Ministers also reaffirmed that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership makes a distinct contribution to encouraging a process of political and economic progress for the benefit of the peoples of the region. Ministers took clear decisions on outstanding matters, and agreed to speed up the process of implementation of the commitments undertaken in the Valencia Action Plan and the conclusions of the Naples Foreign Ministers' meeting. Ministers approved the final decisions regarding the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue of Cultures. The meeting also provided an opportunity for an exchange of views between the EU and the partners on the European Neighbourhood Policy. Finally, Ministers availed themselves of the opportunity provided by the Dublin Ministerial meeting to pursue an intensive consultation on the principles, objectives and implementation measures of the proposed 'EU Strategic Partnership on the Mediterranean and the Middle East'. Ministers looked forward to considering these and other relevant issues at the next Euro-Mediterranean mid-term ministerial meeting which will take place during the Netherlands Presidency on 29/30 November 2004.
