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Speaking note

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Press Conference to launch first seven Action Plans under the
European Neighbourhood Policy

Brussels, 9 December 2004

- I am here to present to you our first Action Plans under the European Neighbourhood Policy. They have the potential to take our relationships with countries concerned a significant step forward.
- The European Neighbourhood Policy invites our neighbours to the East and to the South to share in the peace, stability and prosperity that we enjoy in the European Union. It aims to create a ring of friends around the borders of the new enlarged EU.
- Over the coming years the ENP will be of paramount importance for our External Relations policy and it is one of the top priorities for the new Commission.
- Let's be clear about what ENP is, and what it is not. It is not an Enlargement policy. It does not close any doors to European countries that may at some future point wish to apply for membership, but it does not provide a specific accession prospect either.
- What it is, is an offer. A substantial offer. The offer of much deeper cooperation and progressive integration into certain EU policies and programmes, depending on the fulfilment of commitments.
- The Action Plans set out precise steps agreed with each partner for the 3-5 years to come. You could see it as a statement of intent by our two sides.
- What is important is that each agreement has been tailor made to match the needs and the interests of the country concerned. Nothing is imposed in this policy! We are responding to longstanding requests in many cases, and we have been guided to a large extent by the wishes of the countries themselves. The further a partner is ready to go in taking practical steps to implement common values, the further the EU will be ready to go in strengthening our links with them.
- The ENP is a deal in the interests of both sides. It is a deal which prevents a new dividing line being drawn across Europe following Enlargement.
- The EU gains the benefits of a stable neighbourhood. Our assistance will support countries in their own economic and political reforms to spread the benefits of prosperity and democracy. This is good for us as well as our neighbours.
- The EU gains improved security around its borders. Increased cross border co operation will help us to tackle problems from migration to organised crime.
- The EU gains because our partners sign up to stronger commitments on the fight against terrorism, non-proliferation of WMD, and to the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts.
- Our partners gain: closer co operation, greater financial assistance, the chance to participate in EU programmes, and a stake in the biggest Single Market in the world.
- Concretely, they gain assistance to bring their laws and regulations in line with European standards to boost their access to the internal market
- They gain the chance to participate in a range of policies according to their interests, in areas like education, research, and the environment
- They gain the opportunity to work towards improved links to the EU in the fields of energy, transport and the information society.

The aim is to avoid a new dividing line being drawn across Europe following Enlargement.

Let me run through where we stand with the different partners involved.

- Ukraine is among the partners with which a draft Action Plan has been negotiated in the course of 2004. The Commission will present this Action Plan for Ukraine as a demonstration of our commitment to the country's future development. We recommend that the Council transmit this Action Plan to the EU – Ukraine Co-operation Council for approval, as soon as developments in Ukraine make it possible to envisage implementation of its provisions. Including, of course the holding of free and fair Presidential elections in accordance with OSCE standards.
- Once such elections have been held and a democratically elected government is in place, I plan to visit Kiev to agree on how we can work together to put the Action Plan into practice.
- Moldova is in a difficult situation with the persistence of the conflict over Transnistria. The Neighbourhood Policy provides an incentive for it to persist with political and economic reforms and to cooperate with the EU over a range of issues, including Justice and Home Affairs, where our own interests are also at stake.
- In the Mediterranean region, the Neighbourhood Policy is reinvigorating the Barcelona process. It has aroused considerable interest in the Mediterranean region.
- Morocco and Jordan have committed themselves to far-reaching reforms in this context. Tunisia, too, despite certain severe limitations on political freedom which need to be addressed, has committed itself to important reforms concerning human rights.
- We hope that the Neighbourhood Policy will encourage them to go further with sub-regional cooperation, in trade, energy, transport and other fields
- For Israel and the Palestinian authority, the Neighbourhood Policy is a concrete sign of the EU's engagement.
- On the Palestinian side we have obtained firm commitments to reform. In return, we have undertaken to continue our support, much of which is now being channelled through the World Bank Trust Fund.
- Israel clearly acknowledges the role of the EU in the Quartet and the need to take into account the viability of a future Palestinian state in counter-terrorist activities. Israel has never been willing to make such commitments in writing to any other partner.
- The same applies to the commitments Israel has entered into concerning WMD.
- Our intention is to integrate a second series of partner countries into the ENP during the course of next year: Egypt and Lebanon, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. We will launch this exercise by presenting country reports in February 2005, followed by consultations on Action Plans once the Council has given its green light.

- The Action Plans on the table today are the fruit of lot of work by a large number of different players - I would like in particular, of course to thank Günter Verheugen for all he did to make these Plans possible.
- I should stress that the plans are just a beginning: now we have to get down to work to make a reality of the commitments you see in the plans.
- I will be making sure we keep the momentum and really use these plans to breathe new life into partnerships with our neighbours.