

European Neighbourhood Watch

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Thinking ahead for Europe

The Ukraine Question

On 30 March 2012 senior officials of Ukraine and the European Union initialed in Brussels and the texts of an Association Agreement (AA) between the EU and Ukraine, and also the Deep and Comprehensive Free trade Agreement (DCFTA) as an integral part of the package.

'Initialing' signifies that the negotiations over the text have been concluded and agreed. However thus far there is no binding commitment. With signing there is a political commitment, but only after ratification is it legally binding. However the broad outlines of these agreements can be predicted. The AA will provide for a broad ranging agenda for future cooperation, with some crucial political language at the beginning, like the EU welcoming Ukraine's 'European choice' or 'aspirations'. The Ukrainian side has been pushing for language acknowledging Ukraine's 'membership perspective', but there has been no consensus among EU member states to agree this formulation. The DCFTA will doubtless provide for a phasing out of all industrial tariffs, with a limited opening of agricultural markets (zero tariff for some commodities, but only tariff-free quotas for some others). The two last sticking points in the negotiations seem to have been precisely the choice of political language (as above in inverted commas, or other variants), and the size of the tariff-free quotas for certain agricultural products. Otherwise the DCFTA will have a comprehensive agenda for Ukraine to align many technical standards and regulations on EU norms, and thus to eliminate many non-tariff barriers for goods and services, as well as provide the framework for extensive political dialogue.

Meanwhile, during the long period of negotiation of the AA and DCFTA, much has been happening in domestic Ukrainian politics and economics. Viktor Yanukovich became President in February 2010, but since then his political popularity has dropped to very low levels. Politically he is seen as sliding back towards an authoritarian regime buttressed by support from a group of oligarchs whose interests are deeply tangled up with the government, and by manipulation of the judiciary to political ends. The imprisonment of Yulia Timoshenko is the cause célèbre on the latter point, but far from the only case of politically motivated imprisonments. The economy is in deep trouble too. Loans from the IMF and EU have been agreed in principle, but their disbursement is on hold because of non-fulfillment of economic policy conditions.

The initialing of the AA and DCFTA now prompts the question when these texts will be signed, and on what conditions. One view that seems to be circulating in EU circles is not before the next EU-Ukraine summit, scheduled for December 2012, which would make it possible to see how

the parliamentary elections to be held in October will be managed. In addition, there is the view that release of Yulia Timoshenko from prison should be a precondition. However this is not the only view. Another proposition is that signing should be done without such a long delay or preconditions. If Yanukovich displays no serious interest in implementing the AA or respecting the political values built into it, the EU still has the ratification process in hand. The conditionality instrument is not lost.

The case for the one or other course of action is quite complex, with substantial arguments on both sides.

The arguments for delay with serious conditionality seem to be the following:

- A/ to avoid giving a political present to Yanukovich, helping his party's prospects in the forthcoming parliamentary elections,
- B/ to put pressure on Yanukovich to permit free and fair elections,
- C/ to help get Yulia Timoshenko and others out of prison.

On the other hand the arguments in favour of swifter signing would be the following:

- A/ to lock Ukraine in with treaty level commitments,
- B/ to provide encouragement and reference texts to Ukrainian civil society and reform-minded groups, and avoid creating the sentiment in public opinion that the EU is abandoning Ukraine, which links to the final consideration ...
- C/ to avoid giving Putin the time and opportunity in which to exploit Ukraine's evident vulnerabilities, in order more precisely to get Yanukovich to agree to join the Russian-led customs union, which would mean torpedoing the AA and DCFTA with the EU.

Since all these arguments have some plausibility, which of them should be decisive for the EU's political choice? The fundamental issue is how far the EU should employ political conditionality in its external relations, and notably in cases where there is no membership perspective at stake, and where other powerful external actors pursue their objectives without regard for the same political norms.

The EU has had little difficulty agreeing these days to sanction both Belarus and Syria. But these are five-star pariah states. Ukraine may be sliding into more authoritarian mode of government, but it far from being a Belarus, and of course even less a Syria. Many countries in the European neighbourhood are in intermediate political regime categories, far from high European standards of democracy, including all three South

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Caucasus states, and almost all the Arab world even today after the Arab Spring. Turkey also is sliding towards greater authoritarianism.

There is the inescapable issue for all proponents of tough EU political conditionality of understanding correctly the balance cost and benefits for the partner state to acquiesce in EU conditions. When the context is one of acknowledged membership perspective, the incentive is big in political and economic terms, and the democratic legitimacy of the process is also clearly established. The first best option in the case of Ukraine would be indeed to grant the consistently requested membership perspective. Regrettably the EU has not yet been able to agree this. Without membership perspective the cost-benefit ratios for incumbent regimes to change political course will not look impressive, in particular for partner states which are somewhere in the middle ground between high quality democracy and the pariah dictatorship or failed state.

And then the costs and benefits of responding to the offers of other major powers had to be added to the equation. China is nowadays offering huge sums of money all over the world alongside zero political conditionality, and an explicitly anti-conditionality doctrine known as non-interference.

But closer to home for Ukraine is Russia, whose game is clear enough. Putin, in his recent election campaign, has set re-integration of the post-Soviet space as an explicit priority. The instruments for this are widening of the customs union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia and development of the EurAsian Economic Area. In addition we have a fairly clear view of Putin’s negotiation methods, which easily slip into the category of the semi-coercive. In Russia’s dealings with Ukraine the gas price, pipeline politics and finance are the trump cards. When Yanukovich agreed a long-term extension of the leasing of the Sevastopol naval base soon after taking office in 2010, the only counterpart was a short-term discount on the gas price. Currently Russia pushes for joint ownership of the gas pipeline network in Ukraine, while at the same time building competing projects to weaken Ukraine’s strategic positioning in this sector (the North Stream now built, and the South Stream planned). Ukraine is now in a fairly desperate need for macro-financial assistance, with funding from both the IMF and EU available in principle but on hold because of non-fulfillment of conditions. Russia pushes Ukraine over possible accession to its customs union, which Ukraine so far rejects, and quite reasonably so its first best solution, both economically and politically, would be to have free trade agreements with both. Ukraine already has a free trade agreement with the CIS, and has now initialled the DCFTAS with the EU. If in these circumstances Russia pressures Ukraine to join the customs union this would amount to crude geo-political semi-coercion, with a view to torpedoing EU-Ukraine relations.

More constructively Putin has also been arguing recently for a mega free trade area from Lisbon to Vladivostok as a long-run project. While it remains to be seen whether this is a serious idea or just for show, the EU should signal its interest in this, while joining with Ukraine in rejecting firmly the Russian customs union proposal. To make this

absolutely clear the EU should press ahead and sign the AA and DCFTA without delay. Leave the resolution of political conditionality matters for the subsequent ratification period.

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ENPI Info Centre: EU Neighbourhood Library – your online ENP and ENPI documents database

Brussels, [Link to the DATABASE](#)

The EU Neighbourhood Library is a user-friendly online database bringing together the key documents that guide EU relations with the ENP and ENPI partner countries.

This database allows you to search and download a wide range of materials drawn from official EU sources and EU-funded projects in the neighbourhood. These range from Association Agreements and Country reports to essential policy documents and research generated by the projects. The search can be made by country, by theme, by source, by policy, by date of publication and by keyword.

Documents can be downloaded in their original language (mainly English or French) as well as any other language versions in which they are available.

Additionally, the ENPI Info Centre has translated into the relevant local languages a selection of key documents governing regional and bilateral relations. As unofficial translations, these have no legal value (see Disclaimer).

Each document has a short description in English, and links to all the language versions available.

Registered users can bookmark their documents and have the possibility to suggest documents to be included to the data pool.

This Data Base is an indispensable tool for think tanks, academics, public servants, media, civil society and others interested to know how the Partnership works.

The EU Neighbourhood Info Centre was launched by the European Commission in January 2009 to make more known the relationship between the EU, its nine partner countries in the Mediterranean and seven neighbours and partners in the East.

EU and Ukraine to initial association agreement

Brussels, 22 March 2012. [Link](#)

Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Štefan Füle met with the Energy Minister of Ukraine Yuriy Boyko in Brussels late Thursday. They discussed recent developments in bilateral relations, including the text of the Association Agreement, which was finalised last December and will be initialled in Brussels on 30 March. Commissioner Füle recalled that the signature and the ratification of the Association Agreement will depend on political circumstances in Ukraine, notably in relation to respect for common values and the rule of law.

In the context of the energy sector Commissioner Füle stated: “The overall goal of the Ukrainian government for closer integration with the EU cannot be achieved without transparency in the energy sphere.” He noted in this regard the provisions of the Energy Community Treaty and also those of the Association Agreement, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. “Meeting your energy commitments is very important to us and we should continue to work hard so that the opportunities foreseen by the Energy Community Treaty could be used to the full benefit of Ukraine,” Commissioner Füle said. He added that this was also essential for the country’s future energy security and independence.

He also mentioned the EU’s support for Ukrainian efforts to move towards a market oriented price for its gas, in line with the requirements of the IMF, and declared the willingness of the EU to participate in trilateral discussions regarding the modernization of the Ukrainian gas transit system. Such an approach would logically represent the producer, transit country and the consumer. “I am pleased that Ukraine has reaffirmed its interest in having trilateral energy consultations together with Russia,” Commissioner Füle said after his meeting with Minister Boyko.

EEAS Deputy Secretary General Helga Schmid meets with Eugenia Tymoshenko
Brussels, 2 March 2012. [Link](#)

The Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service, Helga Schmid, today met Ms Eugenia Tymoshenko, the daughter of Ukrainian opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko. DSG Helga Schmid and Ms Tymoshenko discussed Yulia Tymoshenko’s conditions under detention, including different reports on her deteriorating state of health and her access to independent medical advice and treatment. In this regard, Ms Eugenia Tymoshenko reiterated the need for urgent and adequate medical treatment to be provided to her mother.

DSG Helga Schmid recalled the EU’s disappointment with the conduct of the prosecution as well as the verdict and the appeals process in the case of Yulia Tymoshenko, and expressed the need for a solution to the other outstanding cases of selective justice in Ukraine.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss recent developments in Ukraine and the prospects for EU-Ukraine relations, bearing in mind Yulia Tymoshenko’s strong support for the finalisation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.

Council conclusions on Belarus
22 and 23 March 2012. [Link](#)

1. Recalling the Council conclusions on 31 January 2011 and 20 June 2011, the Council reiterates its grave concern about the continued lack of respect for human rights, democracy

and rule of law in Belarus, and regrets that further repressive measures have taken place.

2. As the political prisoners have not been released and rehabilitated, and against the background of the further deterioration of the situation, the Council decided to designate additional persons responsible for serious violations of human rights or the repression of civil society and democratic opposition, to the list of those subject to travel restrictions and assets freezes. The Council also decided to designate further businessmen and companies benefitting from or supporting the regime and will agree further such designations at upcoming Council meetings if all Belarusian political prisoners are not released. The EU’s restrictive measures remain open and under constant review.

3. The EU calls for the immediate release and rehabilitation of all remaining political prisoners. It condemns the rejection of the appeal of human rights defender and political prisoner Ales Byalyatski as well as the sentencing to two years in prison of Syarhei Kavalenka. The EU is deeply concerned about reports of torture and inhumane prison conditions of political prisoners, such as of former presidential candidates Andrei Sannikaw and Mikalay Statkevich and activists Dzmitry Bandarenka, Dzmitry Dashkevich and Mikalay Awtukhovich. The Council reminds the Belarusian authorities of their obligation under international law to ensure the respect of the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and of their responsibility to investigate reports thereof.

4. Recalling the statement of HR Ashton of 17 March 2012, the EU strongly condemns the execution of Uladzislaw Kavalyow and Dzmitry Kanavalaw. The EU reiterates its call on the authorities of Belarus to join a global moratorium on the death penalty as a first step towards its universal abolition. The EU opposes capital punishment under all circumstances.

5. The EU reiterates its call on the Belarusian authorities to stop all harassment of members of the opposition, human rights defenders, journalists and civil society, and not to hinder their freedom of movement. The EU also condemns the suppression of non-violent protests and the systematic use of the judicial system as a means of repression, including against peaceful protesters. It is furthermore strongly concerned about the introduction of new legislation that will further restrict the Belarusian citizens’ freedoms of assembly, association and the free flow of information on the internet, as well as the provision of support to civil society.

6. The Council again urges Belarus to respect internationally recognised diplomatic immunities and privileges of EU diplomatic representations and their personnel in Minsk and to stop the ongoing harassment and intimidation.

7. In the context of the upcoming 2014 World Ice Hockey Championship, the EU will keep International and National Ice Hockey Federations informed about its deep concerns as regards the lack of respect by Belarus for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles.

8. The EU reiterates its firm commitment to strengthening its engagement with the Belarusian people and civil society and to supporting the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people. The Council welcomes that the EU is now launching a “European dialogue on modernisation” with the Belarusian society on necessary reforms for the modernisation of Belarus and on the related potential development of relations with the EU, as well as possible EU support in this regard.

9. The EU calls on the Belarusian authorities to follow up on their previously announced intention to initiate a national dialogue with civil society and the opposition to pave the way for the holding of parliamentary elections in 2012 in line with international norms and standards. The EU calls on the Belarusian authorities to cooperate within the OSCE in view of a re-opening of the OSCE field presence in Belarus, and to adhere to and implement OSCE commitments across all three dimensions, in particular in the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

10. The EU reiterates its readiness to launch negotiations for visa facilitation and readmission agreements which would enhance people-to-people contacts to the benefit of the Belarusian population at large, and strongly regrets the unconstructive position of the Belarusian authorities in not responding so far to the letter sent in June 2011 inviting them to start negotiations. In order to facilitate the issuing of visas to the Belarusian public, the Council welcomes that the EU Member States will strive to make optimal use of the existing flexibilities offered by the Visa Code, in particular the possibilities to waive and reduce visa fees for certain categories of Belarusian citizens or in individual cases. The Council recalls the possibilities of facilitating movement of persons living in border areas, and calls on the authorities of Belarus to take the necessary steps for the entry into force of all local border traffic agreements with its neighbouring EU member states in accordance with the EU acquis on local border traffic.

11. The Council will continue to follow closely the situation in Belarus. The Council reiterates its commitment to the policy of critical engagement, including through dialogue and the Eastern Partnership, and recalls that the development of bilateral relations is conditional on progress towards respect by Belarus for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The EU remains willing to assist Belarus to meet its obligations in this regard.

Council reinforces restrictive measures against Belarusian regime

Brussels, 23 March 2012. [Link](#)

Against the background of the further deterioration of the situation in Belarus, the Council today strengthened restrictive measures against those responsible for the repression of civil society in that country.

The Council added 12 persons to the list of those targeted by a travel ban and an asset freeze. They include individuals benefiting from and supporting the regime as well as persons responsible for the repression of civil society and the democratic opposition in Belarus.

In addition, the Council froze the assets of 29 entities, which are controlled by persons subject to restrictive measures due to their role in supporting the regime.

EU High Representative Catherine Ashton said: “Our decision today comes in response to the negative developments we have seen in Belarus. The situation is getting worse and the authorities are tightening their grip on civil society. Instead of increasing repression, Belarus must release and rehabilitate all political prisoners and roll back its repressive policies.”

Today’s decisions come in addition to already existing measures: more than 200 individuals are already subject to a travel ban and a freeze of their assets within the EU. Moreover, the assets of three companies linked to the regime are already frozen while exports to Belarus of arms and material for internal repression are prohibited.

The legal acts, including the list of additional designations, will be published in the EU Official Journal of 24 March.

Spokesperson of HRVP on the execution of Uladzislaw Kavalyow in Belarus

Brussels, 17 March 2012. [Link](#)

The High Representative strongly condemns the execution of Uladzislaw Kavalyow. He was sentenced to death in November 2011, together with Dzmitry Kanavalaw, whose fate remains unknown.

The High Representative is aware of the terrible crimes that these two men were accused of and her thoughts are with the victims and their families. At the same time, the High Representative notes that the two accused were not accorded due process including the right to defend themselves.

The European Union opposes capital punishment under all circumstances. The death penalty is considered to be a cruel and inhuman punishment, which fails to act as a deterrent and represents an unacceptable denial of human dignity and integrity. Therefore the High Representative calls on Belarus, the only country in Europe still applying it, to join a global moratorium on the death penalty as a first step towards its universal abolition.

Related Documents:

Schulz appalled at reported execution of Uladzislaw Kavalyow in Belarus

[Download here.](#)

EPP Group condemns the execution of Uladzislaw Kavalyow and Dzmitry Kanavalaw

[Download here.](#)

HRVP Ashton and Commissioner Füle on the election of the President of the Republic of MoldovaBrussels, 16 March 2012. [Link](#)

We welcome the successful outcome of the presidential election in Chisinau, by which the members of the Moldovan Parliament have demonstrated their sense of responsibility before the citizens of the Republic of Moldova. This paves the way for an inclusive dialogue between all political factions with a view to responding further to the economic and social aspirations of the country and consolidating Moldovan society. The EU warmly congratulates President Nicolae Timofti on his election and stands ready to work with him in support of democracy, reforms and the ambitious EU approximation agenda, as well as on the early and peaceful settlement of the Transnistria conflict.

Schulz congratulates Timofti for election as Moldova's presidentBrussels, 16 March 2012. [Link](#)

I congratulate Nicolae Timofti for his election as President of Moldova. I am happy that the Moldovan people finally have a president after 2.5-year long institutional stalemate.

The European Parliament was heavily involved in helping Moldova to overcome this challenge.

I welcome the newly elected president's declared support for the pro-European course of his country. I am looking forward to meeting him in the European Parliament.

Now that Moldova has overcome its institutional problems, its leadership should focus on the ambitious European reform agenda. Moldova can count on the European Parliament's support in this endeavour.

The two immediate and important challenges are the upcoming launch of talks on the deep and comprehensive free trade area and the next round of negotiations on Transnistria settlement in Vienna.

I regret that the Communist party boycotted the presidential election. Moldova now needs more than ever national unity and cooperation of all political forces in implementing all reforms related to the European integration agenda.

Statement in agreement with the EU Heads of MissionChisinau, 14 March 2012. [Link](#)

The EU Delegation deeply regrets the decision of the City Council of Bălți which seeks to "prohibit the [...] propaganda of non-traditional sexual orientations", and similar decisions taken in the city of Anenii Noi and the villages of Chetriș and Hiliuți in the Fălești District.

The EU Delegation is concerned about these manifestations of intolerance and discrimination affecting minorities, and in particular lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons, and more generally with any attempts to restrict the universal rights of human beings on a discriminatory basis.

The EU Delegation rejects and condemns such unacceptable violations of human rights. Sexual orientation and gender identity cannot in any way justify or serve as a pretext for restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association or other fundamental freedoms.

The EU Delegation considers that the above-mentioned decisions constitute violations of human rights and discrimination against LGBT persons, by restricting freedom of expression and freedom of association and assembly. The EU Delegation believes that these decisions do not respect the international human rights standards to which the Republic of Moldova has committed, including by joining the Council of Europe and ratifying the United Nations' Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

We call on the Moldovan authorities at all levels to demonstrate and ensure respect for the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of which human rights apply equally to every human being.

Commission President following his meeting with Mr Serzh Sargsyan, President of ArmeniaBrussels, 6 March 2012. [Link](#)

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure to welcome President Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia to Brussels. We just had a very constructive meeting.

My message to the President today was very clear: we fully support the President's reform and modernization agenda, and we remain committed to deepen our engagement with Armenia in the framework of the Eastern Partnership.

And I am happy to say that because of this reformist drive our relations are moving forward and making good progress.

Indeed, we are now ready to launch talks on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, which is part and parcel of the Association Agreement that we are already negotiating with Armenia. This is to a large extent, the result of Armenia's efforts to comply with our 'key recommendations'. I congratulate you on your leadership in this process, Mr President.

The opening of the DCFTA negotiations marks a turning point in our trading and economic relationship, providing new opportunities for our citizens and businesses. This is also a sign that our ties are getting stronger.

Armenia should now continue to advance in its trade and trade-related reforms and work towards reaching a stable,

transparent and predictable economic environment. This is essential, we believe, to attract foreign investment and also to stimulate growth and job creation.

The relationship between the European Union and Armenia is not only about the economy or trade or mobility, we have discussed these issues. But it is also about the universal values that we share. Democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law are at the core of the Association Agreement that we are negotiating with Armenia and they are the solid foundations of our present and also our future relations.

I trust that you, Mr President, will continue to pursue reforms to strengthen democratic institutions, to enhance the independence of the judiciary, to encourage political pluralism and media freedom, and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

The next parliamentary and presidential elections will be an important benchmark in Armenia reform's path. I am reassured by the President's commitment that these elections will be conducted in accordance with democratic international standards – and just now the President has reiterated that very clearly to me. You can count with our support in this regard.

Peace and regional stability are also necessary to advance our common goals. I re-affirmed the urgent need to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The EU continues to support the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group and we stand ready, in full complementarity with the Minsk Group, to provide enhanced support for confidence building measures if the parties so wish.

I am convinced that with strong political will on both sides there is a solution to end this conflict. In parallel with an agenda for reforms we also need an agenda for peace.

There is still a long road ahead to continue and complete the important negotiations in which we are engaged and to strengthen our partnership with Armenia. We have discussed this, it is a process, but a process in which I believe we can also achieve success.

From the part of the European Commission, you, Mr President, and Armenia can count on a steadfast friend and partner.

I thank you for your attention.

President of the European Council, following the meeting with Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia
Brussels, 6 March 2012. [Link](#)

I am happy to welcome President Sargsyan to Brussels. Last time we saw each other was in Warsaw at the Eastern Partnership summit. And like last time, we had a good discussion on a wide range of issues of the bilateral and regional agenda.

I would like to make three short points:

First. As you know, the EU is, at its heart, a community of values. Ultimately, these values guide our policies, and these values are reflected in our approach to partners, in this case to Armenia as to the other countries in the Eastern partnership.

I was therefore happy to welcome your, Mr President, commitment to reforms. We encourage Armenia to continue on the path of reforms. This provides the basis for the deepening and broadening of our bilateral relationship. It also shows your readiness to engage with the EU in an "EU-Armenian Partnership for reform".

I was also happy to hear that you once again confirmed your intention to do all you can to ensure that the Parliamentary elections in May and the Presidential elections next year will be conducted in conformity with international standards.

Second. There is good progress being made in the bilateral EU-Armenia relationship. The Association Agreement negotiations continue to progress at good pace. The EU side has been able to give the green light to launch negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area.

And, a couple of days ago, negotiations were launched on Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements, as a first step towards visa liberalization.

And third. On the region and the challenges for a peaceful settlement: It is well known that the EU wants to see progress on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which remains a high priority of the EU's foreign policy. Progress is crucially important.

In this regard, the EU reiterates its support for the Madrid principles and calls on Armenia and Azerbaijan to step up their efforts to reach agreement on those principles as a basis for peace.

The increased tension along the Line of Contact, is a reason for concern, and underlines the importance of steps to implement the ceasefire and to adopt appropriate confidence building measures.

Local EU Statement on the release of Mr Elshan Hasanov

Baku, 02 March 2012. [Link](#)

The EU Delegation welcomes the release on 22/02/2012 of Mr. Elshan Hasanov, who was jailed as a result of his participation to the peaceful events of April 2, 2011.

This is an important step taken by Azerbaijan in its efforts to strengthen the respect for fundamental rights and freedoms in the country. The EU Delegation hopes that the decision will encourage the release of all other participants to the April 2nd rally.

The EU Delegation will continue to assist Azerbaijan in fulfilling its commitments with regards to democracy and rule of law.

The negotiations on Visa Facilitation between Azerbaijan and the EU started

Baku, 05 March 2012. [Link](#)

On 01-02 March 2012 the European Union (EU) held its first round of the negotiations on the visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Azerbaijan. The visa facilitation and readmission negotiations follow the political commitment taken at the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit in May 2009 regarding the improvement of people-to-people contacts.

“This is an important moment in the EU-Azerbaijan cooperation as we have concretely started to negotiate the visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Azerbaijan. We have had very fruitful 2 days of negotiations, where Azerbaijan demonstrated full and deep commitment and a constructive attitude. Visa facilitation and readmission agreements negotiations constitute the two sides of the same coin, which each partner will reach at its own pace depending on the political will of the country. We are aware that that is also something that the people of Azerbaijan is looking forward to”, said Ambassador Roland Kobia, Head of EU Delegation to Azerbaijan following the negotiations.

The Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements Negotiations were conducted between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented by Mahmud Mammadguliyev, Deputy Foreign Minister and chief negotiator and Parviz Musayev, deputy chief of the State Migration Service and the EU mission cochaired by Rob Rozenburg, Deputy Head of International Affairs Unit and Diederik Paalman, Deputy Head of Visa Policy Unit (both from EU Commission Directorate for Home Affairs).

The Visa Facilitation agreement is aimed at the facilitation of personal interaction between the EU and Azerbaijan’s people. The two agreements discussed include reduced visa fees for all citizens; issuance of visas for an intended stay of no more than 90 days per period of 180 days, fee waivers for certain categories of people; a maximum processing time of 10 calendar days; simplified supporting document requirements; wider issuance of multiple-entry visas for certain categories; and enhanced mobility in a secured and well-managed environment.

The Readmission Agreement will stipulate mechanisms for the return of nationals staying without authorisation on the territories of the EU or Azerbaijan.

The two aforementioned Agreements are interlinked like “twins” and can be signed and come in vigour only together. Both Agreements must be looked in the broader context of Eastern Partnership (EaP). Lifting the EU visa requirement for the citizens of partner states travelling to the EU is one

of the EaP’s key, although long-term, objectives. In the shorter perspective, the EaP envisages visa facilitation and readmission agreements (already signed with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia).

Mobility of citizens (achieved through visa facilitation and readmission agreements) remains one of the core objectives and partner countries are promised visa-free regime with the EU in due course.

Intimidation Campaign against Azerbaijani Journalist Khadija Ismayilova

20 February 2012. [Link](#)

The EU is deeply disturbed by the intimidation of the independent journalist Khadija Ismayilova through the posting of a video of intimate nature on the internet. Such action represents a deplorable interference in the journalist’s private life and has no place in a tolerant society such as Azerbaijan. Journalists must be able to work unhindered and without intimidation.

The EU welcomes the authorities’ decision to investigate the incident and calls for the perpetrators to be brought to justice swiftly. Moreover, the EU calls on the authorities to ensure the necessary protection of Ms Ismayilova given that she is presently the victim of a defamation campaign.

Spokesperson of HRVP on the elections in the breakaway region of South Ossetia in Georgia

Brussels, 26 March 2012 . [Link](#)

In view of the reports about the elections in the Georgian breakaway region of South Ossetia on the 25 March, this statement is to recall that the European Union does not recognise the constitutional and legal framework within which these elections have taken place.

The High Representative reiterates her support to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia, as recognised by international law. The High Representative would in this context like to emphasize the importance of the Geneva International Discussions in ensuring the security and stability in the region.

Local EU Statement on the elections in the breakaway region of Abkhazia in Georgia

Tbilisi, 12 March 2012. [Link](#)

In view of the reports about the elections in the Georgian breakaway region of Abkhazia on the 10 March, the EU Delegation recalls that the European Union does not

recognise the constitutional and legal framework within which these elections have taken place.

The EU Delegation reiterates its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. The EU Delegation also emphasises the importance that the EU places on finding a peaceful settlement to the conflicts in the region and calls for strong commitment by all concerned parties in this regard

EU increases its support to the Criminal Justice Reform process in Georgia

Brussels, 29 February 2012. [Link](#)

Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle, and Vice-Prime Minister of Georgia and State Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration, Giorgi Baramidze, signed a financing agreement for a new programme of support to criminal justice reform in Georgia in Brussels today.

The programme is designed to strengthen the rule of law and human rights in Georgia, in line with the country's own international commitments. This will be done by promoting restorative justice, improving prison conditions, or offering alternatives to imprisonment, such as a community work or early release.

Commissioner Füle said: "Georgia has made significant progress in reforming its Criminal Justice System in the recent years. This new programme aims to build on what Georgia has achieved so far with our support; helping to reduce the prison population and further increase human rights. I am pleased to see that it will also cut down the number of long prison sentences for young people who committed minor crimes, offering them instead alternatives such as community service, vocational training or education."

The programme aims to build on the results already achieved in the course of the previous support the EU has granted to Georgia in the criminal justice sector. The three-year programme, launched today, seeks to achieve five main objectives:

- To carry out sound criminal justice policies and practices in line with Council of Europe standards;
- To continue reforms of juvenile justice in compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- To improve the conditions of convicted prisoners in line with European standards, particularly regarding overcrowding, living standards, healthcare and legal safeguards;
- To support the Probation Service on the rehabilitation and reconciliation of probationers, and by a broader adoption of non-custodial measures;
- To improve access to justice for the citizens of Georgia through a stronger Legal Aid Service and ensuring the independence of the Public Defender's Office;

The most relevant national authorities and civil society groups will be involved in the reform process.

In their bilateral meeting, Mr Füle and Mr Baramidze also discussed the recent developments and progress made in the EU-Georgia relations, including the need to pursue the reforms, the imminent start of negotiations on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) and the way ahead in the area of mobility. Furthermore, they took stock of activities within the framework of the Eastern Partnership as a specific Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

HRVP on the presidential elections in Russia

Brussels, 5 March 2012. [Link](#)

As Russia's strategic partner and direct neighbour, the EU has followed with particular interest the election process and the public debate in Russia on the State Duma elections of last December and the Presidential elections held yesterday.

The EU takes note of the preliminary results of the presidential elections and the clear victory of Vladimir Putin. International election observers from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) noted the significant civic engagement in the campaign and that authorities allowed protests to take place without undue interference, but also identified shortcomings and irregularities in the preparations and conduct of these elections and that voters' choice was limited. The EU encourages Russia to address these shortcomings.

The EU looks forward to working with the incoming Russian President and the new government in full support of our shared modernisation agenda, which we see as covering both economic and political reforms. We trust the new Russian President will be ready to take these reforms forward, in dialogue with citizens and civil society.

Related Documents:

Statement to the European parliament on the outcome of Presidential elections in Russia on behalf of HR Catherine Ashton delivered by Danish Foreign Minister Villy Søvndal

[Download here.](#)

Russia: MEPs want Mr Putin to engage in dialogue with protestors

[Download here.](#)

Council conclusions on Syria
Brussels, 22 and 23 March 2012. [Link](#)

1. The European Union is increasingly appalled by the unfolding situation in Syria and recalls the European Council conclusions on Syria of 1 and 2 March 2012. The EU strongly condemns the continued brutal attacks and systematic human rights violations by the Syrian regime, including the use of heavy weaponry in civilian areas, which risk exacerbating further the spiral of violence, sectarian clashes and militarisation, and endanger the stability of the region. President Assad must step aside to allow for a peaceful and democratic transition. The EU also condemns recent bomb attacks in Damascus and Aleppo causing scores of death and injuries. Acts of terrorism cannot be justified under any circumstances.

2. The European Union reiterates its deepest concerns at the increasingly worsening humanitarian plight of the Syrian civilian population as a result of continuous and widespread violence. The Syrian authorities must grant immediate, unimpeded and full access of humanitarian organisations to all areas of Syria in order to allow them to deliver humanitarian assistance and medical care. In this regard, the EU welcomes the recent visit of USG Valerie Amos to Syria and her efforts to agree a clear framework of humanitarian access with the Syrian authorities and takes note of the start of the preliminary humanitarian assessment in Syria. It also welcomes the outcomes of the Syria Humanitarian Forum, held in Geneva on 8 March, as well as the UN Security Council statement of 1 March 2012, deploring the humanitarian situation in Syria. It fully supports measures aimed at ensuring a coordinated, rapid and effective humanitarian response of the international community. In the light of growing needs, the EU and Member States have increased their financial support to humanitarian organisations and will continue to mobilise the necessary assistance. The EU is greatly concerned by reports of anti-personnel land mines being laid along the Syrian borders aiming to prevent Syrians from fleeing.

3. The EU welcomes the recent visit to Damascus of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States Kofi Annan and urges the Syrian authorities to cooperate fully with him. The EU recalls its full support for his mission and his efforts to stop violence and facilitate a peaceful Syrian-led and inclusive dialogue leading to a political solution that meets the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people on the basis of the UN General Assembly resolution of 16 February 2012 and League of Arab States resolutions, in particular those of 22 January, 12 February and 10 March 2012.

4. The EU reiterates its call for the UN Security Council to agree urgently on a resolution on Syria in order to obtain the cessation of violence, immediate and unhindered humanitarian access and leading to a political process in response to the aspirations of the Syrian people. It calls on all members of the Security Council, particularly Russia and China, to work together in an effort to stop the violence and to support fully the implementation of the League of Arab States resolutions. The EU welcomes the UNSC Presidential

Statement of 21 March expressing its gravest concern at the deteriorating situation in Syria and full support to the efforts of the Joint Special Envoy of the UN and the LAS, Kofi Annan.

5. The EU welcomes the outcome of the debate of the UN Human Rights Council on Syria on 12 March 2012 and the adoption of the HRC resolution on 23 March 2012 on the human rights situation in the country and the extension of the mandate of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry. There must be a full investigation of the findings of the Commission of Inquiry which pointed to crimes against humanity and other gross violations of human rights committed in the country. The EU reaffirms that there should be no impunity for the perpetrators of such alleged crimes.

6. The European Union supports the Syrian opposition in its struggle for freedom, dignity and democracy for the Syrian people. The EU stands ready to step up its engagement with all representative members of Syrian opposition which adhere to non violence, inclusiveness and democratic values as they make progress to form a broad and inclusive platform. The Syrian National Council, recognised by the EU as a legitimate representative of Syrians, and other representatives of the opposition must unite now in the peaceful struggle for a new Syria that is democratic, pluralistic, stable and guarantees human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, and where all citizens enjoy equal rights regardless of their affiliations, ethnicity, belief or gender. To this end, the EU urges all representative members of the opposition to set up an inclusive coordination mechanism under the auspices of the League of Arab States and to agree on a set of shared principles for working towards an orderly and peaceful transition.

7. Given the Syrian regime's continued use of violence against civilians, the EU approved today further designations of persons and entities to be subject to restrictive measures. The EU will continue its policy of imposing additional measures targeting the regime, not the civilian population, as long as repression continues. The EU will also continue to urge the international community to join its efforts, in taking steps to apply and enforce restrictive measures and sanctions on the Syrian regime and its supporters. It calls on all Syrians to disassociate themselves from the repressive policy of the regime in order to facilitate a political transition.

8. As soon as a genuine democratic transition begins, the EU is ready to develop a new and ambitious partnership with Syria across all areas of mutual interest, including by mobilising assistance, strengthening trade and economic relations and supporting transitional justice and the political transition.

Council tightens EU sanctions against Syrian regime

Brussels, 23 March 2012. [Link](#)

Given the Syrian regime's continued use of violence against civilians, the Council today reinforced the EU's restrictive measures once more.

The Council targeted 12 persons associated with the repression or supporting or benefitting from the regime with a ban on entering the EU. The assets of some individuals and of two additional entities will be frozen within the EU. This brings the number of designated persons to 126 and the total of targeted entities to 41.

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton said:

"The repression has reached totally unacceptable levels of violence and must stop immediately. Today's decisions aim to weaken the regime's resources and its ability to conduct its brutal campaign."

The legal acts will be published in the EU Official Journal on 24 March.

This is the thirteenth time that the EU imposes sanctions since the Syrian regime started to violently repress the uprising in 2011.

HRVP following her meeting with Secretary General of the League of Arab States

Brussels, 20 March 2012. [Link](#)

On Monday, I met the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, Dr Nabil Al Araby. The EU's relations with the LAS are essential for our engagement in our common neighbourhood. Since I took office we have intensified our cooperation and dialogue on many matters of common interest and I am grateful for the excellent cooperation with Dr Al Araby.

Above all, we discussed the appalling situation in Syria. I reaffirmed our strong support for the LAS plan. We agreed that the most urgent priority should be to stop the killing and reiterated once more our call on the regime to stop all acts of violence. Members of the UNSC should assume their responsibilities and speak with a strong and united voice to achieve this.

I reiterated the EU's full support to the efforts of the Special Envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League, Kofi Annan. We are determined to support his efforts to bring an end to all violence and human rights violations and promote a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis.

The Syrian regime needs to continue to engage with Kofi Annan and fully cooperate with him. We also discussed the humanitarian situation and both expressed our support for

the work of the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, and reiterated our call for unhindered humanitarian access.

We discussed the Middle East Peace Process, which remains high on the EU's agenda. On Wednesday, I will be hosting the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting. I will also meet the Quartet envoys to follow-up on last week's Principal's meeting.

More EU support for the victims of Syria's humanitarian crisis

Brussels, 22 March 2012. [Link](#)

Responding to the continuous deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria and on its borders, the European Commission is allocating an additional €7 million to finance life-saving assistance to those who have been wounded or forced to flee the ongoing violence in the country. This brings the overall contribution by the Commission to €10 million.

Kristalina Georgieva, Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, who has repeatedly called for full and independent access for humanitarian workers, said: "Every day, the situation inside Syria becomes more and more dramatic. One year of escalating violence has caused massive suffering among the Syrian population. Too many civilians have died. Too many families are forced to flee their homes. A large part of the population now experiences shortages of food, fuel and medical care.

"I am gravely concerned for those who urgently need humanitarian support to survive. It is for their sake that we are boosting our support to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other humanitarian organisations and that we are supporting all initiatives aimed at facilitating urgent humanitarian access. A daily humanitarian truce is absolutely vital in order to provide assistance when people are in most dire need of help. The European Commission is fully mobilised to help meet the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people both inside and outside the country through the work of humanitarian organisations in accordance to the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality". This new funding will continue to help the tens of thousands of Syrians who have fled beyond the borders to seek protection in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq. It will also provide more help to those who have remained in Syria once unimpeded access is possible.

Information on the situation on the ground in Syria still remains scarce, due to the severely limited access of humanitarian agencies to the areas where violence is most prevalent. However, through partial access to victims, the first funding decision of €3 million was used to protect medical missions and to give medical assistance to hospitals and medical facilities, as well as for protection to people who had fled their homes and found safety in neighbouring countries.

The Commission will channel the funding through its humanitarian partners including the ICRC and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid based on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Funding will provide emergency health assistance, protection activities (mainly visits to detainees) and food assistance inside Syria. In neighbouring countries the aid will include emergency health assistance, the registration of refugees, food assistance to both the Syrian refugees and host families and the distribution of items such as blankets, kitchen equipment, fuel. In addition, it is planned to fund trauma support.

Background

Since the beginning of 2011, Syria has been experiencing violent unrest opposing anti-government street protesters and the security forces. According to the UN, killings and human rights violations in Syria have resulted in more than 9,381 deaths. It is estimated that between 1.5 and 3 million people are affected by the violence.

More than 36,000 people have already sought refuge in neighbouring countries, mainly Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, but also to Iraq and Libya. Host countries have been working to meet the basic needs of refugees and to ensure their protection.

The intensification of violence has hindered the capacity of humanitarian workers in Syria to provide essential relief to populations in need. Lack of information has so far prevented the international community from analysing and monitoring the full extent of the needs and has hampered a full humanitarian response.

The European Commission has been active in providing humanitarian aid to Iraqi refugees inside Syria since 2003. This assistance included psychological care for traumatized children and their families, access to primary health care and food assistance through cash and vouchers.

Middle East Quartet Statement

12 March 2012. [Link](#)

The Middle East Quartet (United Nations, Russian Federation, United States, European Union) and Quartet Representative Blair held informal consultations today to assess developments since its statement of 23 September 2011.

Quartet Principals remain committed to the overall objectives of the statement. In this regard, they welcome the important effort led by Jordan, which began in early January, as part of the shared commitment to reach a negotiated agreement by the end of this year.

The Quartet also discussed the grave situation in Gaza and southern Israel, expressed serious concern for the recent escalation and called for calm.

The Quartet reiterates its call on the parties to remain engaged and to refrain from provocative actions.

The Quartet decided to meet in Washington in April.

HRVP Ashton and Palestinian PM Fayyad sign agreements worth €35 million

Brussels, 19 March 2012. [Link](#)

High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice President of the Commission Catherine Ashton signed today, on behalf of the European Union, two Financing Agreements with Prime Minister Fayyad for a total value of €35 million. This funding will enable the building of a medium-scale wastewater treatment plant in Tubas Tayasir areas in the West Bank (€22 million) and the upgrading of border crossing infrastructure at the Karem Abu Salem/ Kerem Shalom crossing point (€13million), which is currently the only functioning goods crossing point in the Gaza Strip.

“Through this investment, the EU will significantly contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of the Palestinian population through two separate projects in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,” said Catherine Ashton. “Fully aware of the scarcity of water resources in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), the EU has identified water as one of the focal sectors of its assistance. The upgrading of the Karem Abu Salem/Kerem Shalom crossing point allows for an increased movement of goods in and out of the Gaza Strip. The EU has repeatedly called for the opening of the crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza.”

The HR/VP Catherine Ashton is hosting on 21 March in Brussels the Spring meeting of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC), the donor coordination group for the Palestinian people.

Background

Water and sanitation in the West Bank - 22 M€

This project under the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument will enable the financing of a medium-scale wastewater treatment plant in Tubas Tayasir areas in the West Bank. It will be the second wastewater treatment plant of its kind in the West Bank. The project will also be the first to re-use the treated water for agriculture purposes. Hence the outcome will not only be about sanitation but also about saving the limited groundwater resources of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Water and Water Sanitation are a focal sector of the EU’s financial assistance to the Palestinian people.

Upgrading of Karem Abu Salem/Kerem Shalom crossing point in the Gaza Strip - 13M€

This project is part of the commitment made by the European Union Foreign Ministers in the aftermath of the Gaza flotilla in 2010 to extend the EU's support to the improvement of the crossings infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. It is an EU crisis response measure under the Instrument for Stability (IfS). It will allow the expansion of the only currently open goods crossing point in the Gaza Strip and consists of the construction and expansion of hard infrastructure (loading and inspection areas, warehouses etc.) and the supply of equipment (IT, weigh-bridge, x-ray equipment). It will be carried out by the Palestinian Authority in full coordination with the Israeli authorities.

EU–Israel aviation agreement: Israel joins Europe in aviation
Brussels, 22 March 2012. [Link](#)

Israel and the European Union have finalized negotiations on a comprehensive aviation agreement during a final round of negotiating in Tel Aviv on 22 March 2012. The agreement will gradually open up and integrate the respective markets, strengthen cooperation and offer new opportunities for industry, including airlines, and consumers. Following eight rounds of negotiations since December 2008, the two sides have agreed to develop a common aviation area between Israel and the EU based on common rules. It is expected that the agreement will offer more travel opportunities, more direct connections and economic benefits for both sides.

“The comprehensive aviation agreement reached in Tel Aviv today is very important for further strengthening the overall economic, trade and tourism relations between Israel and the EU. Israel is a key partner for the EU and the agreement will do much to develop the aviation links between the two partners and establish a high level of regulatory convergence”, said Vice-President Siim Kallas, EU Commissioner for transport, welcoming the agreement. As a result of the agreement, all EU airlines will be able to operate direct flights to Israel from anywhere in the EU and Israeli carriers will be able to operate flights to airports throughout the EU. The EU–Israel air transport market will be opened gradually so that by the start of the summer season in 2017, the market will be fully open with no restrictions on the number of weekly flights between Israel and the EU.

Based on the experience of similar agreements signed with other EU neighbouring countries, the gradual opening of the market is expected to encourage a larger number of direct flights from Israel to more destinations in Europe at lower prices than today while also reducing flight prices to Israel for European travellers. Higher volumes of tourism in both directions are expected to create additional jobs and economic benefits on both sides. The gradual implementation of the agreement will give sufficient time for carriers on both sides to prepare for increased competition.

In parallel to gradually opening up the respective markets, the agreement also aims to integrate Israel into a wider Common Aviation Area with the EU. Israel will implement regulatory requirements and standards equivalent to EU

aviation rules in areas such as aviation safety, environment, consumer protection, including passenger rights, air traffic management, economic regulation, competition issues and social aspects.

The agreement will replace bilateral air services agreements between EU Member States and Israel.

The agreement will be a further step in creating a wider Common Aviation Area between the EU and its neighbours. Similar comprehensive aviation agreements with neighbouring countries have already been negotiated with the Western Balkan countries, Morocco, Jordan, Georgia and Moldova and negotiations are ongoing with Ukraine and Lebanon and are planned to soon start with Azerbaijan and Tunisia.

In 2010 the overall EU–Israel air transport market was 6.75 million passengers, which represents an increase of 13.4% compared to 2009.

The EU is the most important aviation market for Israel, accounting for 57% of scheduled international air passenger movements to and from Israel. Similarly, Israel is one of the most important aviation markets for the EU in the Middle-East with a strong growth potential. Today, there are scheduled direct passenger flight connections between Israel and 16 EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom).

Both sides will now start their respective internal procedures to allow the agreement to be signed and enter into force.

Jobs and stability: EU-Tunisia industry cooperation forges ahead
Brussels, 07 March 2012. [Link](#)

European Commission Vice President Antonio Tajani will visit tomorrow and the day after tomorrow Tunisia. The primary aim of the visit is to speed up the preparations leading to negotiations on EU market access agreements with the South-Mediterranean countries. During his visit Vice President Tajani will meet the Tunisian Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali and Minister for Industry and Commerce Mohammed Lamine Chakhari and take part in the 10th FEMIP (the EIB's Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership) conference.

The visit will reinforce partnerships to permit industry and SMEs to fully exploit the commercial relations potential between Tunisia and the EU. The discussions will emphasise the need for more integrated markets, through common rules aligned with those of the EU and the improvement of the technical infrastructure (laboratories and conformity assessment) Vice President Tajani will also encourage more cooperation in cutting bureaucracy for smarter regulation to mutually favour the internationalisation of the respective SMEs, such as promoting clusters and networks for SME internationalisation. The tourism sector will also see

enhanced cooperation. Tunisia will be invited to be part to the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme.

Before leaving Brussels Vice President Antonio Tajani, responsible for industry and enterprises, said: “Tunisia’s considerable progress in aligning its legislative system with EU rules, underlines the country’s strong commitment to boost its economy. A strong industrial cooperation is of mutual benefit for Mediterranean neighbours and the EU. I am confident that we will reach good results in the coming two days which will contribute to more stability in the Mediterranean.”

Free access to EU for industrial goods in sight

As a result of the EU’s response to the recent developments relating to the Southern Neighbourhood, the Commission has multiplied the efforts to speed up to complete the preparations for negotiating market access agreements with the South-Mediterranean countries.

Tunisia’s considerable progress in aligning the legislative system and the quality infrastructure with those of the EU could soon enable full access to the Single Market for the products that meet several requirements that will be negotiated within the scope of an agreement on conformity assessment and acceptance of industrial products (ACAA).

On 9th of March, jointly with Industry and Commerce Minister Mr. Chakhari, Antonio Tajani will sign a joint declaration to stress the two parties’ wish and dedication to wrapping up the preparatory phase and open market access negotiations as soon as possible, with a view to signing an ACAA agreement in the near future. This will mark the near completion of preparations and the imminent start of formal negotiations regarding electrical products and construction materials. The agreement will subsequently be extended to other industries and goods, once the pre-conditions are met.

ACAA-type market access agreements are currently at different stages of preparation or negotiation with all the Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, and Tunisia) and with some Neighbouring countries (Ukraine).

ACAA help cutting bureaucracy

ACAA agreements will help cutting bureaucracy, doing away with double conformity assessment of products, with the result of simplifying to the extreme the import/export and customs formalities. In a nutshell, an ACAA-type agreement amounts - for the products concerned - to getting access to the Single Market.

During his stay Vice President Tajani will explain the European Commission actions to cut administrative burdens, which is primarily relevant to the improvement of the conditions in which enterprises operate.

Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership

On Thursday 08 March Vice President Tajani will take part in the 10th FEMIP (the EIB’s Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership) conference in Tunis.

The focus of the Conference will be on supporting private sector development and the EIB’s vocation as a long-term investor. The following three main themes will be urgently addressed:

- Access to diverse and competitive sources of financing as a primary obstacle to the development of the private sector;
- Promoting entrepreneurship and Management education as a condition to ensure growth;
- Reinforcing the international competitiveness of Mediterranean enterprises by repositioning them in the global market.

Operational since October 2002, FEMIP is a key player in the financial partnership between Europe and the Mediterranean, and has invested € 12bn between October 2002 and December 2010.

Background

Tunisia is today the leading country of the democratic change in the Mediterranean and has a key role in the area. The Mediterranean future political stability and economic perspectives will greatly depend on its success. The EU works to support stronger industrial cooperation and the creation of a favourable environment for SMEs. Tunisian growth is of mutual benefit for Mediterranean neighbours and the EU. Business partnerships in key sectors such as tourism, regulatory frameworks, free movement of goods, are therefore essential.

EU-Algeria: first ever election observation mission

22 March 2012. [Link](#)

“The EU-Algeria relations are by now strong and mature enough to enable us to embrace the whole spectrum of issues between us,” Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle said after his two-days visit to Algeria on Tuesday. During his stay he signed two documents which will mark a new phase in the intensification of the bilateral cooperation: a Memorandum of Understanding on Election Observation and the EU-Algeria Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation. “I am happy that discussions during my visit have helped moving our relations forward,” Commissioner Füle said after his talks with the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Interior, Minister of Finance, the President of the Economic and Social Council and with the number of representatives of the civil society.

This was his third visit to Algeria and he expressed his satisfaction about the friendly, constructive and open exchanges he had with his counterparts. In his talks Mr Füle appreciated the ongoing reform process and repeated the readiness of the EU to support it in the framework and with instruments of the European Neighbourhood Policy with

a tailor-made approach towards Algeria's own needs: "We are encouraged by the government's approach to reforms. The reform process should not be confined to an isolated timeframe but should be an ongoing, constant process aimed at strengthening democracy and fundamental freedoms as well as delivering on legitimate aspirations of people," Commissioner Füle said. In this respect he stressed the significance of the Memorandum of Understanding on election observation which creates the conditions for the EU to send the first ever election observation mission to Algeria: "This is another clear sign that we move steadily towards more concrete cooperation. We have no doubts about the importance of these elections, first ones based on a number of reform steps undertaken in response to last year's events, which will make the parliament more representative responding also in this way to people's aspirations," Mr Füle said.

Commissioner Füle also discussed the law on association expressing understanding for the concerns of the government about the need for transparency of the funding. He welcomed the authorities' continued support for the cooperation between the EU and the Algerian civil society, in full transparency and hoped that the new law would not hamper the reinforcement of this cooperation. He underlined that there were concerns about the association law expressed by the civil society too: "This law should contribute to the strengthening of the role that civil society plays in the reform process and not the opposite."

In the area of bilateral cooperation Mr Füle discussed with the ministers preparations of the Action Plan in order to identify areas and priorities of future joint activities with Algeria in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. A first draft of the action plan will be prepared in coming weeks.

Commissioner Füle also held two separate meetings with several dozens representatives of the civil society, one of them in the framework of the Economic and Social Council. He recalled the importance the EU is attaching to this particular stakeholder in the reform process: "Successful reforms are only those which are inclusive, when they involve all stakeholders - authorities, civil society, private sector, trade unions. We wish to see the civil society to play appropriate role in Algeria's participation in our neighbourhood policy," Commissioner Füle said in Algiers.

Launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Guarantee Network

22 March 2012. [Link](#)

The credit guarantee Agencies for Micro, Small and Medium sized enterprises from Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the premises of the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean launching a Euro-Med Guarantee System Network (EMGN). During the signature

the European and French Agencies –AECM and OSEO– were also present.

The Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding among credit guarantee agencies from: Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan Palestine and Lebanon, launching the Euro Mediterranean Guarantee System Network. This MoU is the first step towards the crystallization of an upcoming project entitled Euro-Mediterranean Guarantee Network (EMGN).

The objective of the EMGN project will be to facilitate training, exchange of best practices to improve the institutional environment, as well as research and studies on the feasibility to foster Counter-Guarantee Funds to support MSMEs in the Mediterranean Partner Countries. To promote research and analytical tools to create guarantee instruments in particular those which are dedicated to micro and small and medium sized enterprises, and which fall under the interest of the parties.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed among high level representatives from various Mediterranean countries and under the auspices of the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean.

The Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean meets EP President

Rabat, 25 March 2012. [Link](#)

During the session, Mr. Sijilmassi also met M. Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, who has been elected during this session as President of the PA-UfM.

Ahead of the 8th plenary session of the PA-UfM, Sijilmassi said:

"More than ever, the UfM is an appropriate tool for the new Euro Mediterranean partnership. This partnership represents the first shared and co-chaired structure between the northern and southern rims of the Mediterranean. This balanced structure symbolizes for the first time the principles of « co-responsibility », « co-ownership » and « co-decision » among all the partners. The parliamentary Assembly of the UfM itself best embodies this spirit of shared responsibility.

In this regard, one of my main priorities is to focus on the management of concrete and tangible projects and initiatives; raise the necessary funds for the implementation of these projects, and to work closely with our institutional partners, in order to strengthen the synergies and the coherence with all the relevant regional frameworks and platforms.

I am glad of the strong will of M. Schulz to support the Union for the Mediterranean process, and to work with the Secretariat in order to strengthen the cooperation and coordination between the AP-UfM and the Secretariat."

The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly was officially established in Athens in 2004 as the parliamentary dimension of the Partnership set up by the Barcelona Declaration of November 1995.

The PA-UfM is a consultative institution which consists of 280 members: 130 EU members, 10 members from new European Mediterranean partner countries, 130 members from the ten countries on the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey).

Commissioner Füle in Pristina to launch feasibility study

Brussels, 26 March 2012. [Link](#)

The launch of a feasibility study for Kosovo is the main topic of the visit of Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle to Pristina on Tuesday. The feasibility study will provide a comprehensive exploration of Kosovo's further integration into the EU's policy framework for the Western Balkans.

Commissioner Füle will officially launch the feasibility study at the first meeting of Kosovo's newly established Kosovo National Council on European Integration. This Council is an advisory and consultative body providing an inclusive forum for discussion on Kosovo's European agenda. Its aim is to build national consensus on the EU reform agenda. In his address to the Council, Commissioner Füle will speak about the significance of the feasibility study and about the need to approach the European agenda in an inclusive and consensual way. He will also hold talks with the President Atifete Jahjaga and Prime Minister Hashim Thaci and meet as well with other members of the government: the two Deputy Prime Ministers, EU Integration Minister and Minister of Interior.

Start of the High Level Accession Dialogue with the government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Skopje, 15 March 2012. [Link](#)

I am convinced that your future lies within the European family. Together we want to make it sure that real, tangible and visible progress can be achieved on the path towards European integration.

I want to commend Prime Minister Gruevski for his personal commitment to the High Level Accession Dialogue. Your personal engagement, Prime Minister, is precious and a key factor for success. Your initiative to strengthen freedom of expression by decriminalising defamation is a good example. I can assure you that I am committed to supporting your reform efforts. What we are starting today is about comprehensive process, active political dialogue between us and also about inclusive framework for reforms.

I stress again that these efforts are aimed to bring benefits to all people of your country.

Today is a new opportunity to focus on a number of priorities that can help the social and economic development of the country. We have identified the rule of law, the reform of public administration, freedom of expression, electoral reform and strengthening the market economy as key elements. By moving closer to European standards in these areas, all communities and all citizens will benefit.

We want to focus on action and we want to agree on what are the key measures to take and how the European Commission can help. We want to work together with you in order to make membership a reality. I look forward to a good start today and to the continuation of our high level dialogue." stated Commissioner Füle today in Skopje, on the occasion of the starting of the High Level Accession Dialogue with the government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

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