



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council Conclusions on European Neighbourhood Policy

*2851st EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting
Brussels, 18 February 2008*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. "The Council recalls its Conclusions of 18/19 June 2007 on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It reiterates the key principles of partnership and joint ownership, as well as differentiation and tailor-made assistance. The ENP is a single, inclusive, balanced and coherent policy framework. It remains distinct from the question of EU membership and does not prejudge any possible future developments of partner countries' relationship with the EU.
2. In light of the Council's invitation in June 2007 for successive Presidencies and the Commission to take the work forward on strengthening the ENP, the Council welcomes the Commission Communication on "A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy" and takes note of the progress made so far. The Communication provides a useful basis for further reflection by the Council on making the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) more effective and more attractive to our ENP partners, with the aim of making full use of the ENP's potential.
3. Deepened economic integration must remain an essential building block of our relations with our neighbours. The scope of existing free trade agreements with ENP partners should be deepened where possible. Deep and comprehensive free trade agreements (DFTAs) should be considered with ENP partners having acceded to the WTO and following a thorough economic analysis. In this context, the EU welcomes the start of negotiations on a DFTA with Ukraine.

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As for the possible start of negotiations on DFTAs with Georgia and Armenia, the Council will decide on the basis of the Commission's recommendations that will include, inter alia, the results of the ongoing feasibility studies. The Council emphasises the importance of concluding agreements with the ENP partner countries of the Mediterranean region on the liberalisation of services, trade in agricultural products and the right of establishment. In this context, the Council welcomes the creation of the Euromediterranean Senior Officials Group as a way to stimulate the economic integration process and with a view to establishing a Euromediterranean Free Trade Area by 2010. The Council encourages Mediterranean countries to accelerate the negotiation and entry into force of FTAs with one another so as to strengthen south-south regional integration.

4. The Council underlines the importance of people-to-people contacts and the role of civil society in the context of ENP, in particular in the fields of education, science, culture and business, for promoting shared principles, enhancing EU visibility in the ENP region and strengthening local civil societies. In order to increase mobility, legitimate short-term travel by nationals from ENP countries to the EU should be facilitated, on the basis of a country-by-country approach, by a more flexible use of existing possibilities to simplify visa procedures, as well as inter alia through the consideration of Common Application Centres and the rapid conclusion by Member States of bilateral agreements relating to local border traffic, particularly with those partner countries bordering the Schengen area. The implementation of the 2003 Council Conclusions concerning flexibility in issuing visas to participants in Euro-Mediterranean meetings should be extended to include all ENP partners when participating in ENP-related meetings.
5. The ENP has already proven to be an important tool for promoting reform in the ENP countries. The EU reiterates its willingness and determination to continue to assist its neighbours in sectoral reform and modernisation, in line with the ENP Action Plans, as an important step towards prosperity and stability in our neighbourhood, based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The EU, through Community assistance and support, combined and coordinated with bilateral assistance of EU Member States, stands ready to work with ENP partners to help implement ENP Action Plans, in particular in the areas of energy security, climate change, environment, transport, research, information society, education and training, employment and social development, health, maritime policy, agriculture, fisheries and regional policy.
6. In the area of financial cooperation with ENP partners, considerable progress has already been achieved. The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument has led to an increase in financial assistance to ENP partners. The Governance Facility has been established, encouraging partner countries in carrying out the reforms agreed in their ENP Action Plans. The Council looks forward to the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF) starting to make more financial resources available for ENP partners this year, once the modalities for the NIF have been finalised. The NIF will provide considerable additional funding in ENP countries, including for infrastructure projects such as in the energy, environment and transport sectors, while ensuring coordination among partners and avoiding any overlapping with existing facilities.

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7. The Council recognises the importance of cooperation with ENP partner countries and international organisations and other actors towards the prevention and resolution of conflicts, including through confidence-building measures, in the EU's neighbourhood, while taking into account agreed negotiating processes. The Council and Commission will continue to seek ways of using the relevant policy tools in a concerted fashion, so as to strengthen regional stability and security.
8. The Council considers that regional cooperation represents an important tool for deepening the EU's relations with its neighbours and their interaction with each other, as well as for encouraging joint ownership of ENP. The Council also recalls the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2007 regarding the invitation to upcoming Presidencies to develop both the eastern and southern dimensions of the ENP in bilateral and multilateral formats on the basis of the relevant Commission communications and proposals.
9. The Council notes that the established regional organisations and processes can play an important role and underlines that the strengthening of contacts with them would benefit the whole neighbourhood area. In this context, the Council welcomes the Joint Statement made at the Black Sea Synergy Ministerial meeting held on 14 February 2008 in Kiev and looks forward to the Commission's review of the development of the Black Sea Synergy Initiative.
10. The Council underlines the importance of implementation by ENP partner countries of their ENP Action Plans, which will bring partner countries closer to the EU, in line with the principle of differentiation. The Council looks forward to the Commission's Progress Reports foreseen in April 2008 and reaffirms its willingness to deepen EU cooperation with ENP partners."

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