



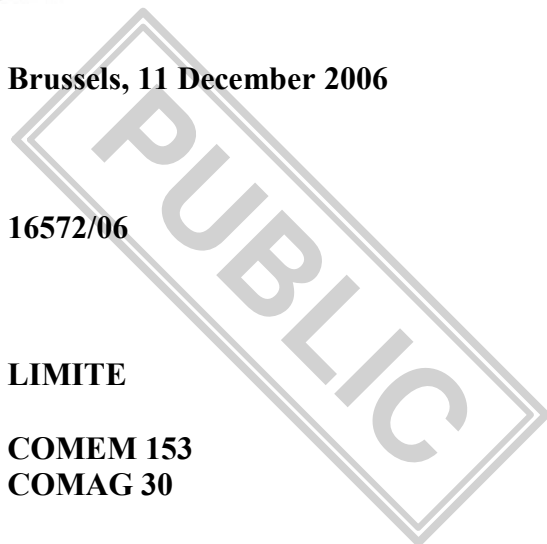
**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

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Subject: The European Union's Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East
- Interim Report December 2006

Further to the mandate given by the European Council at its meeting on 17 and 18 June 2004, the Council has approved the Interim report December 2006 on the European Union's Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East (see Annex). The Council invites the European Council to take note of the report.

**THE EUROPEAN UNION'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE
MEDITERRANEAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST**
Interim Report December 2006

1. Introduction

The Council of the European Union agreed in June 2004 that a report on the implementation of the EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East (EUSPMME) would be presented at the June 2005 European Council and thereafter on a six-monthly basis. The December 2005 European Council, on the basis of the report prepared during the UK Presidency, underlined its commitment to support political, social and economic reform in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The Council emphasised the importance it attached to full implementation of the EUSPMME.

The primary objective of the EUSPMME is to promote the development, through partnership, of a common zone of peace, prosperity and progress in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

The principles of the EUSPMME include partnership and dialogue; understanding the different nature of partner countries; working together toward peaceful stabilisation and reconstruction in Iraq; resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict with the understanding that the resolution of the conflict cannot be a precondition for confronting the urgent reform challenges of the EU partner countries, nor vice versa; the primary political concerns for the EU include human rights, democracy, the rule of law, good governance, gender, respect for minorities, co-operation on non-proliferation, counter terrorism, conflict prevention and resolution, and economic development; central role of education for youth, male and female, in creating a knowledge society; promoting understanding between the peoples of the European Union and the Mediterranean and the Middle East, especially through fostering mutual respect for their cultural diversity; offering an opportunity to all partners to move at a pace in accordance with their willingness to engage;

partners progressing a reform-related agenda more quickly should have greater opportunities to avail of the wider benefits of the partnership; building on existing structures; shared security concerns should be tackled in a spirit of partnership, recognising a broad concept of security and finally recognising that the presence in Europe of significant populations with origins in the partner countries is an important factor in the relations.

The EU continues to be committed to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict consistent with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference and its principles, including land for peace and based on the relevant UNSC resolutions and the Road Map. The EU takes note of the importance of recent regional developments and initiatives and calls for the reinvigoration of efforts to promote progress in the Middle East Peace Process on all its tracks. The Ministers participating in the 8th Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Tampere on 27 - 28 November 2006 welcomed the positive role played by the EU in the Middle East, particularly during the latest escalation in the region. They also encouraged the parties to continue on the path of direct dialogue and negotiation in the fulfilment of the vision of two states, a safe and secure Israel and a viable, sovereign and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Final status issues, including border issues, have to be agreed by the two parties.

The objectives of this interim report are:

1. from a regional perspective, to analyse partner countries' overall commitment and capacity in bringing forward political, judicial, economic, social reforms as well as to stimulate trade and economic cooperation;
2. to assess whether the EUSPMME, as an overall strategic framework, has brought any added value to the efforts of the European Union in enhancing mutual relations and in supporting the reforms and
3. to make concrete recommendations for possible future action.

The analysis is based on reports by EU Heads of Mission as well as other EU sources of information such as the ENP, Association Councils, Committees, sub-committees and Barcelona process reporting.

The report is divided into two main sections: the Mediterranean region and the countries east of Jordan.

2. The Mediterranean region

2.1. Introduction

The EU has a number of instruments available for its relations with the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The Barcelona process, complemented by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), provides the central multilateral as well as country-by-country framework for relations with the Mediterranean countries. It allows for both a multilateral and a country by country approach, tailoring the EU's relations to specific concerns regarding individual countries, to the countries' needs and interests and to progress made.

2.2. State of Play

One year after the 10th Anniversary Summit of the Barcelona Process, significant steps have been taken in bringing the process forward by starting the implementation of the 5-year work programme that was adopted at the Summit. In 2006, the key achievements included the following:

Strengthening of co-ownership and co-operation: The Ministers participating in the 8th Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Tampere on 27 - 28 November 2006 reaffirmed their commitment to the objectives of the Process, reviewed the progress made and adopted the Euro-Mediterranean Work Plan for the year 2007. The Ministers agreed to hold a regular Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the end of each year in order to strengthen the partnership. The Meetings will, i.a., aim at agreeing on the priorities of the Work Plan for the following year.

Promotion of human rights, democracy, gender equality and strengthening of civil society: During 2006, many events took place to strengthen co-operation in the fields of human rights, democracy, gender equality and civil society. Those included the Second Ordinary Plenary Session of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (Brussels, 26-27 March), Joint Senior Officials and EuroMeSCo Colloquium on Cultural Diversity and Fundamental Rights (Tampere, 20-22 July), EuroMed Annual Conference: Paths to Democracy and Inclusion within Diversity (Istanbul, 5-7 October), the Civil Forum (Marrakech, 4-7 November), the EuroMesco sub-regional seminar on civil society, human rights and democracy (Meknes, 21 -23 September) and the first Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in the Society (Istanbul, 14-15 November).

Implementation of the Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism began.: To support the implementation of the Code of Conduct, the EuroMed Ministers of Foreign Affairs agreed in Tampere to hold in 2007 a Euro-Mediterranean seminar on the role of the media in preventing incitement to terrorism through effective and professional communications. They also agreed to hold in 2007 a regional Euro-Mediterranean seminar on ensuring respect for human rights in the fight against terrorism in accordance with international law.

Intercultural dialogue continued to be a priority. The EuroMed Ministers of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the dialogue between cultures, including through the work of the Anna Lindh Foundation. The Foundation was invited to contribute to the preparations of the '2008 EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue'. The Ministers also agreed to intensify the action against racism and xenophobia and to promote a culture of dialogue in a spirit of respect and freedom of religious and other beliefs, rejecting extremist views which attempt to divide Euro-Mediterranean peoples and incite violence or hatred. Other areas of priority included strengthening of youth exchanges, including the launching of a scholarship scheme for the academic year 2007-2008, and the possible creation of a EuroMed Youth Parliament. Furthermore, the Ministers invited EuroMed Ministers of Culture to hold a meeting to discuss the Barcelona Process intercultural agenda, examine the results of work during the first three years of the Anna Lindh Foundation and consider how to co-operate with other initiatives such as the follow-up to the adoption of the UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions and the Alliance of Civilisations.

Strengthening of co-operation in higher education and research: The signing of the Constitution of the EuroMed Permanent University Forum at the EuroMed University Rectors' Conference in Tampere in October 2006 was a significant step forward in strengthening co-operation in the fields of higher education and research. The Ministers for Foreign Affairs decided to invite competent authorities to convene a Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Research in 2007. The Conference would examine higher education and research cooperation and standards of university education. It would also support the efforts of all countries in the region to meet the Millennium Development Goals in the areas of education, vocational training and of gender equality, given the importance of human development and knowledge-based societies to modernisation.

Co-operating in the field of migration:

- The Europe-Africa Regional Conference on Migration and Development was held in Rabat in July 2006, and resulted in the Rabat Declaration, in which representatives of European, West and North African countries committed to creating a close partnership between the countries of origin, transit and destination in order to control migratory flows and to prevent illegal migration.
- Libya hosted an EU-Africa Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development on 22-23 November, 2006. The participants signed a declaration committing themselves to cooperate on a range of concrete steps to tackle the challenges of illegal migration, migration and development and refugee protection, working closely with third countries and international organisations. The Conference also adopted the Ouagadougou Action Plan to combat Trafficking in Human Beings, especially women and children.
- These two conferences enabled the EU and Africa to come together at ministerial level to agree to work together in a spirit of partnership to manage migration between Africa and Europe more effectively.
- Also the EuroMed 5-year Work Programme foresees the holding of a ministerial meeting on all issues pertinent to migration. In this regard, the EU and the Mediterranean partners have prepared the ground for a concrete cooperation framework within the EuroMed Partnership on all migration issues by holding two expert meetings (June and October 2006) conducive to a possible Ministerial meeting in 2007. The work has been focused on three themes: legal migration, migration and development, as well as the fight against illegal migration and trafficking in human beings. The preparatory work has resulted in two draft documents, an overview of current and planned projects related to migration and involving one or more EuroMed partners and a draft of a detailed and focused work programme containing concrete proposals for initiatives and projects structured around the three clusters mentioned above. Further experts meetings will take place as necessary in the first half of 2007.
- The work of the FRONTEX agency and the exploration of a Mediterranean Coastal Patrols Network involving all relevant members of the EuroMed Partnership remain important issues, as does the need to develop cooperation in social integration, justice and security issues as agreed at the Barcelona Summit.

Bringing forward economic & trade co-operation:

- The Trade Ministers' Conference, held in Marrakech on 24 March 2006, reiterated the commitment to achieving a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area by 2010 through progressive liberalisation of trade in services and right of establishment, liberalisation of trade in agriculture, processed agricultural and fisheries products, strengthening of regulatory convergence, and establishing a dispute settlement mechanism in the area of trade.
- The Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance in Tunis on 25-26 June 2006 welcomed the considerable progress made in the Mediterranean countries in improving the business climate and reiterated the need to continue along the same road. There is a critical need to improve access to credit, contract enforcement and investor protection, labour market rigidities and procedures to start business.
- Furthermore, Conference of Ministers for Industry held in Rhodes on 21-22 September 2006 stressed the need to reinforce cooperation on competitiveness, market access, innovation, textiles & clothing sector and investment, underlined the importance in tackling non-tariff barriers to trade and agreed to step up efforts to accelerate regulatory convergence. Further progress in the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for the Enterprise was encouraged and the EU's Competition and Innovation Programme (CIP) was opened also to the Mediterranean partner countries.

Supporting sustainable development: The Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Environment, held in Cairo on 20 November 2006, adopted the timetable which sets out the steps for implementing "Horizon 2020", the Mediterranean de-pollution initiative and underlined the importance of mainstreaming environmental concerns into other relevant sectors in order to contribute to the development of sustainable production and consumption across the region.

MEPP: The EU has reiterated the necessity of a political perspective and reinvigorating the Middle East Peace Process through re-launching negotiations. To support the objective of a future independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state based on the rule of law, the EU has continued to actively work, also within the Quartet, to get the Middle East Peace Process urgently back on track in order to make progress towards a comprehensive settlement and a two-state solution on the basis of the Roadmap, relevant UNSC resolutions and the commitments made at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2005. The EU is committed to help the Palestinian people and continues its considerable assistance, also via the Temporary International Mechanism. The EU also continues its missions in the area, EU BAM Rafah and EUPOL COPPS, and supports efforts in the implementation of the Movement and Access Agreement.

Implementation of Association Agreements/European Neighbourhood Policy :

The Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy have advanced during 2006. The EU has been monitoring the implementation of the existing ENP Action Plans with partner countries in the framework of the Association Councils, Association Committees and sub-committees. The following meetings took place in 2006:

- Association Councils with Lebanon on 11 April and Algeria on 16 May (first Association Council after both Association Agreements entered into force), Israel and Egypt on 13 June and Jordan on 14 November;
- An enhanced political dialogue with Morocco is scheduled for 14 December;
- Several sectoral sub-committees with Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and Israel have taken place. The EU-Israel Association Committee met on 17 May, the EU-Jordan Association Committee on 28 June and the EU-Morocco Association Committee on 17 November. The first meeting of the Moroccan sub-committee for Human rights, democratisation and governance took place on 16 November.

The EU expects the dialogue with Tunisia on the establishment of the sub-committee on "Human rights and democracy" to speed up. The ENP Action Plan with Lebanon has been jointly agreed and now waits for the final adoption of the Lebanese Parliament. Negotiations with Egypt continued and the EU hopes that an agreement on the Action Plan as well as the structure of the sub-committee on political matters: human rights and democracy, regional and sub-regional issues could be reached soon.

The Syrian reform process is hampered by internal problems as well as by political developments in the region that have had a negative impact on the implementation of the reforms as outlined in the National Five-year plan 2006-10. The EU's possibilities to support the reform efforts are limited until the political obstacles to the signing of the EU-Syria Association Agreement have been removed.

The Commission issued the ENP Communication and progress reports on 4 December

It is crucial that the EU's funding to the Mediterranean from 2007 through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument is targeted to support the achievement of objectives set in the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans and the EuroMed Summit Five-Year Work Plan. To this end, in addition to bilateral envelopes for assistance, the EU will establish a substantial Governance Facility to support willing Mediterranean partners in carrying out their reforms.

Observer countries

Libya

Libya is currently an observer of the EuroMed Partnership. In line with the October 2004 GAERC conclusions, the EU recognises the importance of a policy of engagement with Libya. In July 2006, the European Commission held informal consultations in Tripoli with the Libyan authorities in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy on migration, trade regulations, energy questions and EU policies in Sub-Saharan Africa. The objective of these consultations is to identify subjects on which EU-Libya co-operation could develop according to the reform priorities of Libya as soon as the political conditions are in place.

The Commission presented the Neighbourhood Policy, including its governance aspects, as well as the potential benefits for Libya. Libya has made progress with measures in the economic sector, whereas political and social reforms remain a challenge. Further informal meetings at technical level will take place in Brussels on 5 - 6 December, 2006. The EU also continues to insist that Libya resolve remaining EU concerns, notably the case of the Bulgarian and Palestinian medical workers and all outstanding bilateral issues with EU Member States. Solving these remaining EU concerns would contribute to a growing EU policy engagement with Libya in specific areas of interest.

Mauritania

Mauritania witnessed a coup d'etat in August 2005. The coup took place without any violence. Mauritania is now ruled by a 17-member Military Council, which has installed a transitional government to oversee the return to democracy. The Council has promised free and fair elections for this and next year. A new constitution was approved by a large majority in June 2006. The first round of parliamentary elections were held on 19 November and the second round on 3 December, 2006. Presidential elections are scheduled for March 2007. Following the coup, the EU began consultations with Mauritania under article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement in late 2005. Consultations opened on 30 November 2005 and were concluded on 29 May, 2006. The consultations took place in a constructive atmosphere. A follow up period of 18 months is ongoing and the next round of talks is scheduled for late 2006 or early 2007. There were some concerns regarding the neutrality and transparency of the interim government in the preparations of the elections. However, the November 19th elections attracted the participation of over 70% of voters and were completely free and conducted in a calm and transparent manner. Mauritania has for some time tried to join the EuroMed co-operation. Mauritania has recently become known as one of the points of departure for illegal immigration heading for the territory of the EU. However, Mauritania is actively co-operating with the Member States in the efforts of preventing illegal immigration from the Sub-Saharan Africa through her territory, and has increased co-operation with the EU in the field of migration as the first country to begin the dialogue to implement article 13 of the Cotonou Agreement. Mauritania has been committed itself in Extractive industries transparency initiative (EITI) allowing a framework for the use of its future revenues from the oil sector.

2.3. The role of the EUSPMME in supporting reforms

The EUSPMME principles of action as defined in June 2004 are the guiding principles of co-operation within this initiative. Most of them were already part of the Barcelona Process and are included in the country-specific ENP Action Plans. The challenge remains, however, how the EU could deepen dialogue on issues of concern with those countries that are not full members of the Barcelona Process or ENP partners.

3. Countries east of Jordan

3.1. Introduction

Implementation of the EUSPMME has been more challenging in the countries east of Jordan than in the Mediterranean region. The EU has a less visible role and presence in some of the countries east of Jordan than in the Mediterranean region although some co-operation and dialogue mechanisms are available. These include political dialogue as well as economic support to Yemen, support to Iraq's reconstruction efforts and development of political cooperation and the launching of negotiations for a Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and a framework for dialogue with the Gulf countries. The EU has also pursued active diplomacy to persuade Iran to comply with relevant UNSC Resolutions calling for a stop to uranium enrichment activities.

3.2. State of play

Gulf Co-operation Council

Co-operation with the GCC countries has focused on economic and commercial co-operation, as well as on political dialogue.

The EU-GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations continued in 2006. The 16th EU-GCC Ministerial Meeting (Brussels, 15 May) and the Foreign Ministers Troika Meeting with the GCC (New York, 21 September 2006) reconfirmed the commitment to concluding the negotiations. In addition to reviewing the status of the FTA negotiations, the Ministers also exchanged views on issues of mutual interest such as terrorism, WMD, human rights and regional political issues. There are opportunities in the GCC countries to promote principles of the EUSPMME, provided that the local circumstances are taken into consideration and both parties benefit from the partnership. It should also be understood that any strategic partnership must deal with the challenges facing the Gulf countries. Two main issues can be identified: ensuring security in a broad sense in a region of tension, and guaranteeing long-term prosperity and job creation by diversifying the economy and reducing dependence on oil income. These are also the areas where the need for increased regional and wider international dialogue and co-operation is most evident, notably in the field of energy and security. The EUSPMME with the Gulf states should address these issues, if possible, on a regional basis, drawing on the EU's expertise in regional co-operation and experience in enhancing good governance, popular participation and higher education to meet future challenges. To achieve this, the EU should have a stronger presence, enhanced coordination and higher visibility in the Gulf states, including through more high level visits and underpinned by sufficient resources. Steps in this direction have already been undertaken by the Commission and some Member States. The EU welcomes elections in the region.

Iraq

The Iraqi government is committed to bringing forward and implementing political, social and economic reforms. Reform efforts are, however, challenged by a number of problems. These include above all the deteriorating security situation and increasing sectarian conflict which hampers ongoing reconstruction efforts and affects the availability of human resources ("brain drain"). On the other hand, constructive signs include the formation of a national unity government, the adoption of a National Reconciliation Plan, and the ongoing preparations for an International Compact with Iraq.

The Iraqi government has expressed the wish for a closer co-operation with the EU on key reform areas. The EU has supported political and economic transition in Iraq, also with considerable financial assistance. Negotiations have recently started on a Trade and Co-operation Agreement. The EU will continue its political dialogue with Iraq, including on human rights and good governance, rule of law and democracy, anti-terrorism and non-proliferation, conflict prevention and resolution based on the EU - Iraq Joint Declaration on Political Dialogue of September 2005.

In addition the EUSPMME provides, in principle, a useful strategic global framework for the EU's relations with Iraq, and an opportunity for enhancing the consistency and coordination of EU activities in Iraq. The potential of the EUSPMME, however, has not been sufficiently exploited so far. EU efforts should concentrate on areas in which they can offer added value, linked to the reform agenda of the government. Those include, inter alia, support for the rule of law and governance, respect for human rights, reconciliation process and constitutional review. When adopted, the International Compact with Iraq is expected to provide the overall framework for Iraq's relations with the international community. In the context of the implementation of the Compact, the existing close co-operation between the EU and other international actors can be further enhanced.

Iran

The EU reiterates that the evolution of a long-term relationship between Iran and Europe will depend on action by Iran to address effectively all the EU's areas of concern: terrorism, the proliferation of WMD, Iran's approach to the Middle East Peace process, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and regional issues. The EU will continue to seek a diplomatic solution to the nuclear issue. The human rights situation in Iran has regrettably deteriorated. The EU has raised its concerns with the Iranian authorities both through demarches and public statements but the Iranians have made no serious effort to improve the situation. A country resolution on the situation of human rights in Iran - co-sponsored by the EU - was adopted by the UN General Assembly's Third Committee in November 2006. The EU regrets that the EU-Iran human rights dialogue did not take place in 2006 due to Iran's unwillingness. Other dialogues are likely to remain pending until there is positive progress on the nuclear issue.

Yemen

In Yemen there is scope for improving the effectiveness of the partnership in the future. The Yemeni government is interested in closer relations with the EU and has also shown commitment to political, social and economic reform. The September 2006 elections, to which the EU deployed an election observation mission, represented another step in this direction. However, implementation of the reform agenda remains challenging.

Overall, the EU is seen as a valuable partner, and has had a considerable impact on the Yemeni reform agenda. At the moment, individual Member States and the Commission are supporting a series of projects in the areas of democracy, governance, economic reform, public finance, justice, media, decentralisation, water, education and health.

One successful way of taking the EU's support forward has been the EU-Yemen Political Dialogue, conducted both at capitals and the local level. The third EU-Yemen Political Dialogue Meeting, which took place in Sana'a on 20 September, was used by the EU to highlight the need for pushing the reform agenda forward.

The next steps for the EU in Yemen should be in line with the government's reform efforts with a focus on support for promotion and protection of human rights, democratisation, good governance, gender issues, sustainable economic development, water management, health, Yemen's integration with the GCC, enhanced EU coordination and harmonization and enhanced co-operation with international donors. The EU welcomes the results of the London Consultative Group, which should support the socio-economic development of Yemen. It also welcomes the Yemeni support to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in its national reform agenda.

3.3. The EUSPMME's role in supporting the countries' reform efforts

The EU's engagement with the countries east of Jordan has followed the principles of the EUSPMME policy agenda, but the EUSPMME seems to have only a marginal role as a partnership building instrument. However, successful conclusion of the EU-GCC Co-operation and Free Trade Agreement could provide an opportunity for developing a true partnership which could integrate efforts to further support the GCC countries own agendas for economic, social and political development. Continued dialogue and cooperation with Yemen and the on-going Iraq Compact process can also provide additional value to reinforcing relations and promote the countries' reform objectives. Political commitment of all partner countries and strengthening of the EU's presence, underpinned by sufficient resources, coordination and visibility in the region are necessary preconditions for this to materialise. In spite of the marginalised role of the EUSPMME in fostering a partnership it is considered as a useful internal tool for the EU. It has helped the EU and its Member States in harmonising their actions and expanding discussions beyond trade and economic related issues. It has also helped to refocus the attention and understanding of the EU to the domestic and regional realities of the region and has thus enhanced the possibilities for a greater impact of EU programmes and activities.

4. Conclusions

4.1. In the Mediterranean Region most of the EUSPMME principles were already part of the Barcelona Process and are included in the ENP Action Plans. It is therefore proposed that in the future follow-up and monitoring of reforms will take place in the context of the Barcelona Process, Association Councils, Committees and sub-committees as well as through the ENP mid-term reviews and other existing reporting mechanisms.

4.2. In countries east of Jordan and in those Mediterranean countries that are not full members of the Barcelona process, the EUSPMME has not yet brought significant added value to the efforts of the EU in strengthening the partnership and in promoting co-operation in the fields of political, economic and social reforms. However, as a strategic policy framework the EUSPMME has contributed to an enhanced local coordination between EU actors on the ground and has therefore contributed to harmonisation and increased coherence of action. Discussion should now continue locally on how the EUSPMME could be better taken into consideration as an agreed basic policy framework for the EU's relations with the countries concerned.

4.3. There should be progress in co-operation at the regional level, e.g. successful conclusion of the EU-GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA) before the next EU-GCC-Ministerial Meeting scheduled for 30 April, 2007 in Riyadh, in order to increase the interest among the partner countries in a comprehensive, mutually beneficial partnership with the EU. The opportunity of advancing to a new stage of co-operation through the conclusion of the FTA should be used to explore, together with the GCC countries, ways to achieve such a partnership. It must be understood, however, that building a partnership based on dialogue, co-ownership and mutual confidence can be a lengthy process. There are signs of positive developments in all of the partner countries east of Jordan, but the pace differs country-by-country. Economic reforms are considered a priority in all of the partner countries though there are less signs of comprehensive social, and in particular, political reforms. It should be understood that any strategic partnership must deal with the challenges facing the Gulf countries. For this to materialise, the EU's presence, internal coordination and visibility in the region, including through high level participation at the EU-GCC-Ministerial Meetings, need to be strengthened.

4.4. There is room for strengthening dialogue with the United Nations, the G8 and other relevant actors in supporting the developments of the countries concerned. This should be done on a country-by country basis, recognising that there is no "one size fits all" solution in supporting the countries' reform agendas.

4.5. The EU has made good progress in enhancing its relations with the countries of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. It is important that the 2007 - 2013 Financial Perspective supports the objectives of the EU in the relevant countries.

4.6. The implementation of the EUSPMME and especially its reform priorities in the political, economic and social fields is a long-term process that requires strong political will and constant commitment of the partners. Achieving the EUSPMME aims will require a genuine process of information and consultation with partner countries, based on existing instruments, in accordance with a policy of joint ownership, in order to promote a mutually beneficial relationship. It is, therefore, recommended that in the future the interim report be prepared on an annual basis, noting also point 4.1. above.
