

A European Neighbourhood Policy

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The European Union cannot go on expanding indefinitely without running the risk of losing its significance. However, it has to define its relationship with its neighbours in order to stabilise its environment and ensure its security. In order to do this, it has to provide them with assistance so that they may develop their economies and democratise their institutions. This will enable them to become eligible to benefit from the advantages of the European Union without participating in its institutions.

With this in mind, the European Commission developed the idea of a 'European Neighbourhood Policy'. It set out the principles of this policy in March 2003 and submitted specific measures on 12 May 2004 for approval by the Council and Parliament. The objectives are to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and to offer them the opportunity to participate in various EU activities, through greater political, security, economic and cultural cooperation. The method is, together with the partner countries, to define Action Plans based on a commitment to shared values, i.e. respect for human rights (particularly minority rights) and for the rule of law, good governance, good neighbourly relations, and the principles of the market economy and sustainable development.

The countries involved are, first of all, the Union's new neighbours acquired as a result of enlargement: Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. Then there are the countries which are already taking part in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership arrangements established in Barcelona (27–28 November 1995): Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian Authority (not including Turkey, which is an applicant for accession). Finally, there are the countries of the Southern Caucasus: Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

The Action Plans, which will be specifically tailored to meet the needs of each country, will define the priorities for assistance to those countries by means of a new financial instrument and will cover certain key areas. A political dialogue will be initiated on the fight against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as on ways of resolving regional conflicts. In the area of economic and social development, the EU's neighbours will be made ready for participation in its internal market by means of the approximation of legislation, access to certain EU programmes (education, training and research) and the development of links in the fields of energy, transport, the environment and the information society. At commercial level, the EU's markets will increasingly be opened up in accordance with the principles of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). As for justice and internal affairs, cooperation will relate to border management, population movements, the fight against terrorism, trafficking in human beings and arms, and the fight against organised crime, money laundering and financial and economic crimes.

Implementation will take place under 'European Neighbourhood Agreements', which will replace the current bilateral agreements between the European Union and the countries concerned.