Ukraine starts afresh

Ukraine is hardly alone among European democracies enjoying the stresses of coalition politics. Currently Germany, Italy, Belgium and Ukraine would together have no problem in agreeing with Winston Churchill that ‘democracy is the worst of all political systems, except for the alternatives’.

However Ukraine’s new coalition is sending messages of strategic significance to the West, both the EU and NATO.

President Yushchenko, Prime Minister Timoshenko and Rada Chairman Yatsenyuk wrote a joint letter to the NATO Secretary-General, associating itself with the West’s paradigm of democratic security, and requesting that ‘Membership Action Plan’ status be granted in April at a summit meeting in Bucharest. This could be the beginning of organizing a basic turn-around in Ukraine’s majority negative view (according to polls) of NATO.

Regarding the EU it is apparent that the same three leaders are agreed now to get Ukraine better organized to give credibility to its ultimate political objective of EU membership. The past has all too often seen an embarrassing disconnect between the lofty rhetoric of presidential speeches and the poor capacity of the administration to follow through. This could now be on the mend, with Timoshenko’s appointment of Hryhory Nemyria as deputy prime minister responsible for overseeing EU integration. Nemyria has excellent knowledge of European Union affairs, which is spread very thinly still in Kiev. The next step will have to be the creation of a central coordinating office for European integration, that will have to be strong both in professional competence of its staff and in its institutional place in the government.

The European Union must respond in as substantial manner as possible. Fortunately next steps are already traced out for negotiation of a new ‘Enhanced Agreement’ incorporating a deep free trade agreement. This future Treaty can be comprehensive in coverage – political, economic, and security affairs. The ‘membership perspective’ question is still controversial within the EU, but language must be found to sustain Ukraine’s political strategy in the short-run, while the ultimate perspectives for Ukraine could be transformed by a credible performance by the new government. Tuomas Ilves, President of Estonia constantly reminds us of his country’s experience of the EU’s initially negative position on Estonian accession. His message is ‘don’t take no for an answer, for the answer will change’.

The EU and Ukraine must also work together urgently to improve Ukraine’s energy security drastically. Russia in the recent past has been moving very fast to eliminate its dependence on Ukraine as a transit country for its gas exports to the EU. There is already the Blue Stream pipe across the Black Sea to Turkey, the planned Nord Stream in the Baltic, and now the new South Stream from the Black Sea up the Balkans. While this will make Russia independent of Ukraine, it will at the same time make Ukraine more dependent on Russia. All this is a deplorable development, economically since it involves wasteful investments, and politically since it is installing a regime of monopolistic realpolitik instead one of mutually beneficial interdependence based of the rule of international law (such as the Transit Protocol of the Energy Charter Treaty, which Gazprom refused). In this situation what should Ukraine do? Actually it has significant gas supplies of its own, and the enormously wasteful use of energy in Ukraine provides an opportunity to reduce substantially the need for net imports. The EU should work with Ukraine in support of energy saving and alternative supply routes from across the Black Sea.

Michael Emerson
Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy

Enlargement has been one of the most successful EU policies. Under the Slovenian Presidency, accession negotiations with Croatia and Turkey will continue on the basis of their progress towards fulfilling EU membership criteria.

Together with its partners from the Western Balkans, the Presidency will aim to strengthen the European perspective for the Western Balkan countries. Five years after the Greek Presidency, it is time to refresh the Thessaloniki agenda and complete the network of Stabilization and Association Agreements. Our goal is also to take further steps to enable accelerated introduction of European standards in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania.

The Presidency will pay particular attention to Kosovo. Expectations of the key role of the EU in Kosovo are justified, and the Presidency will, while maintaining a high level of the EU unity, actively encourage efforts to bring about a solution that will ensure long-term stability of the Western Balkans.

In line with the principle of differentiation and individual approach, the Presidency will strengthen cooperation with the countries of Eastern and Southern neighbourhood. Economic cooperation and enhanced people-to-people contacts between the EU and its neighbours will be in the focus.

New focus on the Western Balkans

The stability of the Western Balkans – a region encircled by Member States – is of major importance for the security and prosperity of the entire Union. The Stabilisation and Association process has proved to be an efficient strategic instrument for enhancing stability and promoting reform processes in the region. Western Balkan countries have made good progress in recent years. Several key milestones in the transition process are expected in 2008: the review of the 2003 Thessaloniki Agenda; the conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement network; and the strengthening of regional cooperation in various areas.

In 2008, the EU and the international community will have to strengthen their role in solving the Kosovo issue, and in the implementation of the new status of Kosovo. The situation in Kosovo will continue to inform the Union’s positions, in particular in terms of security, law and order, the status of minority ethnic groups and the ability of Kosovo to contribute to stability in the Western Balkans. The Presidency’s actions will be based on the 2007 December European Council conclusions. Preparations for the Donors’ Conference for Kosovo will continue, and the Presidency will further support the progress of Kosovo in the Stabilisation and Association process.
Our neighbourhood
Slovenia will aim to further strengthen the area of stability and prosperity in the EU neighbourhood within the framework of a unified and coherent European Neighbourhood Policy, while taking into consideration the principles of differentiation and individual approach to particular partner states. We will focus on further development of economic integration, enhanced mobility and the strengthening of dialogue with civil society. Particular attention will be paid to the continuation of the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy, which will be the main topic of the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Black Sea Synergy states and the EU in Ukraine.

As regards the Barcelona process, the Presidency will put particular emphasis on intercultural dialogue. The specific contribution of Slovenia to the strengthening of partnership and dialogue is represented by the initiative to establish a Euro-Mediterranean University in Piran.

Central Asia
National programs are being prepared for each Central Asian country on the implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia. Slovenia will devote its attention to regional cooperation and will debate the report covering the first year of the Strategy’s implementation in June 2008.

Visa facilitation and readmission agreements
The Council welcomed the entry into force of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 1 January 2008. They will foster more people-to-people contacts and increase the economic ties between the EU and the region.

Recalling its conclusions of 10 December 2007, the Council also welcomed the intention of the European Commission to launch soon a visa dialogue with all the countries in the region and expressed its readiness to further discuss this issue, based on the Commission’s forthcoming Communication on the Western Balkans, with a view to define detailed roadmaps setting clear benchmarks to be met by all the countries in the region in order to gradually advance towards visa liberalisation. This would enable the Council and the Commission to closely monitor progress in necessary reforms.

The European Union proposes a Political Agreement on cooperation between the European Union and Serbia, providing a framework for making progress on political dialogue, free trade, visa liberalisation, and educational co-operation, to be signed on 7 February 2008.

Serbia has a crucial role to play in the Western Balkans, both for ensuring stability and as a motor for the economic development and prosperity of the region. The European Union wishes to deepen its relationship with Serbia, which draws on a rich and diverse range of cultural, historic, economic and people-to-people ties.

In this context the European Union offers Serbia to intensify political co-operation with a view to accelerating Serbia’s progress towards the EU, including candidate status.

The Serbian people are part of the European family. A deepening relationship between the European Union and Serbia, leading to membership, will bring concrete benefits to the people of Serbia, in particular through stimulating economic progress, commercial relations by developing a free trade area, and people to people contacts, including in particular students. The European Union will continue to reach out to the people of Serbia and recognises the importance of making it easier for Serbians to travel in the European Union. To this end the Commission will start a dialogue on visa liberalisation.

To underline their shared commitment to deepening the relationship among their peoples, the European Union agrees to take rapid steps towards increasing the number of Serbian students who study in the EU, both through the ERASMUS Mundus programme and bilateral initiatives. In this context the European Union agrees to intensify the bilateral co-operation with Serbia, leading to a rich and diverse range of cultural, historic, economic and people-to-people ties.

The Stabilisation and Association process remains the right vehicle to take forward this relationship. The European Union is committed to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement as soon as the necessary steps have been finalised. The European Union remains convinced of the benefits that the SAA will bring to both sides and of the positive effects this will have for the region as well. In this context the EU is committed to:

- support the efforts of Serbia to strengthen democracy and the rule of law;
- contribute to political, economic and institutional stability in Serbia;
- provide a framework for political dialogue, allowing the development of close political relations;
- support the efforts of Serbia to develop its economic and international co-operation, including through helping Serbia prepare its laws for eventual EU membership, including integration into the EU’s single market;
- support Serbia’s efforts to complete its transition into a functioning market economy;
We have agreed to stay in close contact with a view to furthering this process.

The Serbian Electoral Commission released today [23 January, 2008] the results of the first round of presidential elections, according to which the Serbian Radical Party candidate Tomislav Nikolic won 39.99%, whereas the Democratic Party candidate Boris Tadic won 35.39%.

Results from all 8,573 polling stations were processed, while 4,116,844 persons used their right to vote.

Nikolic won 1,646,172 votes and Tadic 1,457,030 votes, while the third-ranked is the candidate of the New Serbia Velimir Ilic, with 5.97% or 245,889 votes.

The Liberal Democratic Party candidate Cedomir Jovanovic won 5.34% or 219,689 votes, and is followed by the Socialist Party of Serbia candidate Milutin Mrkonjic with 0.98% or 40,332 votes.

Candidate of the coalition Popular Peasant Party–United Peasant Party Marijan Ristic and Reformist Party candidate Yugoslav Dobricanin won 11,894 votes, which is 0.29%.

At the elections held on January 20, there were 78,462 invalid ballots, and 2,643,196 unused ballots, whereas the total number of registered voters was 6,708,697.

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN:
Today, we have witnessed and participated in the opening of an important new chapter in Russian-Serbian cooperation. There has been an agreement signed by the governments of our countries concerning cooperation in the oil and gas sector, as well as a protocol on the basic terms governing Gazprom Neft’s acquisition of 51 percent of the shares in Naftna Industrija Srbije. These contracts are essential for extending our bilateral cooperation. In fact, these contracts formalize the strategic partnership in the energy sector between our two countries.

With the signing of these agreements, Serbia has become a key transit hub in a system designed to supply Russian energy to the south of Europe. This means that we now have a long-term, reliable and highly efficient system that, most importantly, significantly strengthens energy security for Serbia and the entire European continent. The joint visit to Moscow by Serbia’s leaders, President Boris Tadic and Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica, confirms the importance of today’s event. Their decision to attend the ceremony for the signing of these contracts indicates their sincere desire for the continual strengthening of relations with Russia in all areas.

Let me stress once again that the Serbian people can be certain of having a reliable friend and partner in Russia. During our exchange of views today, we reiterated that Russia is categorically against any unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo. This would risk doing serious damage to the whole system of international law, and have negative consequences for the Balkans and for stability in other regions of the world.

By the way, we note that Russia’s position on this issue has received support from some European politicians who, despite the political domination of bloc discipline (especially, of course, within NATO), have shown considerable political courage and demonstrated independent judgement. In the best traditions of European political culture they are seeking to extend the principles of democracy and justice to the international sphere.

The best proof of this is the resolution adopted on 22 January by PACE (the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe), which calls for negotiations between Pristina and Belgrade to continue and thus in fact confirms Russia’s position on this matter.

And, finally, I want to stress once again: the strategic importance of the contracts signed today is immense. I want to thank our Serb colleagues for working as a team with us in preparing for this very important event in the development of our bilateral relations. Thank you very much for your attention.

SERBIAN PRESIDENT BORIS TADIC (as translated from a Russian translation):
I must say that I am very glad that we have had the opportunity today to sign an agreement on strategic partnership in the field of energy between the government of Serbia and the government of Russia, and also to decide on a framework agreement that will determine further investment and economic activity for Gazprom Neft in other areas. This agreement is of great strategic importance for Serbia and its citizens, our economy, our industry and the entire country’s development. This is an opportunity for citizens to obtain energy for heating, and an opportunity for Serbian companies and Serbian industry generally to work in more advantageous conditions and to have a stable source of natural gas for many decades.

In addition, Serbia now occupies a pre-eminent strategic position in south-east Europe because the gas will go through it to other countries on the southern flank of the European Union. Serbia is thus serving the interests of both Russia and the European Union, since the pipeline route will pass through our country. We are very pleased that in strategic, historical and economic terms Serbia now occupies a brand new position at the beginning of the 21st century.

Serbia has deep historical ties with Russia. The bonds between the Russian and Serbian people are very strong. In addition, we share extensive economic and strategic interests. The signing
of these contracts is tangible evidence of these common interests.

Mr. President! I would like to thank you once again for Russia’s principled position on the future status of Kosovo and Metohija, which has already been the subject of negotiations for several years. Because of Russia’s position on issues of international law in the UN Security Council, and its position on the preservation of international law (the territorial integrity of all member states of the UN), this question is now the focus of international politics. Serbia will never abandon its legitimate rights in Kosovo and Metohija. Serbia will never cease to defend its territorial integrity through a policy of peace, diplomacy and mutual understanding. Serbia is ready to compromise on the future status of Kosovo and Metohija, but Serbia has consistently held the position that the UN Security Council should oversee the whole process by which the status of Kosovo and Metohija will be determined. This applies to their future status, and to all missions that might be sent to Kosovo and Metohija for the purposes of peacekeeping operations.

In any event, I would like to reiterate our strategic interests: for three years we have talked about the preparation of an agreement on cooperation in the oil and gas field. I am very happy that we were finally able to sign this agreement in the interests of the citizens of Russia and Serbia, for our companies and the development of our economies. Thank you again.

Premier Kostunica and I would like to reiterate on behalf of the Republic of Serbia that this is a very important issue for our country.

Your Excellency,

Since restoration of its independence in 1991, Ukraine has passed a protracted path of its rapprochement with NATO: from the fruitful cooperation in the framework of the Partnership for Peace program and special relationship in the format of the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership to the effective interaction in the framework of the Partnership Action Plan and the Intensified Dialogue on membership and relevant reforms. The Euro-Atlantic integration policy is specified in the Ukrainian legislation; it is not directed against third countries, and it is aimed at Ukraine’s prospective membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Our main priority is deepening the large-scale reforms in the political, economic, defense, security, legal, and other spheres aimed to enhance democratic institutions, wellbeing and security of the Ukrainian people. Activities aimed to raise, in a systematic and resolute manner, the public awareness of the broad range of issues of Ukraine cooperation with NATO continue to be significant. It is envisaged to essentially increase budget allocations to this end in the Programme of the Government.

We hope that the progress achieved by Ukraine in the framework of the Intensified Dialogue on membership and relevant reforms will be recognized by the Alliance in the near future. Currently, Ukraine is interested in the accession to the NATO Membership Action Plan.

We expect that the level of our state’s readiness for new commitments will become the basis for a positive response at the Ukraine-NATO forthcoming summit in Bucharest in April 2008.

President of Ukraine
V. Yushchenko

Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine
A. Yatsenyuk

Prime Minister of Ukraine
Yu. Tymoshenko

Late yesterday [16 January, 2008] the European Union and Ukraine resolved the final outstanding issues in their discussions on Ukraine’s accession to the WTO. At a meeting in London, EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson and Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Hryhory Nemyrya sealed the final terms of the agreement. The agreement clears the way for the final approval by WTO members of the terms of Ukraine’s accession. Following ratification of the accession agreements, Ukraine will become a member of the WTO.

The agreement also clears the path for an EU-Ukraine FTA.
The EU completed its bilateral negotiations with Ukraine on its WTO accession in 2003. It has since then continued to work with the Ukraine in the multilateral working group that considers all applications for WTO membership on a number of issues, including guarantees concerning agreed reductions in export duties on some raw materials. The EU will now begin negotiations for a comprehensive free trade agreement with Ukraine.

**Background:**
The EU is the Ukraine's largest trading partner and its largest market. In 2006 the EU absorbed 25% of Ukraine's exports worth 8.7 billion euros and provided 42% of its imports worth 17.8 billion euros. In 2006, the European Commission proposed a new Enhanced Agreement with the Ukraine that would include the negotiation of a free trade area to strengthen the economic integration between the two economies. WTO Membership is the necessary foundation for such an agreement.

WTO membership will bring significant benefits for the Ukraine. It will provide it with guaranteed access to the markets of all other WTO members, including the EU. It creates a degree of certainty and stability in openness of the Ukrainian market that will help attract new trade and investment. It will be a highly significant step in the Ukraine’s integration in the global economy.

**Official Election Results of the Presidential Elections in Georgia on 5 January 2008**

Central Election Commission
Tbilisi, 13 January 2008. [Link](#)

On January 13 the Central Election Commission of Georgia approved the Summary Protocol of the January 5, 2008 Extraordinary Elections of the President of Georgia.

Results of the election:

1. Total number of voters: 3 527 964
2. Voter Turnout: 1 982 318
3. Ballots repealed 33 129

Amount of Votes per candidate:

1. Levan Gachechiladze 509 234 votes, 25.69%
2. Arkadi Patarkatsishvili 140 826 votes, 7.10%
3. David Gamkrelidze 79 747 votes, 4.02%
4. Shalva Natelashvili 128 589 votes, 6.49%
5. Mikheil Saakashvili 1 060 042 votes, 53.47%
6. Giorgi Maisashvili 15 249 votes, 0.77%
7. Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia 3 242 votes, 0.16%

The Presidential Elections on 5 January 2008 were an important test for democracy and stability in Georgia, particularly in the light of the recent political developments in the country.

The European Union congratulates the Georgian people for the peaceful conduct of the elections and notes the Statement of the Preliminary Findings and Conclusions of the International Elections Observation Mission which concludes that the elections were in essence consistent with most OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and standards for democratic elections. The EU also welcomes good cooperation of the Georgian authorities with OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission. However the European Union also notes that significant challenges were revealed which need to be addressed urgently.

The European Union urges Georgia to take all necessary steps to address the identified shortcomings in order to ensure successful Parliamentary elections later this year. In particular, Georgia needs to do more to reinforce the independence of state institutions in a political campaign environment and to strengthen the freedom and pluralism of the media, as well as the independence of the judiciary.

The European Union looks forward to the final results of the presidential elections and calls on the competent authorities to ensure that all complaints are adequately and urgently addressed. Moreover, the EU urges all political forces to respect the election results and to engage constructively and democratically in order to ensure that Georgia continues moving forward. Dialogue between political forces is an essential part of this process. The European Union also reiterates its full commitment to strengthen relations with Georgia in the context of the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan.
1. Welcomes the Commission’s Communication entitled “Black Sea Synergy – A New Regional Cooperation Initiative” and the aim of enhancing cooperation with and within the Black Sea region by supplementing the existing bilateral policies with a new regional approach; notes, in particular, that the energy security issues and the accession negotiations with Turkey, as well as the forthcoming expiry of the PCAs and the negotiations on their future, place regional cooperation in the Black Sea area among the top priorities of the Union’s foreign policy agenda; considers that the future development of the Black Sea would benefit greatly from an independent Black Sea strategy in the long term;

2. Underlines that the Black Sea region needs a more coherent, sustainable and strategic response, leading to the creation of a Black Sea policy, alongside the Northern Dimension Policy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership;

3. Considers that, in order to adopt a coherent, effective and result-oriented regional policy approach, the Communication has to be followed by further consistent steps on the part of the EU to encourage a genuine regional dimension tailored to this area; is also concerned by the fact that the results of the Black Sea regional strategy pursued since 1997 have not been properly evaluated; calls on the Commission to prepare a thorough assessment of previous and ongoing activities and to present the results to Parliament;

4. Welcomes the intention of the Commission to provide for an initial evaluation of the Black Sea Synergy in 2008, and calls upon it to put forward concrete proposals for fostering regional cooperation and genuine partnership in the Black Sea area, based on the results of its evaluation and taking into account the recommendations contained in this and other relevant resolutions adopted by Parliament; encourages the Commission to use the experiences gained in the Northern Dimension when drafting any future review or extension of its Black Sea strategy;

5. Stresses that the Black Sea regional policy approach must be used neither to provide an alternative to EU membership nor to define the frontiers of the EU; considers, however, that the objectives specified herein should represent an integral and coherent part of the broader EU foreign policy towards the neighbouring countries and countries participating in the Black Sea regional strategy;

6. Believes that regional cooperation in the Black Sea region should involve the EU, ENP countries, candidate country Turkey and Russia as equal partners; believes that only by gradually creating a feeling among the Black Sea countries of shared responsibility for the region’s common challenges, including security issues, will it be possible to fulfil the full potential of Europe’s involvement in the region; calls on the Council and the Commission to actively involve all Black Sea countries in the policy approach;

7. Considers that the new regional approach should be targeted at a number of priority areas for which the Commission should provide a detailed action plan envisaging concrete objectives, benchmarks and follow-up and constituting a basis for enhancing the EU’s involvement in the region as well as intra-regional cooperation; underlines that the EU must concentrate on a limited set of priority objectives and avoid dispersion and duplication of efforts;

Key priority fields of cooperation:
- Security challenges
- Promotion of political stability and effective democracy
- Cooperation in the field of energy, transport and the environment
- Trade and economic cooperation
- Education, training and research
- Institutional and financial aspects
4. Reaffirms that the principal objectives of the EU in the region are to encourage the development of the South Caucasus countries into open, peaceful, secure and stable states, able to contribute to good neighbourly relations in the region and to regional stability and ready to share European values and to develop institutional and legal interoperability among themselves and with the EU; in order to attain these objectives, calls on the EU to develop a regional policy for the South Caucasus to be implemented jointly with the countries in the region, complemented by individual bilateral policies;

5. Underlines the fact that the ENP was designed to transcend the dividing lines in Europe through gradual extension of the area of democracy, prosperity and security; calls on the EU and the countries of the South Caucasus to take advantage, by means of twinning, secondment and other available assistance programmes, of the extensive knowledge and experience gained by the new Member States in reforming their societies and economies in the EU integration process, in particular as regards strengthening the border guard and customs authorities and developing regional cooperation between them;

6. Stresses that the ENP reviews and funding must be used to promote institution-building, respect for human rights, the rule of law, democratisation and regional cooperation; reaffirms the need for further firm steps on the part of the EU to encourage genuine regional cooperation and integration; calls on the Commission to report regularly on the progress of the regional cooperation process and to adapt its policies and instruments accordingly; looks forward to increasingly constructive relations being developed between the EU and the different stakeholders, particularly civil society, in the partner countries, in order to make the ENP process more dynamic and transparent;

7. Notes that, due to the rapid and strong growth of its GNP, Azerbaijan has become a donor of aid, while international donors have noticeably reduced their activity in the country; proposes that the EU should focus on transfer of know-how and best practices within the framework of Twinning, TAIEX and Sigma programmes (under the ENPI);

8. Considers that trade policy is a key component in ensuring political stability and economic development leading to a reduction in poverty in the South Caucasus, and that it is crucial for further integration between the EU and the South Caucasus; stresses that, in respect of trade policy, the social dimension must be considered;

9. Supports the Commission’s initiative to undertake a feasibility study to evaluate the possibility of a free-trade agreement with Georgia and Armenia; believes that such an agreement will benefit all parties; in the meantime, calls on the Commission and the Council to implement measures to ensure that Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan benefit as much as possible from the Generalized System of Preferences, while underlining the importance of Azerbaijan’s membership of the WTO for further enhancing bilateral trade relations; encourages the Azerbaijani authorities to tackle remaining impediments to its accession to the WTO, such as high customs tariffs, lack of transparency and failure to enforce commercial laws, corruption and failure to enforce intellectual property rights, and calls on the Commission to further support Azerbaijan in its process of accession to the WTO;

10. Notes that Georgia has been under massive pressure as a result of the Russian economic embargo, which was enforced over a year ago, closing traditional markets for Georgian goods and therefore depriving a number of citizens of their livelihoods; stresses that the speedy conclusion of a free-trade agreement with Georgia is equally important in strengthening EU-Georgia relations and relieving the country of the consequences of the Russian embargo;

11. Stresses that all three states will have to continue their efforts to reduce poverty and adhere to the principle of sustainable development; suggests adopting efficient policies to reduce social polarisation, as well as to ensure access to social security systems; calls on the Commission to further support the three countries in strengthening their national capabilities to improve and implement poverty reduction policies;

12. Believes that the ENP provides an excellent framework for regional and sub-regional cooperation, with a view to creating a genuine space of security, democracy and stability both in the South Caucasus and in the Black Sea region; takes the view that a differentiated bilateral approach towards the three countries of the South Caucasus cannot do without a global multilateral dimension entailing the development of regional cooperation;
The EU welcomes the start of negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian officials on all outstanding issues, including all final status issues, with a view to concluding a peace agreement before the end of 2008 as agreed in Annapolis last November. The Council reaffirms that this is a crucial opportunity for regional and international partners to support effectively a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In this context, the Council calls for a continued broad and constructive involvement by Arab partners, building on the Arab Peace Initiative. The Council urges the parties to implement their Road Map obligations in parallel with their negotiations. The goal remains the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza that will unite all Palestinians, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

The EU considers that settlement building anywhere in the occupied Palestinian Territories is illegal under international law. This includes Israeli settlements in both East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Settlement construction is an obstacle to peace. The EU is therefore deeply concerned by recent settlement activity, particularly the recent tenders issued for new construction in Har Homa. The Road Map is clear that Israel should freeze all settlement activity, including the natural growth of existing settlements, and dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001.

The Council is deeply concerned about recent events in Gaza and the grave disturbances at the border between Gaza and Egypt. It expresses its sympathy for the civilian populations affected by the violence in Gaza and in Southern Israel. It condemns the continued firing of rockets into Israeli territory and all other activities which are contrary to international law and endanger civilians. While recognising Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, the Council calls for an immediate end to all acts of violence. It reiterates its grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and calls for the continuous provision of essential goods and services, including fuel and power supplies. The Council calls on Israel to fulfil its obligations to Gaza. The Council reiterates its call on all parties to work urgently for the controlled re-opening of the crossings in and out of Gaza for both humanitarian reasons and commercial flows. In that context, the Council underlines its support for the proposal by the Palestinian Authority to take control of the crossings and supports the Arab League resolution in that respect. The EU will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the population of Gaza and stands ready to assist in the economic rehabilitation of Gaza. The EU reiterates its call for the immediate release of the Israeli soldier abducted 19 months ago and commends efforts including by partners in the region, to that effect.

The Council commends and supports efforts by the government of Egypt to find a peaceful and orderly solution to the current situation, and expresses the EU readiness to contribute to its implementation in the framework of an agreement involving the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and Israel. The EU is ready to consider resuming its monitoring mission at Rafah under the provisions of the relevant international agreements related to Access and Movement concluded in November 2005.

The EU reaffirms its commitment to remain actively involved in order to support the parties’ efforts to keep the negotiation on track, working closely with other members of the Quartet and partners in the region. The EU remains determined to contribute significantly to this effort, as laid down in its Action Strategy: “State building for Peace in the Middle East”, which covers the broad range of its assistance activities. The EU welcomes the agreement reached on the accreditation procedure of EUPOL COPPS, which will allow the EU to support Palestinian Civilian Police in order to further strengthen security and law and order.

The EU welcomes the results of the International Donors’ Conference for the Palestinian State last December, namely over 7,4 billion US-$ in pledges, and calls on all donors to deliver on their pledges in support of efforts to build the future Palestinian State in accordance with the Reform and Development Plan presented by Prime Minister Fayyad. In this context, the EU recalls the utmost importance of the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access. The EU is committed to providing substantial financial support for the Palestinian people, and welcomes the work of the Commission to launch a new funding mechanism PEGASE, which will constitute a key channel for EU and other international assistance. The EU continues to support the work of the Quartet Representative, Tony Blair.

The European Parliament, […]

1. Recognises the role that Egypt plays in the Middle East peace process and the importance that EU-Egypt relations have for the entire Euro-Mediterranean area and in the fight against international terrorism and fundamentalism, but points out that respect for human rights is a fundamental value of the EU-Egypt Association Agreement and reaffirms the importance of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership for promoting the rule of law and fundamental freedoms;
2. Considers that the recent arrests and action against NGOs and human rights defenders undermines the commitments entered into by the Egyptian Government concerning fundamental rights and freedoms and the democratic process in the country; supports the campaign by non-governmental organisations for freedom of organisation launched on 13 May 2007 by 34 NGOs as a follow-up to the first collective report on administrative and security harassment;
3. Calls on the Egyptian Government to end all forms of harassment, including judicial measures, the detention of media professionals and, more generally, human rights defenders and activists calling for reforms and to fully respect freedom of expression, in conformity with Article 19 of the UN
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
4. Encourages the Egyptian Government to honour its undertaking to lift the state of emergency on 31 May 2008; asks the Egyptian authorities to amend law No 25 of 1966 on martial courts, which is one of the major obstacles to the full enjoyment of fundamental freedoms, and to ensure that all measures and legislation adopted to combat terrorism are fully in accordance with international human rights law;
5. Strongly supports measures to guarantee academic freedom, freedom of the media and freedom of private religious belief; in that connection, calls for arbitrary administrative measures, such as those taken against the Centre for Trade Union and Workers’ Services and the Association for Human Rights Legal Aid to be rescinded; calls for the release of Kamal Abbas and other activists; urges that the law on associations should not impose arbitrary restrictions on the peaceful activities of civil society organisations;
6. Calls for the immediate release of Ayman Nour, in the light of the reports of his deteriorating state of health, and calls for an immediate welfare visit, including a visit by qualified medical personnel;
7. Stresses the need to fully implement the principles of the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and the 1993 International Convention concerning the rights and the protection of migrant workers and their families; supports the concluding observations of the UN Committee on Migrant Workers of May 2007 which called for the re-opening of the investigations into the killing of 27 Sudanese asylum-seekers in December 2005;
8. Calls for an end to all forms of torture and ill-treatment and calls for investigations when there is reasonable suspicion that acts of torture have occurred; calls on the Egyptian Government to allow a visit by qualified medical personnel;
9. Stresses the need to fully implement the principles of the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and the 1993 International Convention concerning the rights and the protection of migrant workers and their families; supports the concluding observations of the UN Committee on Migrant Workers of May 2007 which called for the re-opening of the investigations into the killing of 27 Sudanese asylum-seekers in December 2005;
10. Welcomes the efforts made by Egypt to secure the border with Gaza and encourages all sides concerned to step up the fight against smuggling through tunnels into the Gaza strip;

The New EU Strategy towards Central Asia: A View from the Region
Nargis Kassenova

[Abstract]
At the end of the German Presidency, in June 2007, the EU adopted “The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership”. It was the first-ever EU strategy developed for Central Asia, and in this way, it marked a real breakthrough in the relations between European and Central Asian countries. In this paper, Nargis Kassenova, Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science, Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research, attempts to go beyond the assistance programme with generic developmental goals based on the perceived needs of the region, to define European interests in the region, find prospective areas for cooperation and improve the approaches by making them more effective.
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