

EuroMediterranean industrial cooperation - Meeting of the Working Party, 21-22 February 2011, Brussels

Background

Euro-Mediterranean industrial cooperation unfolds within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean. The purpose of the cooperation process is to bring industrial policy on both sides of the Mediterranean closer together in order to help business to go international (help them to trade, invest and engage in partnerships at Euro-Mediterranean level). The process has a regional scope and concrete activities mainly consist in exchanging information, knowledge, tools and good practice to improve the business environment and spur entrepreneurship across the region. The process is coordinated by DG ENTR. Priorities are defined by Industry Ministers (who meet every two years) and are translated in 2-year work programmes on Euro-Mediterranean industrial cooperation.

Participation in the meeting on 21-22 February 2011 and general atmosphere

All nine Mediterranean partner countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia from both public and private sectors) were represented at senior-level in the meeting. Considering the current events on the Southern rim of the Mediterranean, this participation of all MED neighbour countries is a remarkable achievement in itself and signals a continuous, strong commitment to the cooperation process. On EU side, 15 Member States were present. Further countries involved in the Union for the Mediterranean (Turkey, Croatia, Monaco) and a dozen national and international business associations also attended the meeting. The atmosphere of the meeting was cordial and constructive. All MED delegates actively participated in all discussions.

Results

The meeting was highly productive. MED delegates underlined that the industrial cooperation process was more relevant and useful than ever under the present circumstances and they expressed a need to increase joint efforts paying particular to the pressing need of creating jobs and a future for skilled youth in MED countries. The EEAS invited partners to take full advantage of the Co-Chair of the Union for the Mediterranean (France, Egypt for the moment) and the Secretariat in Barcelona to increase ownership in the South and turn ideas into concrete activities. The EEAS also called for stronger involvement of EU Member States in the cooperation process.

The main objective of the meeting was to prepare the 8th ministerial Euro-Mediterranean ministerial meeting on industry, to be held in Malta, on 11-12 May 2011. In spite of the current changes in the region, the Working Party saw no need to postpone the event, Malta confirmed its readiness to host it, Hungary declared its full support to it and the Working Party agreed on concrete steps to organise the ministerial meeting.

Malta is preparing a programme for the ministerial meeting and proposes to organise discussions on four topics:

Promoting partnerships and investment

Improving innovation and the business environment

Preparing and concluding ACAAs

Mobilising the business community to implement projects under the Union for the Mediterranean

Three documents will be submitted to Industry Ministers for their approval:

1) A work programme outlining activities in 2011-2012.

In 2010, a draft work programme for 2011-2012 was prepared by the Commission (DG ENTR in consultation with concerned DGs) in cooperation with the Working Party. All sections of the work programme were re-examined and discussed in detail at the meeting : implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise, investment promotion, ACAAs, innovation and technology

transfer, sustainable enterprise development, sector-specific activities relating to textiles/clothing, tourism and space.

Most activities target the whole region, adding value to the more bilateral approach of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Participants recognized that improving the business climate was a long term process that requires sustained effort on many fronts. They underlined the need to capitalise on intermediary results and to avoid duplications and overlaps. They asked the Commission to act as a catalyst for concrete activities (including timetable and funding) and to strengthen links with bilateral programmes supported by the EU. Given the latest developments in the region and expectations of youth in MED countries, priority attention should be paid to entrepreneurship, start-ups, SMEs, regional development and the need for more transparency to promote investment, including from the diaspora.

Participants in the meeting were invited to send additional comments on the draft work programme to DG ENTR by 28 February 2011 so that a final version can be prepared for the ministerial meeting.

2) Draft conclusions of the ministerial meeting

DG ENTR has prepared a first draft in agreement with Malta, Hungary and the EEAS. The text will be discussed in the Council in March (Maghreb-Mashrek, and Competitiveness-Growth Council Working Groups and COREPER). In April, it will be examined by Mediterranean partner countries. Final discussions will be organised at Senior Official level on the eve of the ministerial meeting (11 May) to fine-tune the document before it is submitted to Ministers for their approval.

3) A report on achievements in 2009-2010

A summary of activities implemented under the 2009-2010 work programme will be prepared by DG ENTR.