

**Intervention by Andrej Šter, State Secretary in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs,
Republic of Slovenia**

Mrs Commissioner, thank you.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the Commission's initiative to organize today's event which we perceive as an important opportunity to hear our partners' views about the Neighbourhood policy and how do they see the further development of this key policy.

In four months from now, Slovenia will for the first time ever take up the Presidency of the Council of the EU. We intend to put the ENP high on our Presidency agenda.

Slovenia sees the ENP first and foremost as a partnership. We support a balanced approach to the ENP, and will during our forthcoming EU Presidency aim at **further consolidating the Neighbourhood Policy within a single and coherent policy framework**. Within the overall objective of strengthening security and well-being in our Neighbourhood, we will endeavour to further strengthen the ENP in those thematic areas that have during the last few months been identified as particularly relevant and pertinent within the Neighbourhood Policy by all of us.

We intend to strengthen a dialogue with our Mediterranean and Eastern European partners into a dialogue on common challenges and issues of common concern, such as economic integration, energy, transport, mobility and migration, intercultural dialogue and respect of human rights. As a follow-up to the European Council in June 2007, we could also discuss the effects of climate change on international security.

I would now like to avail myself of the opportunity to elaborate on some of the thematic areas that have been identified as particularly relevant:

Trade liberalization, including improved access to the EU Internal market lies at the centerpiece of a strengthened ENP. Along with the implementation of the ENP Action plans, the next step would be the adoption of bilateral deep free trade agreements, with the possibility of asymmetric elements. By the same token, enhanced intra-regional trade among our partners would importantly improve their overall competitiveness and economic performance.

Likewise, we should aim at intensifying our **energy cooperation**, hereby establishing a win-win situation both for the EU and our ENP partners. We should embark on an intensified dialogue with producer and transit countries, with a view of further diversifying energy resources and routes. This cooperation needs to be based on the principles of transparency, predictability and trust. An important element will be the implementation of the Energy Community Treaty. Furthermore, it will be important to further develop energy transport networks, connecting the Union with its neighbourhood.

Another area which is of particular relevance for our citizens is **mobility**. The EU is certainly aware of the need to make the ENP more tangible for the citizens in the ENP region. Along with mobility partnerships, the proposal on visa facilitation for specific categories of population (students etc) should be addressed within a broader framework, in relation to the

fight against illegal immigration, border management etc. Intensified efforts in tackling these challenges from the side of our ENP partners should lead to additional steps by the EU.

With regard to **climate change**, this challenge can only be efficiently tackled in an integrated approach, including both climate and energy policy. Having in mind the transnational character of this challenge, international collective action will be critical in driving an effective, efficient and equitable response on the scale required to face climate change challenges. The EU from its side is committed to do its part of the homework, as reflected in the March European Council conclusions on energy efficiency and renewable energies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ENP is based on the prospect of enhanced relations with the EU, accompanied by appropriate financial commitments through the ENP Instrument, in exchange for proper implementation of the political and economic reform agenda by our partners, while not prejudging future relations. The European Council in June reconfirmed that the ENP's character as a single and coherent policy framework should be maintained, implementation of the Policy should take due account of the specificity of partner countries. We believe that performance-driven differentiation and tailor-made assistance remain essential for the Union's relations with the ENP partners. We welcome our Partners' commitment regarding the implementation of the reform agenda such as formulated in the ENP Action Plans and encourage all of us to further step up our efforts in this regard.

Today's event also presents an opportunity to collect ideas on how to further enhance existing cooperation mechanisms and their implementation. By the same token, in order to achieve maximum results in implementing the goals of the Neighbourhood Policy, **enhanced regional and multilateral cooperation** is needed specifically in the areas of transport, energy, migration management and environment. Here, we should make use of existing and developing cooperation frameworks.

Moreover, in order to achieve maximum impact of the ENP, we should also think about ways on how we could **more actively involve non-governmental actors** – NGOs, media, civil society and business circles – **into the formulation and implementation of this policy**. We are confident that today's event will provide some useful ideas. In this respect, we count on our ENP partners' cooperative approach regarding this matter.

Thank you.