

EU-Libya cooperation: a new start

2010 is a year that has brought many positive elements in EU-Libya relations. We progressed in negotiating a first ever agreement on long term dialogue and cooperation in many policy areas (the so-called Framework Agreement). We also agreed the first ever multiannual programme of financial cooperation between the EU and Libya. And we will open an EU office shortly in Tripoli. If we consider how limited EU-Libya relations still were only three years ago, a lot of joint work has been achieved.

There remains a large potential for developing further our cooperation with Libya. Libya is a leading country in Africa, a strategic energy provider for the EU, an important interlocutor about regional security. It shares common challenges with the EU like the development of Africa, migration and the preservation of the Mediterranean environment.

The EU can help Libya in its plans to modernise and diversify its economy to move away for its current reliance on oil and gas. Libya requested the EU to provide its know-how based on the experience accumulated in many years of cooperation with other partner countries. We have agreed that we will support the creation and consolidation of small and medium enterprises. We will also help the Libyan administration in its efforts of modernisation. Libya has a vast potential for receiving foreign investment in many sectors other than hydrocarbons. This potential should be fully used, as will benefit the Libyan people.

We also agreed to continue our cooperation towards a more efficient health system. For several years Libya and the EU have been successfully cooperating on HIV/AIDS matters and we are keen to enhance this joint work.

Migration and visa issues are important issues in our relations. I will be visiting Libya with my colleague Cecilia Malmström, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, in particular responsible for these issues. Migrations are a common problem, as Libya is a destination country for many African and Asian migrants, and so are EU countries. We understand the problems that can be generated by the high flux of migrants in Libya. It is estimated that at least 1.5 million migrants are in Libya. Such a strong presence requires an efficient management of migration in all its different aspects. I am convinced that the **EU and Libya can give a response to this common issue by working together** on strengthening border controls, establishing clear legal rules in the area of migration, the management of legal and illegal migrants and of the people needing international protection. We all agree that **the solution to migrations is improving the living conditions in African countries.** Libya and the EU are both major donors to the African countries (in 2008 alone, the EU provided over €5 billion of grants to Africa).

I come to Libya with an offer for an extensive partnership through which the European Union can support Libya's reform efforts towards market economy, sustainable development and the rule of law. It is up to **Libya to decide how ambitious it wants to be when it comes to the depth and the speed of these reforms.** We in the EU stand ready to provide all our support.

Stefan Füle is European Commissioner for Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy. He started his mandate in February 2010. He visited Libya for the first time on 4-6 October.