



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear President,

I would like to thank you for the opinion of the Senate of the States General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands on the Joint Communication on a new response to a changing neighborhood {COM(2011) 303 final} and apologies for the extremely long delay in replying.

The new approach of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is centered on support for deep and sustainable democracy in our neighbourhood. The renewed ENP is also based on conditionality and mutual accountability. If a partner country wishes to obtain greater support from the EU, then it will have to demonstrate progress on a number of significant political reforms. Conversely, the EU will be accountable to its partners for delivering on its offers of support that are incentives for reform. Such incentives include not only financial support, but also access to the EU market and improved mobility of people in a secure environment. The support of EU Member States and of their Parliaments will be crucial for the EU to deliver credible incentives and for the success of its policy.

The EU shares the views of the Senate that significant synergy benefits can be achieved through cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in support of our neighbours. This concerns not only our Eastern neighbours, most of whom are members of the Council of Europe and who benefit from long-standing cooperation between EU and Council of Europe, but also our Southern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern neighbours.

A reinforced dialogue and coordination between the Council of Europe and the EU on opportunities for cooperation in our Southern neighbours in the areas of the Council of Europe's competence was already launched at the end of 2010. The Council of Europe strategy towards its neighbours of Central Asia and the South Mediterranean rim, adopted at the Committee of Ministers in Istanbul on 11 May 2011, is a major step forward in the progressive engagement of the Council of Europe in this region.

The EU considers the Council of Europe as one of the main partners supporting the process of reforms in these countries. The Venice Commission is one of our leading

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interlocutors in the areas of constitutional and election reform. The EU is closely following up on the initiatives undertaken by the Council of Europe in identifying together with the Southern neighbours, in particular Tunisia and Morocco, priorities for cooperation. Several visits to the two countries were carried out by its organisation (including by the Venice Commission) during the last months. On these occasions, dialogue was launched with the authorities but also with civil society, the EU delegations and Member States.

The Communication on a new response to a changing neighbourhood reflects this approach. Under section 1 "To support progress towards deep democracy", on page 5, second paragraph, the need to boost cooperation with the Council of Europe is confirmed. This reference is then developed in the Medium Term Programme for a renewed European Neighbourhood Policy, which is an integral part of the Communication.

Section 2.3 of the Programme ("Building the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity in the Southern Mediterranean partner countries") recommends stepping up cooperation with the Council of Europe and identifies the Council of Europe's instruments to be used, in particular the Partner for Democracy Status of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and the governance-related Council of Europe conventions which set important benchmarks for progress. The Programme also considers the establishment of a suitable financial mechanism to support cooperation with the Council of Europe in these countries. Along these lines, a South Mediterranean Facility of 4 MEUR, fully financed by the EU, is presently under preparation.

Cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe on this dossier is a good example of how cooperation between the two organisations has grown in importance over the last few years, in line with the Memorandum of Understanding the EU and the Council of Europe signed in 2007.

I am very grateful for the continued support of the Senate of the States General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for the European Neighbourhood Policy and look forward to our fruitful cooperation in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*