



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Riksdag for its Opinion on the Joint Communication by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission of 25 May 2011 on a new response to a changing neighbourhood {COM(2011) 303 final}. The Commission apologises for the delay in replying.

Allow me to take this opportunity to once again reiterate the commitment of the Commission and of the High Representative to regular consultations with all EU national Parliaments in order to guarantee the widest possible support for Union policies.

The Commission fully shares the Riksdag's view on the need to focus to a greater extent on support for democracy and human rights. Indeed, the Communication identifies a number of areas that are indispensable to deep and sustainable democracy: free and fair elections, freedoms of association and of expression, judicial independence, fight against corruption and democratic control over security forces. Furthermore, the Communication specifies that benchmarks on human rights will be elaborated, with a special emphasis on gender equality.

To pursue our policy goals more effectively, the EU decided to reshape the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans that we conclude with each partner. Future Action Plans will focus on a limited number of short and medium-term priorities, incorporating more precise benchmarks and a clearer sequencing of actions, according to the reforms implemented by the countries and to progress achieved towards deep and sustainable democracy.

The new approach of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is based on conditionality and mutual accountability (the "more for more" principle). 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 and human rights. In turn, 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 three Ms:

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money, mobility of people and market access). In this context, financial support will be even better targeted towards our policy goals and we will strive to deliver the best value for money for the EU and its Member States.

Protecting and reinforcing the role of the civil society is an ever more essential pillar of the ENP. The Commission already launched a new Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility in November 2011, with an initial budget of € 22 million. In addition, the new European Endowment for Democracy will offer support to unregistered political actors and political parties that strive for democracy.

“People to people” contacts will be maintained regardless of the lack of progress by the national governments. In Belarus, for instance, the EU increased its support for civil society and students in the aftermath of the December 2010 events.

The Commission will also seek to negotiate new Mobility partnerships with neighbours both to the East and to the South. I believe the EU should move forward on the road towards visa facilitation and visa liberalisation with its partners, while at the same time ensuring security in our societies. Visa facilitation and liberalisation are not only incentives for governments to carry out reforms, but also tools to increase people-to-people contacts and to promote reform from the bottom up.

The EU shares the view of the Riksdag that it is important to effectively use and to reinforce existing structures for the promotion of democracy and human rights, including the activities of the Council of Europe. 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 the EU and Council of Europe, but also our Southern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern neighbours, who can also benefit from the Council of Europe experience.

The EU needs to keep working closely with all its national and international partners in order to build a relationship with its neighbours based on mutual accountability and cooperation. National Parliaments play an important role in this context. I am very grateful for the continued support of the Riksdag for the European Neighbourhood Policy and look forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President