



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

### **New EU programme to support political and democratic reform in Southern Mediterranean**

Brussels, 22 December 2011 – A new regional programme was adopted today by the European Commission, to promote political and democratic reform in the Southern Neighbourhood countries as part of the strategic partnership between the EU and the Council of Europe (CoE).

This programme, which will initially be rolled out in Morocco and Tunisia, aims at supporting the independence and efficiency of the judiciary, as well as promoting good governance and the fight against corruption, the protection of human rights and democratic values and institutions and the control of human trafficking .

The programme will target governmental bodies at all levels; parliaments and public structures with specific responsibilities in the relevant areas, civil society and youth representatives. Activities will include experts' assessments and recommendations to streamline the existing legislation and practice, legal opinions and policy advice to improve the independence and efficiency of the judiciary, conferences, round tables and expert working groups to allow for exchanges and peer-reviews and training of young political leaders from the southern Mediterranean.

Catherine Ashton, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission, said: "The European Union is determined to provide all the help it can as its southern neighbours strive for a democratic future. Building deep democracy is about more than simply holding one election. Countries need to build the democratic institutions which will allow democracy to take root and become a normal way of life. The programme we are adopting today aims to help them do just that. It forms part of our new approach to our neighbourhood, set out in May in our new European Neighbourhood Policy."

Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle, commented: "Assistance in building sustainable and long-lasting democracy in North Africa is one of our utmost priorities. By supporting human rights and good governance with programmes like this, we are helping to ensure that people have a judiciary system which responds to their needs and makes sure that they are treated fairly."

The Council of Europe has a long proven experience in supporting political and democratic transformation processes, so makes an ideal partnership for the European Commission on this programme which is part of a new approach to the Southern Neighbourhood. The Commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms through multilateral treaties and bilateral agreements is a further, important element."

The programme will have the necessary flexibility to react to new and emerging priorities, which may result from the still developing political context in the region. Strong complementarity and coherence will also be ensured with other EU initiatives such as the SPRING programme or the future "European Endowment for Democracy". It will have an initial budget of €4 million, will start early 2012 and last for three years.

### **For more information**

Regional cooperation with Mediterranean partners:

[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-south/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-south/index_en.htm)

On the European Neighbourhood Policy:

[http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/index_en.htm)

Website of the Council of Europe:

<http://www.coe.int>

Website of the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy: Štefan Füle:

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_2010-2014/fule/](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/fule/)

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