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Baroness Catherine Ashton

European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
European Commission Vice President for External Relations

Mr. Štefan Füle

Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy

Dear Vice President, Dear Commissioner,

Allow us to express our appreciation for the timely reflection on the future of the Union's policies with regard to its neighbourhood, which gives us a welcome opportunity to offer our vision for the EU's future relations with its neighbours in the South and the East.

Our neighbours should be perceived as an invaluable asset for the EU. Some 300 million people living in the EU's proximity, linked with us historically and culturally, represent an opportunity the EU should embrace.

While the ENP is addressed to 16 of the EU's closest neighbours, those countries and their aspirations vary from one to another. Some are European and thus enjoy special status in accordance with the Treaties, others will remain neighbours of Europe. Yet all of them have the potential to be close political allies and to become more integrated with the EU.

Future co-operation with the Eastern and Southern partners should be built on the principles of partnership, openness and conditionality. Firstly, our neighbours are our partners, not our clients. This implies intensified political dialogue and deepened integration in a number of fields. Secondly, as for openness, we should be ambitious in offering the neighbours a clear model of economic integration, with full participation in the single market as a long-term goal. This principle should also imply an increasing openness to involve the citizens and civil society organizations of the partner countries in the development and implementation of relevant policies, since this is required for their success, not least in the areas of democracy and human rights. Finally, we should apply the principle of conditionality more coherently in relations with all our neighbours, as it gives the most advanced partners a chance to move faster forward on the path towards EU norms, standards and values.

The launch of the **Eastern Partnership** (EaP) is a very significant achievement, and the partnership has raised the EU's offer to partners substantially. There remains, however, a need to safeguard the political objectives already established with the EaP (i.e. visa liberalization as a long term goal, deep and comprehensive free trade areas, closer political association) and to ensure that the EU and partners deliver on their respective commitments. Mobility of people is an issue of utmost importance. A reflection should be conducted concerning how co-operation with partners could be further enhanced, including as regards the Schengen co-operation, when visa free regimes are properly implemented and reviewed. The EaP has started a necessary and long-expected process in this area.

The EaP covers key objectives and policy instruments of bilateral relations with the Eastern partners. It is thus much more than a multilateral co-operation initiative supplementary to the ENP. In order to make the EU's policy clearer and more effective, all EU bilateral relations and actions with the Eastern partners should be put under aegis of the EaP.

The multilateral dimension of the Partnership has already proved that it has clear added value to the bilateral track. However, additional efforts should be put into making the work of the multilateral platforms, panels and flagship initiatives more operative and concrete, producing visible outcomes, focussing on the EU integration of the partner countries. A higher degree of involvement of civil society actors in the multilateral activities would be desirable.

The EaP needs to continue to evolve to stay relevant. This is valid for both the bilateral and the multilateral dimensions. Next year's EaP Summit in Budapest (26 May) is the appropriate time for further elaborating political objectives and taking new qualitative steps in the Partnership. This could i.e. include possibilities of closer alignment of partners to EU policies, including elements of the cohesion policy, strengthened political dialogue and more advanced forms of co-operation. Over the coming years, and in response to ambitions and efforts by partners, the EaP should continue to evolve and successively open up more areas for co-operation, approximation and integration, i.a. co-operation between police and law enforcement agencies, elements of ESDP, migration and asylum, and others. In this context, we want to underline the importance of a process leading to a well-prepared and substantial Summit, resulting in a broadened and strengthened EaP. In this process, a review of which EU policies, programs and agencies could be opened for participation of EaP partner countries could be conducted.

The current co-operation with the Southern neighbours builds on 15 years of extensive experience, to a large extent pre-dating the ENP. The partnership was relaunched in 2008 as the **Union for the Mediterranean** (UfM), with the strategic aim to infuse new vitality in and raise the political level of the partnership as well as to concretize co-operation efforts. This vision of forging stronger partnerships with our Southern neighbours, as well as those measures already undertaken, must be safeguarded. We should also ensure that the EU and partners alike deliver on their commitments.

We see the upcoming Summit of the UfM (20-21 November) as an important impetus for the continued development of our relations with our Southern partners and we welcome the broad agenda that has been proposed.

The political dialogue with the Southern partners is an important feature of the UfM. Furthermore, when the Secretariat is in place, priority projects should enhance co-operation in key areas of common concern. At the same time, democracy, human rights and gender equality should be enhanced and a higher degree of involvement by different actors of society would be desirable. Some Southern partners have been offered an advanced status, which could be considered more widely, given that core criteria are met.

Good relations with both our **Southern and Eastern partners** are of strategic importance. The ENP has played an important role in advancing the Union's relations in both directions, and it has contributed to building stability and prosperity in our neighbourhood. At the same time, with the establishment of the UfM and the EaP, the development of relations with the two sets of neighbours has followed increasingly differentiated tracks. Given the differences between the two groups of countries, this is a logical development.

In order to achieve our political objectives for the two groups and the individual partner countries, and to accommodate the different visions and challenges facing them, a greater degree of flexibility in formulating and implementing the EU's policies is desirable, both in a short and a longer perspective. In particular, and in light of the upcoming discussions on the next financial perspective, we see several advantages with a transformation of the **European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)**, so as to:

- allow for a more transparent allocation process. The EU should allocate funding on the basis of objective criteria, such as the level of ambition in the EU's relations with partners, the needs and developments in the countries concerned (including their access to other sources of finance), partners' effective absorption capacity and their rate of progress towards implementing agreed objectives;
- allow clearer and thus more effective linkages between the policy objectives as expressed in UfM and EaP documents, as well as bilateral agreements between the EU and each partner, and the substantial financial assistance provided by the European Union;
- enhance the weight and credibility of UfM and EaP in the eyes of partner countries;
- allow for tailoring support modalities more closely to the increasingly differentiated needs of the Southern and Eastern partners respectively.

The European Union is in the process of negotiating deep and comprehensive free trade area agreements (DCFTAs) with EaP countries. The following commitments to adapt to the *acquis communautaire* are very much in the interest of both the EU and the partners. It is also a very costly undertaking. Therefore, on the financial side, our policies should take into account the costs of implementation of the *acquis* incurred by partner countries.

Furthermore, in order to increase the efficiency in the implementation of the EU's policies, the period between political decisions and the realization of assistance programs and projects needs to be shortened.

In order to facilitate the further evolution of EU policies in the neighbourhood, we should take into consideration dividing the ENPI into two separate financial instruments, one for the East and one for the South, in mid-term perspective.

In the case of the EaP, the linkage between the work of the multilateral thematic platforms and the programming of assistance for the partner countries should be strengthened, while fully respecting the EU's decision-making procedures. Moreover, it could be to the benefit of the EaP if programmes or activities carried out by EU Member States or other donors in the partner countries could be presented as supporting EaP objectives, when appropriate.

EU financial support for the neighbouring countries should not be limited to the EU budgetary funds only. Our aim should be to mobilize additional resources, coming from bilateral partners and multilateral financial institutions, but also from the private sector. In this regard, the active involvement and support of the international financial institutions, notably the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction Development are essential for the implementation of our policies in both the South and the East.

In conclusion, we look forward to participating actively in the forthcoming strategic discussions on the future of our relations with the immediate neighbours of the EU. This should provide a good basis for strengthening our policies and instruments in the period leading up to the next financial perspective and beyond. We hope that you have found our ideas useful for the process ahead.

Yours sincerely,



Radosław Sikorski



Carl Bildt