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NOTE

from:	Council
to:	European Council
Subject:	The European Union's Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East - Interim Report December 2007

Further to the mandate given by the European Council at its meeting on 17 and 18 June 2004, the Council has approved the Interim report December 2007 on the European Union's Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East (see Annex). The Council invites the European Council to take note of the report.

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST

INTERIM REPORT, DECEMBER 2007

I. Introduction

The Council of the European Union agreed in June 2004 that a report on the implementation of the EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East (EUSPMME) would be presented at the June 2005 European Council and thereafter on a six-monthly basis. The December 2005 European Council, on the basis of the report prepared during the UK Presidency, underlined its commitment to support political, social and economic reform in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

In the report presented to the European Council in December 2006 during the Finnish Presidency it is stated that the implementation of the EUSPMME and especially its reform priorities in the political, economic and social fields is a long-term process that requires strong political will and constant commitment of the partners. The report concluded that in the Mediterranean region most EUSPMME principles were already part of the Barcelona process and are included in the ENP Action Plans and suggested that future follow up and monitoring of reform in the Mediterranean region will take place in the context of the Barcelona Process, Association Councils, Committees and sub-committees as well as through the ENP mid-term reviews and other existing reporting mechanisms.

The objective of this interim report is to assess progress on the primary objective of the SPMME which is to promote development, through partnership, of a common zone of peace, prosperity and progress in the countries east of Jordan.

The principles of the EUSPMME include partnership and dialogue; understanding the different nature of partner countries; working together toward peaceful stabilization and reconstruction in Iraq; resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict with the understanding that the resolution of the conflict cannot be a precondition for confronting the urgent reform challenges of the EU partner countries, nor vice versa; the primary political interests for the EU include human rights, democracy, the rule of law, good governance, gender, respect for persons belonging to minorities, co-operation on non-proliferation, counter terrorism, conflict prevention and resolution, and economic development; civil society development; central role of education for youth, male and female, in creating a knowledge society; promoting understanding between the peoples of the European Union and the Mediterranean and the Middle East, especially through fostering mutual respect for their cultural diversity; offering an opportunity to all partners to move at a pace in accordance with their willingness to engage; partners progressing a reform-related agenda more quickly should have greater opportunities to avail of the wider benefits of the partnership; building on existing structures; shared security concerns should be tackled in a spirit of partnership, recognizing a broad concept of security and finally recognizing that the presence in Europe of significant populations with origins in the partner countries is an important factor in the relations.

The EU has a less visible role and presence in some of the countries east of Jordan than in the Mediterranean region although some co-operation and dialogue mechanisms are available. The EU has continued to use the existing co-operation and dialogue mechanisms with the countries in the region, including political dialogue, active diplomacy in support of compliance with relevant UNSC Resolutions, enhanced support to the national reform agendas, substantial support to reconstruction efforts and the development or strengthening of contractual relations.

The analysis is based on reports by EU Heads of Mission as well as other EU sources of information.

II. State of play

Gulf Co-operation Council

Co-operation with the GCC countries has focused on political dialogue as well as economic and commercial co-operation.

Political dialogue was moved forward through meetings at officials and ministerial level in Brussels, Riyadh and New York. Broad high level participation on behalf of the EU at the 17th EU-GCC Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting on 8th May 2007 in Riyadh underlined the great interest in deepening the dialogue with the GCC. **DELETED**. On the economic and contractual front, the EU-GCC negotiations for a free trade agreement continued in view of their conclusion at the earliest possible stage. At the Ministerial meeting in Riyadh, both parties reconfirmed their commitment to further intensifying their efforts to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome in the nearest future.

On the economic front, the signing of the Free Trade Area Agreement could assist the governments to further address the challenges linked to the diversification of the economies and employment generation, notably amongst the young populations. At the same time, it should help to enhance the EU-GCC partnership in all fields, including in the area of energy as well as climate and environment.

Further efforts were made by the EC and Member States to promote public knowledge and understanding of the EU among GCC citizens such as the launching of an initiative to promote debate and understanding on EU-GCC relations by the Commission through the new instrument for cooperation with Industrialised Cooperation Countries as well as the numerous events organised by EU member countries with EC support in the GCC capitals on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome.

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Iraq

The Iraqi government is committed to bringing forward and implementing political, social and economic reforms. **DELETED**

The Iraqi government has expressed the wish for a closer co-operation with the EU on key reform areas. At the November GAERC, the Council agreed that the EU should work closely with the UN to further identify and deliver support for it to fulfil its role as set out in UNSCR 1770; identify further contributions to help alleviate the humanitarian situation in Iraq and the region; identify and take opportunities to provide further human rights support; and assist the Iraqi authorities in meeting their responsibilities in accordance with the International Compact with Iraq (ICI) and identify and provide further support. The EU has supported political and economic transition in Iraq, including through active participation in the preparation of the ICI, which was endorsed on 3 May 2007 in Sharm El Sheikh. The EU will continue to support Iraqi efforts to live up to its commitments and implement this ambitious reform programme both on security, political and economic issues. The Community has already supported Iraq with more than 800 Meuro since 2003.

Negotiations continued on a Trade and Co-operation Agreement, with two rounds in June and November 2007. **DELETED**

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Iran

The EU reiterates that the evolution of a positive long-term relationship between Iran and Europe will depend on action by Iran to address effectively all the EU's areas of concern **DELETED**

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Yemen

Yemen has continued to show commitment to political, social and economic reform. The September 2006 elections, to which the EU deployed an election observation mission, represented another step in this direction. **DELETED**

The Yemeni government is interested in closer relations with the EU. **DELETED**

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III. Conclusions

1. EU policy with the countries covered by this report has continued to be rooted in the principles and objectives of the SPMME as agreed in June 2004. Dialogue and cooperation with the partner countries has been enhanced since the last report. **DELETED**
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