

The European Union Strengthens its Role in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

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For this new edition of the Mediterranean Yearbook, I would like to send my warmest regards to the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) and the Fundació CIDOB, and congratulate you on this publication, which in so little time has become an important forum for dialogue and understanding

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between the European Union and its neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean Basin.

In 2007, during its Presidency of the G-8 and the Council of the European Union, Germany assumed a double challenge that holds great significance for Mediterranean States as well. At the G-8 Summit in Heiligendamm, we made significant progress in the struggle against climate change and in support

to Africa. During the remainder of the year, within the framework of the G8 Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, we will step up a cooperative and reform-oriented dialogue with the States and societies of the Middle East and North Africa, a dialogue which will deeply involve civil society. During our EU Presidency, we felt it particularly important to bring Europe closer to its citizens. The European Union has managed to strengthen its institutions, in particular the European Parliament, and recover its capacity to act, which will also be of benefit to our Southern Mediterranean Partners. The Berlin Declaration of 25 March 2007 clearly stated that all Member States are “united in our aim of placing the European Union on a renewed common basis by the European Parliamentary elections in 2009.” Thanks to the consensus achieved at the European Council meeting of June 2006, we can attain this goal. Despondence and skepticism are things of the past for the EU. Europe can once again look to the future.

We have also made considerable inroads with regard to international relations: European external policy will be strengthened by the so-called EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, as well as by the European External Action Service. With their support, Europe will be able to better defend its interests.

Europe will also be able to place this new capacity for action at the service of the Euro-

Mediterranean Partnership. Peace, stability and prosperity for the whole of the Mediterranean Region continues to be one of the primary objectives of our cooperation. We must continue to strengthen economic integration and the political and cultural ties that unite us. The European Neighbourhood Policy is an important tool to such an end. We can make progress on specific issues such as migration, energy, the environment, education opportunities, the role of the media and other social matters. The Barcelona Process continues to be highly relevant. My hope is that all EU States will participate in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

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By the same token, we must also make all efforts to seek a solution to the Middle East conflict that will facilitate development and economic and social

progress throughout the region. The aim is and will continue to be to find a solution that acknowledges the existence of two States, allowing Israel and Palestine to coexist within recognised borders and with good neighbourly relations.

Last year was marred by a second conflict in the region, the Lebanon crisis. Through our commitment as an EU Member State as well as a member of the United Nations, we helped to strengthen Lebanon's stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this way, we have actively contributed to the implementation of the UN Security Council's Resolutions 1559 and 1701.

Cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean Region constitutes an important task for our future, to which a strong EU can and will contribute. Major challenges remain on our agenda, however, such as that of improving the socio-economic situation in a manner compatible with environmental and climate protection. Together we can contribute to overcoming the religious and cultural differences that extremist and terrorist forces use to their ends. On the solid foundation represented by our value system, we wish to build bridges among cultures through tolerance and dialogue.

May this Yearbook contribute to better understanding among people throughout the Mediterranean Basin.