



Speeches & Interviews

Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, on "Strengthening Eu's ties with its neighbours during the Cyprus Presidency" at the Economist Conference, Nicosia - 08/10/2012

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you today, at the annual Cyprus Economist Conference, which has become a tradition during the last few years on the island and I would like to warmly thank the organizers for this invitation.

This year's theme and the high caliber of participants provide an excellent opportunity for brainstorming and planning our next steps on shaping our strategy in the thematic areas under discussion, with the aim of working collectively for a "better Europe."

To highlight this, I would like to quote from President Barroso's 2012 State of the Union Address: "The reality is that in an interconnected world, Europe's Member States on their own are no longer able to effectively steer the course of events. In order for the EU to maintain political leverage and be able to continue to promote universal values in the new multipolar system, we must all work together "Towards a Better Europe".

As you are aware, this is exactly the main message and the fundamental objective of the Cyprus Presidency: Working towards a "Better Europe", a Europe of social cohesion, prosperity, security and sustainable growth, a Union that means more for its citizens. By creating a Better Europe we are also building a stronger Union, which can enhance its role in the world and strengthen its relations with its neighbors.

A more confident Europe is a more reliable regional and international partner. To this end, our priorities as Council Presidency include a renewed focus on the global role of the EU and its relations with its neighbours, especially after the recent developments in our southern neighbourhood.

The European Neighbourhood Policy, together with the process of Enlargement, constitute vital tools and coherent policies of the EU which define our approach towards our immediate neighbors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The EU has responded quickly and with determination to the unprecedented and historic changes unfolding in the Southern Neighbourhood: it adapted its policy and its instruments, re-oriented its assistance programmes, has made available technical support to facilitate democratic transition and allocated additional funding to neighbouring countries. Towards reaching this goal, the new EU neighborhood policy has been built on the provision of three pillars: Money, Mobility, and Market access, based on the principle "More for More", i.e. only those partners willing to embark on political reforms and to respect the shared universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law have been offered the most rewarding aspects of the EU policy, notably economic integration (based on the establishment of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas), mobility of people (mobility partnerships), as well as greater EU financial assistance.

The EU offered to Southern Mediterranean partner countries "A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity" in the context of the European Neighborhood Policy, focusing on three elements: democratic transformation, a partnership with people and civil society and sustainable and inclusive growth. With the "New Response to a Changing Neighborhood" the EU spelled out more concretely the EU's new policy approach and proposed to allocate substantial additional financial resources to support democratic transition. Total 2011 ENPI commitments in favor of Arab Spring countries and region amounted to EUR 1.4

billion of which EUR 130 million were additional funds made available after the Arab spring events.

In acknowledging the significance of dialogue between the EU and the Arab world I have paid a number of visits to several Arab Spring countries that comprise our southern ENP partners, in an effort to deliver the message that the EU is interested in forging a renewed partnership. This has been one of the key interests of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Addressing the regular session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States' in September and meeting the Secretary General of the Arab League here in Nicosia in June this year, are some of such activities that have contributed to this objective. We also held the first ever, consultations between the EU's Political and Security Ambassadors with the League of Arab States' Permanent Representatives in Cairo at the end of September and we are now looking forward to the 2nd EU-Arab League Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting, an initiative that I have personally exerted special effort to materialize, and which will take place on 14 November 2012 in Cairo.

In the longer term, I have often stated during the last months that as the EU we have to set up a strategic objective that will foster the conditions for sustainable development and democracy in our southern neighborhood. The tragic situation in Syria and recent developments in other countries of the region that are in transition, demonstrate the importance of genuine EU engagement.

Therefore, I strongly believe that democratic transitions can only be successful if they manage to meet real social and economic expectations. What is at stake is the stability of the entire region; the safety of our **borders** and beyond; the future of our economic and trade relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me a pertinent and relevant side note:

As the EU we have a duty towards the future to turn the Mediterranean into a flourishing area of cooperation and mutual benefit.

In this respect, the end of Cyprus' division, through peaceful reunification, will undoubtedly have a very important collateral influence on achieving and maintaining a much needed environment of stability and peace in the turbulent region of the Southern Neighborhood. The ramifications of this singularly positive effect will be felt on a variety of fronts.

Before proceeding further I wish to stress that the importance we attach in the future of the fragile southern neighborhood in no way implies that we consider the evolution of EU relations with our Eastern Partners to be of lesser importance.

Cyprus declares itself to be a staunch supporter of the Eastern Partnership aspect of the European Neighborhood Policy and attests to the Eastern Partnership's success during its three years of implementation, as it has indeed brought the EU closer than ever to our Eastern partners. Currently, the relevant Roadmap, endorsed during last July's Eastern Partnership Ministerial, serves as our guiding beacon for our steps forward in view of the Vilnius Summit of Autumn 2013.

As I have talked about the EU's neighbours that are included in both dimensions of the ENP, it would be an omission not to make a specific mention to the neighbour which is also one of the key strategic partners of the EU, and that is the Russian Federation. Relations with Russia matter enormously to the EU. We are tied together in terms of trade and investment, energy, people to people ties and much more. In this double-hatted role of a key neighbor and a strategic partner, the assistance of Russia in a variety of areas on the European and international agenda has proven to be indispensable. I strongly believe that this strategic Partnership can and should keep strengthening and being further elaborated, with ambition and pragmatism, based on common interests, constructive engagement, and mutual accountability. This is obviously to the advantage of both the EU and Russia

Distinguished participants,

Let me now turn to Enlargement, a dossier which falls under my responsibility in my capacity as presiding over the General Affairs Council during the 6-month Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU. For Cyprus, which is a strong believer in the European Union's transformative powers and in the vision of our continent's unification, it was only natural that the enlargement policy of the EU received priority designation in our Presidency program.

The process of enlargement itself is clearly one of our most successful policies; on the one hand, it showcases the emphasis the Union ascribes on the common European values of peace and freedom, democracy and the rule of law, while on the other it provides prospective members with a solid incentive for democratic transformation, structural reforms and regional co-operation.

Indicative of the significance we attach to the enlargement policy of the EU is the fact that I have already visited nearly all the countries which belong to this dossier, commending them for the progress achieved so far and urging them to intensify their efforts on their path towards further integration. I have also expressed the commitment as Presidency to push forward and achieve tangible results on the European perspective of every candidate or prospective candidate, by acting as an honest broker.

Amongst the three countries currently involved in accession negotiations, Iceland is clearly at the most advanced stage, having opened 18 chapters of the *acquis* and closed 10 others since the start of accession negotiations in July 2010. Our aim is to open by the end of the year another 10 chapters and work with our partners in trying to tackle some of the more sensitive policy areas, including on fisheries and on agriculture.

Accession negotiations were initiated with Montenegro in late June this year and it is our hope that it will be possible to advance them substantively until the end of December. Montenegro's progress is all the more important when viewed in the larger context of the EU's policy in the Western Balkans, a geographical area of vital interest whose future clearly lies within the Union. Speeding up the relevant processes for the countries of this region is without a doubt an important challenge for the EU, and one which we must all ensure that is handled successfully.

Lastly, on Turkey, allow me first to underline once again Cyprus' staunch support towards its full accession, provided that Turkey unequivocally commits to implementing fully and without exception all its obligations vis-à-vis the EU, something which it has so far unfortunately eschewed. It is obviously quite regrettable, to put it mildly, that Turkey has refused to co-operate with the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU. Nevertheless, and in spite of Turkey's unconstructive stance, which has been overwhelmingly denounced by the EU, we continue to be bound by our duty as Presidency to monitor its progress in its accession negotiations and to impartially review its state-of-play, aiming, similarly with all other candidates, to facilitate the advancement of its negotiations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The tireless implementation of the key policies of the EU that I have just described is tangible evidence of what joint determination can achieve. The work that is in progress constitutes the best tool of disseminating the core message of EU policies towards its neighbors and the advantages of its soft power strategy, via trust building, mutual interest, collective benefit; all of which epitomize the value of our concerted efforts.

Let me assure you that Cyprus, particularly as Council Presidency will continue doing its part to this end, determined to do our best in providing a more stable, more prosperous and more reconciliatory future in the EU's neighbourhood, for the sake of generations to come, so that our European legacy is remembered for all the right reasons. We certainly hope that all of our neighbors will concur to this collective cause.

Thank you for your attention.

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