

October 23-24 EuMed Event

October 24th: Policy agenda for e-infrastructures in the Mediterranean countries

Introduction by Mr Marcus Cornaro, European Commission, Director Europe, Southern Mediterranean, Middle-East and Neighbourhood Policy

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I would also like to welcome you all to this important event marking the ongoing growth of the Euro-Mediterranean co-operation in the field of Information Society. I convey the sincere greetings of Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner who would have liked very much to be here today to welcome you personally, but unfortunately because of pressing obligations Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner was not able to participate in this event and she asked me to welcome you in her place, which I am delighted to do.

Barcelona Declaration objectives

It has been more than a decade now since the governments of the Member States of the European Union and their neighbour states in the Mediterranean region started a new phase in their co-operation with the Barcelona Declaration. Although usually a lot of time and effort is invested in preparing common declarations, we tend to forget their content when the day to day work on their implementation takes centre stage.

For the occasion of today's event I am taking the opportunity to remind you of this Declaration.

In the Barcelona Declaration the Euro-Mediterranean partners established three main objectives of the Partnership:

1. The definition of a common area of peace and stability through the reinforcement of political and security dialogue.
2. The construction of a zone of shared prosperity through an economic and financial partnership and the gradual establishment of a free-trade area.

3. The rapprochement between peoples through a social, cultural and human partnership aimed at encouraging understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies.

Today these objectives remain to be fully relevant for the Euro-Mediterranean region, perhaps even more so than ten years ago. And more and more, it is recognised how these three objectives are intertwined. Peace and stability stem from common understanding between cultures and from joint economic prosperity.

The European Union's mechanism of sharing benefits does not stop at its borders. The Union intends to extend this mechanism to its neighbouring countries and regions, not just as a friendly gesture but for the well-being for all concerned, including the European citizens. This is the reason why the Barcelona Declaration was followed up by real and successful co-operation programmes. The framework for this is the ENP, the European Neighbourhood Policy. It is designed to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and to offer them the chance to participate in various EU activities, through greater political, security, economic and cultural co-operation.

The Information Society is key to the Barcelona objectives

I believe that the co-operation in the field of the Information Society is one of the key elements for achieving all three objectives mentioned in the Barcelona Declaration. Integration processes depend on getting to know one another, exchanging information, removing stereotyping, disclosing sources, sharing news of each others lives and circumstances. Also, integration depends on diminishing differences in wealth levels by speeding up economic development of countries and regions that are relatively poor. As Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are key factors to economic growth, co-operation in the field of the Information Society can provide leverage to this development.

In today's interconnected world the latest generation of ICT-based infrastructures, e-Infrastructures are becoming more and more important enablers for not only scientific, but also for social development. When we talk about e-Infrastructures, we talk about grid empowered infrastructures, we also talk about a new concept that puts the power of Information and Communication Technologies at the service of the researchers, helping them

to concentrate on their problem domain. E-Infrastructures are therefore at the core of Europe's strategy towards the deployment of the European Research Area, in support of e-Science.

To illustrate this let's have a look at the EUMEDCONNECT project: for the first time, researchers in Europe and in the South Mediterranean can work together on-line on joint initiatives, benefiting from enduring advanced broadband infrastructures to foster a spirit of collaboration between different nationalities and cultures. The applications that can run on top of these infrastructures are almost limitless, ensuring that society can benefit from developments on a wide range of application areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The contributions of the distinguished speakers of today's event and the discussions with you as participants will show that significant progress has been made in all partner countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region. The shape of the Information Society has dramatically changed – and changed for the better. Market liberalisation and technological change have accelerated the development of the Information Society at a speed that is unparalleled in history.

But a lot of work still needs to be done. Not all partner countries take up the pace of this development equally fast. But there are success stories to be told and we can learn from each other.

Today's event is one of the occasions where we can share these success stories. But let us also be frank about what still needs to be done. The agenda provides an opportunity for both.

We are in an important phase of our co-operation. The EUMEDIS project has just finished and the NATP-II project will also come to an end in 2008. Although the European Neighbourhood Policy mainly relies on national Action Plans, we should now ask ourselves what efforts are necessary on a regional level.

Early in 2008, the Euro-Mediterranean Ministers responsible for the Information Society will have their next meeting in Cairo. This will be a perfect opportunity to define the needs and means for future co-operation and strengthen the Euro Mediterranean partnership in the field of the Information Society.

It is the challenge for all Euro Mediterranean countries to use Information Society as a common tool for security, prosperity and integration. I am certain that today's event will contribute to this debate and to successfully identifying the next steps. On behalf of the European Commission, I would like to thank you for being here today and taking part in meeting this challenge.