

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY !

**EURO-Mediterranean Summit
Ljubljana, Slovenia
November 15 - 17, 2006
Opening remarks by the Representative of
the EU Presidency, Ambassador Bassin**

Mr President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. As representative of the Presidency of the EU, I concur fully with the previous speakers on their views of the importance of this meeting and of the Barcelona Process as a whole. I also join those who have expressed their cordial thanks to the Government of Slovenia for hosting the meeting and for undertaking the heavy burden of logistics which the hosting of such an important international meeting entails.

2. Mr President,

I would, first of all, like to give you some insight into the progress made in the Barcelona Process under the chairmanship of Finland. Secondly I would share with you some thoughts on the role of the EU in the recent conflict in Lebanon.

3. At the 10th anniversary Euro-Mediterranean Summit in Barcelona, in November 2005, the EU and Mediterranean partners agreed on a large and ambitious Five Year Work Programme. A key priority for the Finnish Presidency has been to bring forward the objectives of this Work Programme, progress made in its implementation and the spirit of co-ownership which has prevailed in contacts with EuroMed Partners.

4. In the second half of 2006 the Presidency has arranged events within all the three pillars of the EuroMed Partnership. Central themes have been democracy, human rights, gender equality and creating a stronger civil society as well co-operation in the area of higher education. The dialogue of cultures in the EuroMed area has been and will remain one of the high priorities.

5. The four ministerial meetings arranged or to be arranged before the end of the Finnish Presidency are perhaps the most important among these fora. Lack of time prevents me from describing in detail their objectives and contents, but I will enumerate them for your convenience:

- The 6th Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Industry (Rhodes, Greece, in Mid-September)
- The 1st Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Rights of Women in Society (Istanbul, Nov 14 - 15)
- The EuroMediterranean Ministerial Conference on the Environment (Cairo 20th Nov 20)

- The Finnish Presidency will culminate in the 8th EuroMed Foreign Ministers' Conference in Tampere., in Nov. 27th - 28th

6. The Partners have held two ad hoc meetings on migration, with a view to a Ministerial meeting on the subject in 2007. The Presidency has also continued to promote a deeper intercultural dialogue. The A Ministerial working dinner on Monday Nov. 27 will allow Ministers to review the work undertaken since the 2005 Barcelona Summit.

7. Mr President,

Allow me now to make a few comments on the European Union and its role in the recent conflict in Lebanon. The Union's contribution was essential in formulating the UN resolution 1701, reaching the cease-fire and strengthening the UNIFIL Mission. Now looking ahead for the next steps we are more than ever convinced that a lasting peace and security in the Middle East can only be ensured by a comprehensive settlement with a negotiated two-state solution at its core.

8. But the work for lasting peace in the region would not be successful without another important track, the promotion of the living conditions of the entire population and the sustainable development of the Mediterranean countries. The EU is committed to long term co-operation to assist the Partner countries in their transition to modern, competitive economies. We have to intensify our efforts to mobilize FDI into this region and redouble our efforts to create a regional free trade zone by 2010.

9. In addition to action in the political and economic spheres, inter-cultural and interreligious dialogue is an essential part of the kind of healing process we envisage for Lebanon. This, evidently, is the sector where the Civil Society excels. We invite men and women of good will to contribute their ideas and their time. The EU is behind you, ready to give its support in appropriate ways.

Thank you for your attention.