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"The Euromed- Partnership and the German Presidency"

Ladies and Gentlemen,

presenting the Euromed-programme of the German EU-Presidency - which is my task today - means to present a concept, slightly different to those in the years before. You might come up with two questions:

What is new? and Why a new concept?

Since it is very often easier to say "what it is not let me start by this which is - by the way -also helpful in avoiding misunderstandings. The "new or different concept is not contradictory to former concepts; it is complementary. The "new or different concept does not ignore work that was so far done in the Barcelona Process; it builds on the achievements of past years and presidencies'.

As you might have noticed, I am approaching my topic very cautiously - for at least one good reason which I don't want to hide from you today: When we first circulated our program, we were confronted with suspicion by some of our Euromed-partners. There was doubt whether Germany would attach enough importance to the Mediterranean region. Rumours had it that the German Presidency would turn its back to Euromed and focus on Eastern Europe.

Against this background, the announcement of a program that looked already different at first glance, seemed to prove the most pessimistic expectations. Priority was given to so-called "soft topics"-, namely role of the media, democratic values and democracy development, social problems like unemployment, environmental issues, elections.

More precisely and as response to our question "What is new"? allow me to elaborate: We developed our program at a time when tension in the Near and Middle East was running high and getting worse day by day. As we all know,

conflict scenarios have doubled and tripled and the outlook was quite bleak at times.

As if the existence of several bloody conflicts was not enough, we had to notice that the readiness to approach one another, to do away with misunderstandings and prejudices of the other culture, was speedily decreasing.

The media had its role in that development. And it was not always a constructive one. On the contrary: On both sides reporting went along dividing lines to the extent that it damaged the reputation of the partner country and distorted its intentions into a deliberate and wicked attack against the values of the other one.

I won't quote any examples but we all know some of them.

Our analysis of that development was, that a lack of knowledge about - and empathy for each other, paired with highly emotionalised and controversial topics would more and more widen the gap between different cultures and end up in a situation when it became impossible to bridge it.

It is difficult to say where we stand at the moment. And in a way it wouldn't change much if we knew. We have no other option than to do our best - or at least, what we consider to be our best - to improve the prevailing situation in the interest of all of us. One of many impressive interlocutors, I had the honour to meet at the occasion of my "Presidency journey" to the Euromed countries, put it that way: "Nous sommes obligés à réussir" (We are obliged to succeed!).

Now, what can the contribution of "Euromed" be like on the road to success? How can the possibilities that are offered in the framework of the Barcelona Process best be used to achieve that goal?

One answer to that question might be to increase the fields of practical cooperation beyond the political hostilities that overshadow the region since such long time.

As we see it - the Euromed partners should aim at building jointly more and more on the following elements:

- To extend cooperation to as many social layers as possible

- to include potentially influential groups - like journalists, parliamentarians, representatives of the Civil Society, scholars, writers - in their projects
- to prepare young people for their future responsibility as political and economic players
- to encourage them to meet with youngsters of different cultures
- to promote economic activities-, in particular those of smaller enterprises
- to adapt education and vocational training to the needs of the labour market

The "Barcelona Process" offers many chances on a broad scale. It is ambitious in its objectives and sounded from the very beginning - that is already in the Barcelona Declaration of 1995 - quite promising.

Years later people started to evaluate the achievements of the Process against its high level endeavours. They concluded that results were not convincing. Some even asked questions about the added value of the process. One major reproach was the fact that the Barcelona Process has so far not created a considerable increase in employment rates and could not visibly contribute to economic progress in partner countries.

Germany is convinced that the potential of the Barcelona Process is high. At the same time - we think - this potential has not been exploited accordingly. According to our assessment, we are at a crossroads with two options:

Either we allow the political situation to continue to limit cooperation in many fields-, or we take up the recommendations of Ministers in the Barcelona Declaration and try to implement them step by step. Even if these steps were small, they will still underline the character of a "process"! The Declaration puts it that way: "considering that the Barcelona Conference provides the basis for a process, which is open and should develop".

The reflex - if something "new and different" shows up is - understandably - to cling even more to the old system in the hope to avoid surprises. But what you'll get in the end, is stagnation.

Against this background, Germany, for its Euromed-presidency developed the following program:

- Germany wants to promote social dialogue and interaction with civil society. This is - according to our conviction - the only way to improve mutual understanding between the peoples of our two neighbouring regions. What we desperately need is mutual tolerance-, be it in the context of religion, culture or history. The Barcelona Declaration gives a clear definition of the goal we should have in mind: "...breaking down prejudice, ignorance and fanaticism and fostering cooperation at grassroots level". This is why Euromed cannot allow itself to exclude certain groups from our activities, since they all participate in shaping our society - if we like it or not. Not in the least, social policy is always linked with other sector politics, like labour or economic policy. In this context, the German Presidency organised a "Conference on Employment and Social Dialogue", which took place in Berlin in mid-March and gathered approximately 150 participants from trade unions and employers associations who discussed options of how employment and social dialogue in the Euromed region can be strengthened. Participant countries presented their types of social systems. The importance of dealing with these questions is underlined in the Barcelona Declaration: "The Euro-Mediterranean partnership must contribute to improving the living and working conditions and increasing the employment level of the population in the Mediterranean partner states, in particular of women and the neediest strata of the population. In this context, the partners attach particular importance to the respect and promotion of basic social rights".
- Also, the subject of Energy was treated under German Presidency. For obvious reasons, many "energy-related events" are organised these days. Yet, the importance of the subject was already mentioned in the Barcelona Declaration, which underlines already the necessity of close energy-cooperation and refers even to "new and renewable sources of energy", "energy efficiency" and to "energy-related environmental issues". Berlin hosted a Ministerial Conference on this issue on 10 April. About 120 representatives of relevant Ministries, utilities, energy agencies and financing institutions took part. Discussions centred around the prospects for and benefits of an integrated energy network, options for achieving environmental goals and secure supply as well as options for energy storage. The Conference was settled in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy/ENP and thus also representatives from Eastern Europe participated. This is why this Conference does not appear in our "Euromed List".

- Just a few days ago – 23<sup>rd</sup> April - a meeting of Euromed-investment experts took place in Brussels. It was a strong request by the Arab group to tackle this topic.

*Events still to come and currently under preparation are the following:*

- About 200 young people between the age of 18 to 25 from all Euromed countries will hold "parliamentary sessions" in Berlin. The event is scheduled for 26<sup>th</sup> May - 03<sup>rd</sup> June. They will discuss a range of topics, learn about different dialogue-cultures and trying to find compromises amongst each other. In this respect, let me quote the Barcelona Declaration": "Youth exchanges should be the means to prepare future generations for a closer cooperation between the Euro Mediterranean partners". The "Youth Parliament Session" is meant to boost the participants' understanding of other cultures and values, raise awareness that problems can only be solved in cooperation and provide a concrete experience of democratic practices. The impact of young generations - to which you belong as well - on the future shape of political, economic, social and cultural life in all its aspects becomes evident if we look at the following statistical item (UNDP-report 2002): the Mediterranean region includes the largest number of young people in the world. More than half of the population are under the age of 25, with almost 38% under the age of 14! This shows that the future role of these generations can hardly be over-estimated!
- On 1<sup>st</sup> May, Berlin will welcome a Euromesco Seminar on "Governance, Reform and Human Rights in the Euromed Region".
- In the frame of the "Euromed and the Media"-initiative, Germany will host a Media Conference in Berlin on 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> June. We are expecting around 100 participants from the media and nongovernmental organisations, as well as scholars, students and experts. Political audience and a number of high-ranking guest will also be present. Main topic will be the "Role and responsibility of the Media in the Euro Mediterranean Region". The intention is to give participants the floor to find out about their perception of the role of media. It is not, to teach them on this issue!
- With reference to the role of the media, quite a number of events are taking place under German Presidency. We consider this issue of particular importance against the background of increasing terrorist

activities and its media-coverage. The latter is quite often not helpful, becomes increasingly instrumental for terrorists. In particular internet appearances cannot be controlled. There is a big need for joint action against this threat. On 21<sup>st</sup> May, there will be a "Euromed Seminar on the Role of the Media in preventing incitement to terrorism" in Dublin.

- Another milestone in the German Presidency Program is the "Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Scientific Research". The Conference will take place in Cairo in June. The interest in that subject is high on both sides of the Euromed partnership. The key role of education has been widely accepted also pertaining to the demographic pressure that was just mentioned in connection with the Youth Parliament. At the moment the substance of the conference is being prepared jointly by Euromed partners. It is envisaged to come up with "Final Conclusions" in which Ministers would agree on an intensified exchange in the fields of education and research that could open new roads for cooperation.

It will be a long and winding road to successfully work on all these issues, which are of a complex and difficult nature. As such, they might be well placed in the frame of a "process"-, under the condition that they are treated continuously.

This is why the German Presidency - together with Portugal and Slovenia (the EU's upcoming presidencies) - introduced the new concept of programming with 3 presidencies, which means: for one year and a half.

To give you a practical example: Portugal has decided to organise a Euromed-Ministerial Conference on Migration. Preparations for it have already started under our presidency with meetings of migration experts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your attention - and, please, feel invited to ask any questions you might have.