

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on European neighbourhood policy

(2006/C 309/20)

In a letter of 22 April 2005 from Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, the Commission formally consulted the European Economic and Social Committee under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community on the *European Neighbourhood Policy*.

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 4 May 2006. The rapporteur was Ms Cassina.

At its 428th plenary session, held on 5-6 July 2006 (meeting of 5 July 2006) the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 160 votes to two with nine abstentions.

Preamble

The EESC has already produced two partial assessments of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): one deals with central and eastern European and the other with Mediterranean countries⁽¹⁾. This opinion will therefore only touch briefly on certain aspects of these two documents; nevertheless, they will be submitted, together with this opinion, to the relevant EU and state authorities for information purposes.

0. Summary and conclusions

0.1 The EESC considers that the ENP is a policy of immense strategic importance, and that its potential for peace, stability, the sharing of values and policies and the promotion of exchanges at all levels with neighbouring countries should be enhanced through consistent and responsible implementation.

0.2 In particular, the EESC stresses the need to ensure consistency between:

- the Member States' foreign policies and the ENP;
- other actions related to the EU's external actions and the ENP;
- the foreign and domestic policies of the partner countries and the ENP;
- the actions of the various Commission DGs involved in implementing the ENP;
- the EU's budget choices and the strategic importance of the ENP;

⁽¹⁾ The first is on *Wider Europe — Neighbourhood: A new framework for relations with our eastern and southern neighbours* (Opinion, rapporteur: Ms Alleweldt (OJ C 80 of 30/3/2004 p. 148 — 0155); the second is on *The role of consultative bodies and socio-occupational organisations in implementing the Association Agreements and in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy* (providing a thematic contribution to the Euro-Mediterranean socio-occupational summit to be held in Jordan on 16 and 17 November 2005 (rapporteur: Ms Cassina), drawn up in cooperation with the consultative bodies in Greece, Israel and Tunisia and Moroccan socio-professional representatives).

— application of the principle of differentiation (which can bring about positive competitiveness between countries and areas) and the opportunity to create synergies both within the area itself and between different areas (which promotes cooperation and greater understanding);

— those concrete measures which have been identified as priorities and the main objectives pursued.

0.3 The EESC urges all the institutional players to recognise in practice that the principle of joint ownership implies a strong reference to democratic values, which must be respected and promoted and not merely formally shared: joint ownership must be the guiding principle of relations not only between the EU and the partner countries but within the EU itself, and between national administrations and civil society representatives in the partner countries. An effective and adequate representation of the ENP can only be achieved by systematically involving civil society organisations, and social and socio-occupational players in particular, whose consultative role and negotiation skills need to be explicitly recognised and promoted. Thus, it is necessary to ensure:

- clear, transparent, documented and timely information on decisions relating to implementation of the ENP;
- consultation areas, instruments and mechanisms and participation in developing these decisions, in order to pursue an effective civil dialogue;
- information, instruments and harmonised data to evaluate the implementations, not least by resolving to develop regular initiatives with a view to achieving this goal;
- training opportunities which would enable these organisations to contribute to the implementation of the ENP and to maximise their contribution, not least through access to Community resources and programmes;
- opportunities to set up networks for dialogue, cooperation and the monitoring of ENP implementation among organisations in the various countries and areas.

0.4. The EESC undertakes to build, maintain and develop relations with consultative bodies and/or socio-occupational organisations in the partner countries, to consider their views and cooperate with the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions with a view to contributing towards a joint, effective and consistent implementation of the ENP and achieving the objectives of peace, stability, security and shared and sustainable development.

1. Introduction

1.1 Throughout the integration process, the EU authorities have taken account of the circumstances of bordering countries for at least two pertinent reasons:

- the first, which is related to the main political impetus which led European countries to form a community, was the need for peace, freedom and stability both within and outside the integration area;
- the second reason is related to the process of economic and market integration, which prompted the need for a trade area that extended beyond the territory of the Member States, in which they would be dealing with countries whose economic growth and human development were or became comparable to their own, so that trade would be mutually beneficial and would not be liable to distortions, dumping and/or protectionist measures on either side.

1.2 During the long period when the world was split into two blocs, the heterogeneous economies of eastern and western Europe, but particularly their different political systems, unfortunately reduced exchanges (not just economic, but human, cultural and social exchanges too) to a minimum; moreover, for over four decades, contact between the people of the two parts of Europe was limited to diplomatic and superficial relations between organisations and local government authorities. This had the dual negative effect of entrenching the stereotypes produced by the cold war and giving the Soviet regime's government systems an aura of international democratic legitimacy, which they did not have and could not have had.

1.3 However, during this time, the European Community improved its relations with neighbouring democratic European countries (or countries that had moved from a dictatorship to a democracy, such as Greece, Spain and Portugal) and had four enlargements⁽²⁾. Through agreements, stable relations were created with those countries which had no prospect of joining or did not intend to join the Community: for example, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), set up in 1960, the European Economic Area (EEA), set up in 1994, and a wide range of bilateral agreements (in particular with countries bordering the Mediterranean).

⁽²⁾ Denmark, the United Kingdom and Ireland joined the EU in 1973; Greece in 1981; Spain and Portugal in 1986; and Austria, Sweden and Finland in 1995.

1.4 Between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the neighbouring area of the southern and eastern Mediterranean basin gained increasing importance in the eyes of the European Community, culminating in the 1995 Barcelona Interministerial Conference. This established a strategic partnership that would be structured through association agreements and regional projects, the objective being to create an area of free trade, peace, security and shared prosperity by 2010.

1.5 The event which radically changed the geopolitical condition of the Community — which, by now, had established market integration and was preparing to create the single currency — was the liberation of central and eastern European countries from the Soviet system and their transition to democracy and a market economy.

1.6 The reunification of the European continent as a result of the enlargement of 1 May 2004, represents Europe's most important post-war political achievement. It has made the EU richer in terms of human, cultural, historical, economic and social resources and provided it with a totally new outlook. This major quantitative and qualitative change calls for an in-depth understanding of the new situation, which we must uphold and promote by adapting all EU policies, including that on relations with neighbouring countries. The European Neighbourhood Policy has grown out of this conviction and the EESC, which has contributed towards these achievements through its broad commitment to cooperation and dialogue with civil society organisations in the candidate countries, fully supports it.

2. The initial phase of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

2.1 The need for a neighbourhood policy was first put forward by the General Affairs and External Relations Council in November 2002 and by the Copenhagen European Council in December of that year; the latter called on the EU to strengthen relations with its neighbouring countries on the basis of common values in order to avoid further divisions in Europe and to promote stability and prosperity both within and outside its borders. Initially, the major focus was on relations with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, as well as on the Mediterranean partner countries.

2.2 The Commission published two Communications in 2003 and 2004 and, also in 2004, a proposal for a regulation to establish a European neighbourhood and partnership instrument⁽³⁾.

⁽³⁾ COM(2003) 104 final — Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Wider Europe — Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours — Brussels, 11.3.2003.

COM(2004) 373 final — Communication from the Commission: European Neighbourhood Policy — strategy paper — Brussels, 12.5.2004.

COM(2004) 628 final — Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument — Brussels, 29.9.2004.

2.3 In addition to the countries mentioned above, in 2004, upon a formal request from the three countries of the Southern Caucasus, the ENP was extended to include Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Russia had previously stated that it would not take part in the ENP but it would continue relations with the EU within the framework of the 'strategic partnership'. The ENP does not even apply to the Balkan countries which form part of the Balkan Stability Pact and/or have applied for EU membership such as Croatia or Turkey (previously incorporated in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership policy and an applicant country which began its accession negotiations on 3 October 2005).

2.4 Under the ENP, the EU and its neighbouring countries are to share a substantial set of policies, which implies a strong commitment on the part of the EU and partner countries to promote common values (the principle of joint ownership): the rule of law, good governance, respect for human and minority rights and the principle of gender equality, a market economy and sustainable development. The partner countries are also called upon to make a particular commitment to combat terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to promote respect for international law and peaceful conflict resolution.

2.5 National Action Plans (NAPs) are drawn up in cooperation with the partner countries, in line with the specific circumstances and needs of the various countries involved (principle of differentiation), but they are essentially geared towards promoting the values mentioned in the previous paragraph. Each NAP is then approved by the respective Association Council and applied in cooperation between the partner country concerned and the EU. The implementation of the NAPs will be monitored by the EU through periodic reports drawn up by the Commission so that the strategy can be fine-tuned in line with the results obtained by each country.

2.6 Until the current financial budget comes to an end (end 2006), the resources will be those allocated to the TACIS and MEDA programmes. However, in the financial perspective for 2007–2013, there should only be one ENP financing instrument (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument). Its budget has not yet been decided, but according to the Commission's proposal it should be double the current amount allocated to the two programmes mentioned above.

2.7 However, the EESC considers that, so far, the Commission has not proposed any elements, either in its documents, or in its negotiations for setting up NAPs, which actually underpin Community development and which have supported the integration process and made it more democratic and dynamic: in particular, the concepts of 'social dialogue' and 'consultative role' are missing. The EESC has already, on several occasions, pointed out these shortcomings to the Commission and trusts that all Community authorities will take the necessary steps to ensure that these concepts become the general rule in the implementation of NAPs.

3. The concept of 'neighbourhood' and general issues

3.1 Though the concept of 'neighbourhood' would intuitively seem to be clear, it is less clear how a highly ambitious policy based on this intuition could have the necessary strategic rigour. The EU, as such, has in fact developed a foreign policy that is still limited, given that many competences in the area are jealously guarded and exercised by the Member States. Developing an EU external relations policy is not a matter of taking over Member States' international strategies: it can in fact consolidate them and bring added value if the Member States develop the will to act together and acquire instruments for coordinating their foreign policy actions, so as to ensure that the action taken by all the players operating in a given area is consistent and efficient. In the case of the ENP, this goal can be achieved only if the Member States and the EU ensure consistence with the European framework and present themselves to their partners as an entity having the same shared objectives and proposals.

3.2 In the EESC's view, the concept of 'neighbourhood policy' cannot be seen merely in geographic terms. On the contrary, the very formulation of the ENP — in the various documents mentioned in the third footnote — lends the term a markedly strong sense of a community (or search for a community) of values, cultures and intent⁽⁴⁾. Thus, although the principle of neighbourhood also has geographical connotations, it is underpinned by policies and values. It is therefore possible that other countries may be included in the ENP in the future.

3.3 A difficulty that may arise in connection with the principle of joint ownership of the action to be undertaken is the fact that the partner countries in the ENP are not viewed as prospective Member States. The prospect of EU membership would certainly be more motivating but it is true to say that the content, methodology and, proportionately, the resources made available for the NAPs are similar to — if not the same as — those used during the recent enlargement. Even the mechanism for implementing policies for the development of the partner countries should have as its model the experience of structural policies and be based on a very close partnership between the EU and the partner countries. One of the methodological characteristics of the ENP is to proceed on a step-by-step basis which allows ample room for the identification of the methods and instruments used, but above all for the assessment of significant developments that could possibly change the objectives identified so far. The 'new phase' of the ENP would allow for even more significant relations with those partner countries which make optimal use of the NAPs: it is a sort of 'reward' which should make economic and political relations even closer, and, one hopes, also relations between societies, thereby meeting the, at times, enthusiastic expectations of the populations of the partner countries. The EESC therefore believes that it would be a mistake to have in place a rigid framework that would exclude any possibility of EU membership or raise false hopes.

⁽⁴⁾ The fact that Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (which are not adjacent to the EU) have asked to be involved in the ENP is a practical demonstration of this statement.

3.4 In March 2005 the Commission published a Communication containing the recommendations for countries with which NAPs have not yet been approved⁽⁵⁾: it concerns 3 countries of the Southern Caucasus, as well as Egypt and Lebanon. The European Council of 25 April 2005 supported the document and expressed the hope that the definition of the NAPs could be completed shortly so that the relevant bodies (Association Councils) could rapidly approve them and the plans could be implemented. The Council also drew attention to the need to apply the principle of differentiation but, at the same time, emphasised the declaration by the three Southern Caucasus countries, which intend to make the best possible use of the ENP instruments to strengthen regional cooperation (see also point 4).

4. Problems facing the various areas

4.1 The ENP focuses on bilateral relations between the EU and the individual partner countries. However, each of the main areas covered by the ENP (which can be roughly defined as central and eastern Europe, the Mediterranean and the Southern Caucasus) presents specific issues; the implementation of the ENP should thus aim to promote local synergies and relations within the area itself: this objective can be achieved through targeted actions and incentives which make it suitable and desirable to develop relations and cooperation within each area, but also between areas. What counts is that the implementation of the ENP should always pursue a balance between bilateral actions and those to be promoted between the countries of a region and between the regions themselves. As well as benefiting the countries in the three areas, which often explicitly call for this, it would promote stability, security and peace across the EU and even in countries outside the ENP area. It is nonetheless important to remain both flexible and pragmatic in order to ensure the right balance between bilateralism and the development of local and interregional cooperation.

4.2 The ENP implementation arrangements imply a certain degree of competition between the various partner countries. Thus, as a country moves further towards the objectives that have been jointly established with the EU, its status as an EU partner can improve (more favourable terms, greater support for key actions, greater market access, easier movement of people, etc.). This competitiveness may also emerge at regional level and, in this case, care will be needed in order to ensure that the areas facing major difficulties — or the countries within such an area — do not suffer frustration and entertain thoughts of quitting. It is crucial to encourage contacts between different countries and areas because, if ENP players firmly believe that the work would not only be to their benefit but would also further a major shared undertaking, it would help develop mutual understanding and identify possible cooperation arrangements which, perhaps, have not yet been

contemplated. The contribution of civil society can be a strong driving force in this scenario.

4.3 At the same time it is right to point out that in all three of the large areas covered by the ENP there are explicit, latent or potential conflicts. Some partner countries, particularly where democracy is not well established, face other conflicts. The concern about the possible repercussions of these within the EU is legitimate, but even more important must be the concern for the security and stability of the partner countries and their populations. Special, continuous attention must therefore be given to targeted actions which, in applying the NAPs, are explicitly intended to defuse sources of tension and conflict, create conditions for overcoming difficulties and promote cooperation between countries, economies and peoples. It is obvious that these measures must involve civil society organisations as players in the economic, social and cultural cooperation which is an essential instrument of peaceful co-existence.

4.3.1 It is also important that the various EU external relations initiatives are developed in such a way as to ensure consistency with the different aspects of the ENP. In this connection, relations with Russia within the framework of the strategic partnership and the northern dimension, are particularly delicate, as the recent gas crisis has shown. Moreover, it is useful (and not only in the case of the Ukraine) to thoroughly examine all the implications — not least of a social and economic order — of recognition of market economy status, both for the country concerned and the EU.

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4.4 In line with these ideas and objectives, cross-border cooperation between Member States of the EU and partner countries has a central role to play. Most of the new Member States directly border on countries of the ENP area and are therefore exposed both to the difficulties and to the opportunities of this proximity. Implementation of the ENP must therefore seek to reduce the risks of instability to the minimum (in political, economic and social terms) but above all to encourage the transition from potential positive opportunities to practical policies and mutually useful results. This will have a positive effect throughout the Community territory — now to a large extent open and homogenous — in terms of greater and better trade, increased security and better understanding between peoples.

⁽⁵⁾ COM(2005) 72 final, Communication from the Commission to the Council: European Neighbourhood Policy, recommendations for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and for Egypt and Lebanon, Brussels, 2 March 2005.

4.5 This opinion does not set out to evaluate the particular circumstances of the various countries or areas, given that, as mentioned at the beginning, the EESC has already produced some specific contributions on the Mediterranean and its new neighbours to the east. The EESC's initiative, launched in Kiev in February 2006 with the Ukrainian civil society organisations, has shed light on the vigorous interest of these organisations — which show enthusiasm for the EU and have high expectations with regard to the ENP — and has shown that the work carried out through the above-mentioned opinion on the eastern neighbours has begun producing concrete results. The EESC is resolved to set itself more structured and longer-term objectives of dialogue and cooperation with the Ukrainian civil society organisations.

4.5.1 The EESC is deeply concerned about recent events in Belarus and condemns the repressive and anti-democratic measures and persecution which are damaging civil and social rights. The EESC, which will continue forging even closer relations with Belarusian civil society organisations, is drawing up an opinion on this subject ⁽⁶⁾.

4.5.2 However, the truth is that the EESC has neither conducted a direct analysis nor developed stable contacts with civil society organisations in the countries of the southern Caucasus. These shortcomings could be overcome in the short term through in-depth work in the form of an information report and a specific opinion on the subject, if necessary.

5. Methodological and financial instruments

5.1 The methodology for implementing the NAPs involves an ongoing process of dialogue and negotiations between the authorities of the EU and the countries concerned. In implementing the actions, all parties are to follow the procedures in use within the Community framework. The EESC has already signalled its concern — in the context of the MEDA programme — with regard to the difficulties faced by the beneficiaries, and civil society organisations ⁽⁷⁾ in particular, in accessing the relevant funds. Rigorous allocation and control procedures are needed to avoid any illicit use of resources, but these procedures must also be clear-cut, transparent (e.g. by translating forms into the beneficiaries' languages), simple and in keeping with the political goals of the ENP. Entangling the procedures for accessing funds in a surfeit of red tape does not achieve priorities any more effectively or make the action taken any more efficient. It also fosters the 'professional cooperation' provided by consultancy undertakings which ultimately stifles the richness of individualism and the partners' capacity for initiatives. EU authorities insist that the ENP must be approached as a tailor-made policy: this is very important, but

on condition that it also applies to the implementation methodologies, ensuring that these systematically and consistently reflect the economic and social circumstances of the various countries, thereby being comprehensible by the various sectors of society.

5.1.1 Often the difficulties which civil society organisations have in accessing programmes and related resources arise at least in part from inadequate knowledge of the regulations and procedures. Access to a Community programme or to the measures of a policy promoted by the EU cannot be regarded in the same way as a tendering procedure in which the competitors must provide themselves with the knowledge and organisation needed for participating. The Community institutions must take on a precise responsibility and support the social and socio-occupational organisations in their efforts to develop adequate capability and professionalism. Such action was carried out up to a few years ago by the Commission which held courses for 'planners' at an accessible cost. Recently these costs have tripled and are becoming prohibitive for most of the people who need this sort of help. In the EESC's view, the spread of this type of know-how among civil society organisations is as essential as the capacity building of the ENP partner countries' administrations; it must therefore be regarded as an essential service to be provided free of charge if civil society is to contribute to implementing the ENP.

5.2 Since the NAPs contain all the policies dealt with by the various Commissioners, it is essential for the ENP to become a project understood and supported by all the DGs, which will need to network in a responsible way to contribute to its success.

5.3 For the periodic evaluation mechanism to be effective, it too must be reduced to the essential, avoid being repetitive and focus on the priorities. This can help make the participation of organised civil society — which remains an irreplaceable player in ensuring the success of this and any other policy (see point 6) — in the implementation and evaluation of the ENP more effective and fruitful. A priority of merit must be the criteria for assessing the democratic progress made by the partner country involved and the respect for values and fundamental rights. A priority of method must be the construction of a networked system for surveying data and statistics which makes it possible to assess the achievements of each country involved in a reliable and if possible comparable way. It would also be desirable for the assessment reports to cover roughly the same period of time, as this would be useful both for the process of assessing the best achievements and for identifying the priorities which need more support or support of a different kind.

⁽⁶⁾ See the working document by Mr Stulik (REX/220).

⁽⁷⁾ See the Dimitriadis report submitted to the Malta Euromed Summit — REX 113, points 35 and 36.1 in particular.

5.4 Notwithstanding the fact that the EU is the main trading partner of the partner countries/ENP, the EU's budget for cooperation are, at times, and in some countries, less than those of other international players, but our partners have shown on several occasions that the Union's involvement has great qualitative importance for their development, as it can consolidate certain achievements, provide significant capacity building and create a partnership that looks upon each party as a fully responsible player with equal dignity and never as an aid recipient who is more or less obliged to accept the objectives imposed upon them by others.

5.5 Our partners' expectations must not be thwarted. All the Community actors must assume their responsibilities, and the Member States in particular, since they have the prime responsibility for budgetary matters. The current uncertainty about the EU's future financial framework clouds the conditions which, in the future, could lead to a successful ENP. It is important that the 2007-2013 financial perspectives promote this policy, which is crucial both for the EU's internal development and security and for the development of its role as a partner on the international stage. Alongside the coordination of foreign policies within the ENP framework, the EU should scrutinise the use of current and future resources to be allocated to this policy. This will also make it easier to mobilise funds from private resources, given that the investors will be able to move forward in a climate of stability and certainty.

6. The contribution of civil society to the ENP

6.1 The EESC is convinced that the success of the ENP is closely linked to the capacity of all the institutional players to involve civil society organisations in the implementation of the NAPs, and has fully explained this view in its earlier opinions and, by analogy, in all the opinions relating to the enlargement process⁽⁸⁾. It is to be hoped that the Commission may give a clearer pointer in this direction, by proposing criteria, procedures and instruments with a view to involving civil society organisations in the implementation of the NAPs. Without prejudice to point 3.3, the experience of enlargement is an important reference point, both in terms of the involvement of the social and socio-occupational players of the applicant countries in the negotiating process and in terms of dialogue between the civil society organisations of the EU countries and those of the applicant countries. If the first of these dynamic processes has been achieved, especially in certain applicant countries which are now members, the second has been left to the voluntary initiative of organisations, foundations and consultative bodies, particularly the EESC. Implementation of

the ENP, however, requires that this involvement be structured and guaranteed.

6.2 On the basis of the EESC's experience and work, and of the proposals contained in the opinions listed in footnote 1, we shall simply list here the actions which the EESC regards as essential for achieving the objective of effective implementation of the ENP with social participation.

6.3 The EESC calls upon the Commission to:

- ensure internal consistency between the different DGs dealing with the various aspects of the ENP, by stimulating synergies, networking and promoting best practice;
- impress on the governments of the ENP partner countries the need to involve civil society organisations in the implementation of the NAPs, not least by, to this end, establishing a criterion on the involvement of civil society organisations in evaluating the results obtained by the various ENP partner countries;
- provide social and socio-occupational players with the know-how needed to make the best, and correct, use of the resources intended for the ENP, not least to enable people to monitor the application of the NAPs in their countries and to make proposals for the follow-up;
- provide clear-cut and effective criteria for assessing shared values, which is the main discriminating factor when implementing the ENP;
- provide information and documentation on the meetings planned under the Association Agreements to discuss the implementation of the NAPs (in particular, publish the timetable and agendas of such meetings), and promote the holding of information and consultation sessions before and after these meetings;
- propose an instrument to facilitate the granting of visas to citizens of ENP partner countries intending to visit the EU for the purposes of study, training and research initiatives, contacts with corresponding organisations, business etc.;
- support the EESC's efforts to ensure the coordination of the consultative bodies and civil society organisations committed to participating in the implementation of the NAPs, in particular by financing the holding of an annual socio-occupational summit (similar to that which the EESC has been organising for 10 years in the Euro-Mediterranean context) which would assess the overall implementation of the ENP and enable the organisations involved to compare notes on a general basis and not just at bilateral or area level.

⁽⁸⁾ See, among the most recent, the REX Opinion on the subject REX/208 (rapporteur Mr Pezzini).

6.4 The EESC calls upon the governments of the EU Member States to:

- devise a method for systematic comparison in order to ensure consistency and efficiency between individual national foreign policies and the ENP, with a view to creating a critical mass of resources, but mostly of initiatives that can help to achieve results that benefit all the stakeholders;
- orientate their foreign policies towards an application of the ENP which would make the most of organised civil society's contribution both in ENP partner countries in general and at national level, partly through the contribution of cooperation policies to the development and creation of partnerships and networks with the civil society organisations involved;
- ensure consistency between the commitments undertaken within the framework of the ENP and the initiative of multi-lateral international organisations;
- provide all information on national government positions on the agenda points for the meetings to be held under the Association Agreements;
- commit themselves to promoting and facilitating access to the national universities for students from the ENP partner countries;
- organise, at national level, information days at regular intervals (about two a year) on the results of ENP implementation and on the assessments which the government itself makes of the implementation of this important policy.

6.5 The EESC calls upon the governments of the ENP partner countries to:

- ensure a high degree of consistency between their bilateral and multilateral foreign policies and the ENP commitments;
- guarantee clear and constant information on progress in applying the NAPs to the social partners' organisations and the socio-occupational organisations of their countries, and

provide access to documentation relating to developments in the application of the NAPs;

- consult systematically the consultative bodies — where they exist — on decisions in preparation, whether on the application of the NAPs or on the assessments and any further stages which would lead to progress in relations between the country concerned and the EU;
- set up, in ENP partner countries where consultative bodies do not yet exist, an instrument to encourage and coordinate the participation of civil society organisations in formulating decisions on the implementation of the NAPs and the monitoring of the actions undertaken;
- coordinate consultation and the participation of civil society at various territorial levels so that the ENP can work as an instrument for developing the economic and social system in a balanced way throughout the national.

6.6 The EESC calls on civil society organisations in the ENP partner countries to:

- undertake to familiarise themselves with the ENP, evaluate it and contribute towards its implementation in their country, by pressing for information and opportunities for participation from their government and by cooperating with the EESC in order to identify priorities and bring them to the attention of the Community authorities;
- be open to structured dialogue with both the EESC and consultative bodies in the EU Member States and other ENP partner countries, with a view to creating a wide network for monitoring implementation of the ENP, and promoting mutual understanding between organisations and the dissemination of participatory best practice.

6.7 The EESC undertakes to follow closely the implementation of the ENP in the different areas and to develop more effective forms of cooperation with the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions in order to contribute to the involvement of civil society organisations in this important policy.

Brussels, 5 July 2006.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Anne-Marie SIGMUND