



## **6<sup>th</sup> EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS FOR INDUSTRY:**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Rhodes, Greece on 21-22 September 2006**

The 6<sup>th</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers for Industry took place in Rhodes, Greece on 21-22 September 2006. It was attended by the EU and its Member States, Bulgaria and Romania, the Mediterranean Partner Countries as well as Representatives of the European Investment Bank, UNICE, UMCE, Eurochambres, OECD and several Greek business organisations.

The Conference welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise since its adoption at the Caserta Ministerial Conference in 2004 and Ministers from the Mediterranean countries renewed their commitment to implementing the Charter and endorsing the conclusions of the European Commission's "Report on the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise."

The EU invited the Mediterranean partner countries to take full advantage of the European Neighbourhood Policy which provides the framework for future cooperation in areas covered by the Charter.

On the issue of **promoting investment**, Ministers renewed their commitment to eliminate institutional, regulatory and administrative obstacles with a view to attracting increasing national and foreign investments and to creating job opportunities. They recognized the positive results accomplished through MEDA regional and bilateral projects as well as the contribution of the European Investment Bank's Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership (FEMIP) to promote investments and access to finance in the region.

They also stressed the importance of taking action to improve the image and market the industrial Mediterranean area abroad, to target potential investors and attract foreign investments, to consolidate a Euro-Mediterranean network of organisations involved in investment promotion, to develop economic intelligence, generate projects, promote networks and transfer of know-how at regional level and with the EU, to strengthen synergies with FEMIP, to explore the readiness of women investors in the EU to invest in enterprises run by women in Mediterranean partner countries, and to explore to what extent expatriates' remittances contribute to private sector development in the home country.

During their discussions on **facilitating trade in industrial products**, Ministers acknowledged the importance of the alignment of legislation, standards and conformity assessment procedures with the EU system towards achieving the goal of establishing the Free Trade Area in the Mediterranean region by 2010. They welcomed the progress achieved since the Third EuroMed Trade Ministerial Conference (July 2003), the identification of priority sectors by Mediterranean partners and the inception of the process of alignment of legislation and adoption of harmonised European standards. The Mediterranean partner countries were encouraged to step up efforts in order to accelerate reforms and regulatory convergence, and to put in place, or upgrade, the necessary quality infrastructure and legislation, with a view to concluding Agreements on



Conformity assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products in sectors of common interest, for signature of the first agreements in 2008.

The Conference also welcomed the progress achieved with programmes such as EURO-MED Quality and EURO-MED Market. Ministers stressed the importance of developing new programmes in the context of the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument to continue to support current policy objectives. The European Commission will explore the possibility for increased participation of Mediterranean partner countries in European standardisation, accreditation, metrology and market surveillance activities. In the area of EU non-harmonised legislation, the EU invited its Mediterranean partners to identify problems related to the movement of goods in non-harmonised sectors, in order to be able to address these.

On the issue of **innovation**, Ministers acknowledged the vital contribution that innovation makes to enterprise competitiveness, job creation, and to meeting the challenges of globalisation. They recognized the importance of education and training to develop an innovation culture, more innovative firms and an innovation-friendly environment. They also noted the need to ensure a high level of protection of intellectual property rights. The Conference welcomed the recent launch of the EURO-MED Innovation and Technology programme, underlining the importance that this programme may have in stimulating exchanges in the field of innovation across the Mediterranean region and with the EU.

The EU invited the Mediterranean partner countries to improve access to information, technology transfer and networks, offering assistance to promote mechanisms for strengthening Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and developing a comprehensive common knowledge base on innovation policies across European and Mediterranean countries. The European Commission will be invited to make proposals with the objective of increasing the participation of Mediterranean partners in activities relating to innovation, including under the EU Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP). The conference also asked for maximum synergies to be developed within the 7th EU Research and Development Framework Programme and EUREKA.

In the **dialogue on the future of the textile and clothing industry**, the Conference expressed its support to efforts made by the working groups for the benefit of the textile and clothing industry and stressed the merits of working at a strategic level - where policy makers meet and examine together how they can best address the challenges facing the textile and clothing sector - and at a more operational level where businesses, support organisations and stakeholders can exchange experience on specific topics of common interest and define concrete projects, taking full advantage of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Finally, with the support of the EC, a programme should be implemented which aims at improving competitiveness in the sector.

Ministers agreed to meet again in 2008 to assess progress in implementing the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise and the initiatives agreed during the conference and to discuss the orientations put forward by the Working Party on Euro-Mediterranean Industrial Co-operation. They welcomed the work programme (2007-2008) of the Working Party requested that it identifies and provides an opinion on the coherence of the programmes and regional financing towards their implementation. The Ministers also agreed on directing the financing under the bi-lateral agreement towards the implementation of an enterprise charter according to the priorities of the countries.