

**Communication from the European Commission
to the Council and the European Union
“Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our
Eastern and Southern Neighbours”**

Conclusions of the debates *

1. During the meetings of the PABSEC delegation at the European Parliament in Brussels on 20 May 2003, in particular, with Mr. Renzo Imbeni, Vice-President of the European Parliament, and Mr. Ioannis Koukiadis, Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Legal Affairs and the Internal Market, the two sides discussed a number of issues related to the EU enlargement process. In that context, particular attention was paid to the Communication from the European Commission to the European Council and the European Parliament “Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours” (COM (2003) 104 final, 11 March 2003).
2. Given the importance of this document which outlines the European Union’s medium- and long-term strategy towards its old and new neighbours and the fact that it, either directly or indirectly, affects practically all the PABSEC member countries, the European Parliament representatives suggested that the Assembly discuss this Communication and present its opinion to the European Parliament. The document was therefore discussed at the PABSEC Committee Meetings in autumn 2003 and at the 22nd Plenary Session of the General Assembly held in Bucharest on 8-10 December 2003.

* The Assembly debate on 10 December 2003

3. The Assembly members agreed that 2004 will be a historic year when the European Union, joined by ten new member countries, will greatly increase its political and economic weight in Europe and in the world. In the nearest future, the EU will eventually include 28 countries. It means that instead of one, four BSEC member states will also be EU members (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey). These countries may play an important role as a bridge between the EU and the BSEC. On the whole, the Black Sea area will become not only a neighbour, but also a part of the European Union.
4. The speakers stressed that the European Union is aware of its duty to promote stability, security and sustainable development beyond its borders. Even though the Communication explicitly refers to only three PABSEC member countries - Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, - other countries will also be engaged in, or affected by, the process of implementing strategies outlined in this document, either as new EU members or being in immediate proximity. At the same time, it was mentioned that the countries of the South Caucasus –Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – which are actually part of Europe, are not included in the document. Nevertheless, these countries have contractual relations with the EU (Partnership and Cooperation Agreements) and are interested in substantially expanding their relations with the EU. This would undoubtedly contribute to conflict prevention and resolution in this area.
5. The members stated their overall support to the Wider Europe - New Neighbourhood concept which put forward important incentives for the social and economic development of the concerned countries. They welcomed the fact that the neighbouring countries should be offered the prospect of a stake in the EU's Internal Market and further integration and liberalisation to promote the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital.
6. It was underlined that the EU enlargement should not lead to the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe, especially as regards the free movement of people and the simplification of visa procedures. The members also stressed that the BSEC Region, having vast natural resources, a wide consumer market, a skilled workforce and a substantial high technology potential, can have mutually advantageous trade and economic relations with the EU. Trade liberalisation and the opening up of markets should proceed in a way that would be mutually beneficial to the EU and BSEC countries. In this respect, the EU's support to the BSEC countries aiming to raise their capacity to cope with European competitive pressure and market forces will assist them in meeting one of the Copenhagen criteria.

7. The members pointed out that by its historical and cultural traditions the Black Sea region was firmly anchored in Europe. All the eleven BSEC countries are also members of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, they share the universally recognised values of democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights. At the same time, it was recognised that substantial differences among the BSEC countries – in their development levels, institutional capacity, progress achieved in implementing political and economic reforms, etc., call for a differentiated approach by the European Union in devising its country-specific policies within a broader enlargement or cooperation context. Nevertheless, the EU may wish to consider developing ‘the Black Sea dimension’ in its policies towards the region.