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To all EU Foreign Ministers

Dear Colleagues,

The Joint Communication *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood*, adopted on 25 May 2011, proposed to put the EU's relations with its neighbours on a different footing, one in which the EU response would be much more responsive to the efforts of our partners to develop sustainable democratic societies. Both the Council and the European Parliament have endorsed this approach and have asked for further information as to how it is to be implemented in practice.

We are pleased to enclose herewith a note outlining our thinking on this issue; the note presents a set of guiding principles on the introduction of incentives and considerations on the assessment of reforms. When it comes to translating this assessment into financial allocations, we consider it important to ensure transparency on the methodology proposed and to apply this initially on a pilot basis. The methodology will be refined on the basis of experience and will contribute to our ongoing reflection on the allocation of funds under the next multiannual financial framework.

Our services are ready to present this paper in greater detail to your representatives in the appropriate setting.

We are confident that a properly structured incentive-based approach will contribute to the promotion of democratic reforms in the Neighbourhood.

Yours sincerely,


Catherine Ashton


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Assessing reforms

In line with the ENP review Communication, the assessment of partners' progress in democratisation will be based on progress against the following criteria:

- the holding of democratic and credible elections, in accordance with international standards;
- the enjoyment by citizens of freedom of association, expression and assembly;
- the existence of free press and media;
- the rule of law, administered by an independent judiciary, and the right of citizens to a fair trial;
- the fight against corruption;
- reform of the security and law enforcement sectors (including the police) and the establishment of democratic control over armed and security forces;
- the respect of other human rights (abolition of capital punishment, freedom of religion, non discrimination on the basis of gender or sexual orientation, non discrimination of minorities, rights of the child, abolition of torture and degrading punishments).

For all criteria, international conventions and norms will be used as key benchmarks against which progress will be measured. As set out in the Communication, particular attention will be paid to women's rights, reflecting the major role once again played by women in recent events in the South.

Progress on reforms will be assessed in the annual ENP country reports. Given the natural link between the reporting exercise and EU policy instruments, the important resources (both in Delegations and in Brussels) that are mobilised for this purpose, and the extensive consultations that accompany it, this will enable choices to be made on a consistent and transparent basis, easily understood by all stakeholders.

The above cannot be the only criteria by which EU engagement is determined. We must take a holistic view of our relations with partners. As mentioned in the Communication, we must intensify our political and security cooperation and define win-win situations in energy security, respond to challenges and threats that do not respect borders, and tackle instability and conflict in the region. The Council Conclusions of June 2011 state that resources should be allocated "taking fully into account partner countries' needs".

The path to sustainable democracy can be tortuous, and the assessment of progress in its achievement can therefore not be conceived of as a short-term "box-ticking" exercise. It will require the exercise of political judgement and in some cases a long-term perspective. A balance needs to be achieved between reactivity, allowing a timely response to significant developments, and consistency, which is essential for the pursuit of long-term reform processes. Particular elements of the EU offer, such as those related to market access, the facilitation of mobility or the provision of macro-financial assistance have built-in steps (negotiation directives, ratification procedures, etc.) that give Member States and the European Parliament the possibility to apply their political judgement and adapt the scope of incentives and the pace of their introduction, in line with the progress made by partners.