

Brussels, 23 February 2007

## **Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner to visit the Middle East, 26 February - 1 March**

***European Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, will visit Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Jordan from 26 February to 1 March. In each country the Commissioner will discuss with key interlocutors how to strengthen bilateral relations with the EU, and the growing opportunities available under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) particularly in important areas such as education and energy. The visit is also an opportunity to explore with all parties the current state of play in the Middle East Peace Process, and how the EU can work with partners to create the conditions for progress.***

On the eve of her visit, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner said: *"We all have an interest in maintaining the political momentum of recent weeks. I look forward to discussing with all parties how we can each play our part in keeping the hope of progress towards peace in the Middle East alive"*.

She added: *"Through the ENP the EU offers its neighbours a privileged relationship that brings advantages to both sides. It strengthens our co-operation in areas of mutual interest like trade relations, energy, migration and visa issues and people to people contacts. Through our joint Action Plans, we are deepening our political relationships and economic integration – supporting reforms where they are needed, always in line with each country's own priorities for itself"*.

**On 26 February in Cairo**, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner will meet the President of the Republic of Egypt Hosni Mubarak, Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif, Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit as well as other members of the Egyptian Government. Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner will discuss ways to strengthen the partnership between the EU and Egypt through the ENP Action Plan, which will be adopted by the EU-Egypt Association Council on 6<sup>th</sup> March in Brussels. Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner will also meet Head of Security General Omar Suleiman as well as Secretary General of the Arab League Amr Moussa.

**On 27 February in Jerusalem**, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner is expected to meet Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. Following the trilateral summit between Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian President Abbas in the presence of the US Secretary of State Rice, and the meeting of Quartet Principals in Berlin, discussions will focus on how to advance the peace process. Bilateral relations between the EU and Israel in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy will also be discussed, including the new opportunities under ENP that have recently been proposed by the Commission. The Commissioner will also have the opportunity to talk to students of European studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem about the current state of EU-Israel relations.

**On 28 February in the Palestinian territories,** Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner will meet many leading Palestinian political figures. During her trip to the region, she also expects to meet President Abbas. Discussions will focus on how to maintain momentum towards unity in the Palestinian political process following the Mecca agreement, and the chances for meaningful negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. In particular, the Commissioner will explore the ideas that the European Commission is developing at the request of the International Quartet for the Middle East Peace Process (US, EU, UN and Russia) to better co-ordinate and mobilise international assistance in support of the political process and to meet the needs of the Palestinian people, including through the existing Temporary International Mechanism.

**On 1 March in Amman,** Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner will meet Prime Minister Marouf al-Bakhit, Minister for Foreign Affairs Abdelelah al-Khatib and Minister of Planning Suhair Al Ali. They will exchange views on how to further improve the very constructive partnership between the EU and Jordan, the role the EU can play in supporting Jordan's reform agenda and Jordan's role in the Middle East peace process. The Commissioner will also meet Minister of State Muhyiddine Touq, who is currently chairing the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures based in Alexandria and the Head of Intelligence General Dhahabi.

For more information on the EU's relations with Egypt, Israel, West Bank and Gaza Strip and Jordan and on the ENP at

[http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external\\_relations/egypt/intro/index.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/egypt/intro/index.htm)

[http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/index.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/index.htm)

[http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external\\_relations/gaza/intro/index.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/gaza/intro/index.htm)

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