

## EU aims for stable, prosperous Eastern Neighborhood

Aims to boost east's prosperity and stability

**The European Union seeks to strengthen ties with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan while bolstering its European Neighborhood Policy. The region is part of the EU's Eastern Partnership and an area Russia considers part of its neighborhood.**

A primary EU goal is to help the countries initiate reforms that will bring them greater prosperity and stability, said Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU's commissioner for external relations and European Neighborhood Policy, in a January 2009 news release.

Besides closer political and economic ties, the partnerships promise new steps to boost energy security in the region and Europe, Ferrero-Waldner said.

"A very special relationship with the EU is on offer to countries which choose to pursue reforms, particularly in improving democracy, human rights and rule of law," she said.

The three nations have shown more willingness to work with the EU since the Russian intervention in South Ossetia in August 2008, the Agence France-Presse news agency reported the following month.

"These countries are sovereign nations, and they have the right to choose their own destiny," Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said in the AFP report. "They have expressed their view for a closer relationship with the EU. They have their right to choose their own future, not to be restricted by the wishes of everyone else."

How quickly the three nations seek further association with the EU depends on each country, EU spokeswoman Christiane Hohman told the Azerbaijan Today online news outlet. She said EU association agreements with each country could take place in 2010, but that negotiations would proceed at their own pace.

The neighborhood partnership helps, in part, to set up free economic zones and agriculture and visa agreements. In August 2009, the EU announced it had reached an agreement with Georgia on easing visa rules and sending back illegal immigrants, the AFP reported.

The EU's European Neighborhood Policy, started in 2003, applies to the union's immediate land or sea neighbors: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine. The EU develops relations with Russia through a separate strategic partnership.

Neighborhood policy goals encourage:

- Greater commitment to foster economic integration and improve market access. In ongoing trade

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A Turkish Soldier stands guard on a road on Turkey's border with Armenia. The EU's push to strengthen ties with its Eastern Neighborhood includes building stronger links with Turkey and other Black Sea nations.



negotiations, the number of products excluded from full liberalization should be limited.

- More ambitious developments in managed migration, making it easier for some categories of visitors to get visas, such as students, business people, nongovernmental organization workers, journalists and officials using existing opportunities.
- Further engagement in tackling frozen conflicts in the neighborhood, using the full range of instruments available to the EU.
- Intensified EU support for partner countries' reforms in energy, climate change, environment, fisheries, transport, maritime policy, research, information society, education, employment and social policy.
- More people-to-people contacts, more exchanges in education (including enhanced academic and student mobility) and between youth, researchers, civil society, cultural groups, business, trade unions, and regional and local authorities.
- Stronger political and regional cooperation.

The EU has also established a new cross-border cooperation program with local authorities in Black Sea countries, and it supports the activities of civil society organizations. Through its Black Sea Synergy Initiative, the union will work alongside the

neighborhood program to increase cooperation in the region to:

- Stimulate democratic and economic reforms.
- Support stability and promote development.
- Focus on practical projects in areas of common concern.
- Respond to opportunities and challenges through coordinated action in a regional framework.
- Develop a climate more conducive to the solution of regional conflicts.

The Black Sea program began in 2007 and includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine. It started with a number of initiatives looking at transport, energy, the environment, maritime management, fisheries and migration, fighting organized crime, information society and cultural cooperation.

In a joint statement issued in 2008, EU foreign affairs ministers and those of the Black Sea nations said, in part, that the Black Sea Synergy effort was a long-term regional cooperation plan to offer new opportunities, increased stability and prosperity to European and Black Sea citizens. Three immediate areas of concern the accord seeks to address are migration, security and cross-border cooperation. □

This article includes information from the European Commission and European Neighborhood Partnership Web sites.



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European Commission President José Manuel Barroso, left, and Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU commissioner for external relations, outline the EU's plan for partnerships with its eastern neighbors in Brussels in December 2008.