

Commissioner Patten attends signature of Agadir Agreement - Brussels, 24 February 2004

On 25 February, Chris Patten, External Relations Commissioner, will attend the signing ceremony of the Free Trade Agreement between Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. This agreement, known as the Agadir Agreement, is a crucial step towards the envisaged creation of a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area by 2010. The Commission has been one of the main political supporters of this initiative since the Agadir Declaration was signed in May 2001 and it is also supporting it with a €4 million programme funded under MEDA.

Speaking before his departure for Agadir, Commissioner Patten said: *"I am delighted to witness the conclusion of the Agadir Agreement today. This agreement brings us closer to our joint objective of a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area by 2010. It will create much needed momentum for Mediterranean regional integration and foster private investment in the region. I strongly encourage other Euro-Med partners to join this agreement."*

EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy added: "Tearing down barriers to trade and investment is part of the strategic partnership between the EU and the Mediterranean region launched in 1995. Trade is a vital boost for the development of this region and contributes to stability. Today we are a step closer to our goal".

Pending conclusion of an agreement with Syria, the European Union has already concluded far-reaching Association Agreements with all the other Mediterranean partners, in an effort at encouraging closer political, economic and social ties with the region. The Agadir Agreement will offer further momentum towards the goal of achieving a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area by 2010 initiated by the Barcelona Declaration in 1995.

The agreement signed today will create an integrated market of more than 100 million people in the four countries involved, thus providing new attractive opportunities for European investors in the region.

The European Commission has strongly supported the Agadir initiative since its inception and will continue to do so through a MEDA programme of € 4 million, that will provide technical assistance to Agadir member countries and to its soon-to-be-established Secretariat.

Background

In the Barcelona Declaration, the 27 Euro-Mediterranean Partners agreed on the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA) by the target date of 2010. This is to be achieved by means of the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements negotiated and concluded between the European Union and 9 out of the 12 Mediterranean Partners, together with free trade agreements between the Partners themselves: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and the Palestinian Authority. The other three Partners, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey are covered by Association Agreements dating back to the 1960s and 1970s which envisaged possible membership of the European Union in due course and provide inter alia for customs unions with the European Union (completed with Turkey).

The Agadir process, an important sub-regional initiative, was initiated by Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan at Agadir in May 2001. These four partners expressed in a Declaration their intention to set up a free-trade area among themselves. This initiative was also significant since

it links Maghreb and Mashrak countries. It is no coincidence that it concerns the partners who were the most advanced in the Association process.

The EU has pledged to support the Agadir Process from both a financial and technical point of view. The programme *Helping the Association Agreement signatories to develop free trade among themselves, and with the EU* was launched in 2003. This € 4 million programme, funded under MEDA, aims at encouraging South-South trade and integration, starting on a sub-regional basis and at introducing pan Euro-Mediterranean cumulation of origin. The programme works for the creation of a pool of technical assistance to help progress towards South-South free trade.

[Progress of Negotiations on Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements](#)