

Brussels, 5 May 2008

Commissioners host meeting to boost energy co-operation with Mashreq countries, Iraq and Turkey

European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, and European Commissioner for Energy, Andris Piebalgs, meet representatives of the Mashrek countries, Iraq and Turkey on 5 May in Brussels to discuss improving energy security in the region and in the EU, in particular by deepening co-operation on natural gas. The meeting will be attended the Minister of Oil and Mineral Resources of the Arab Syrian Republic, Sufian Al-Alao, the Deputy Minister and Chairman of Egyptian Natural Gas Company, Eng Mahmoud Latif, as well as senior officials from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. The meeting will support finalisation of the Arab Gas Pipeline, and promote its role as a future supplier of the Nabucco project. It will also encourage the full participation of Iraq in regional energy activities, including as a partner in the Arab Gas Pipeline.

Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner said: "The Mashreq countries, Turkey and Iraq are key energy partners for the EU, and it is important that we fully exploit the potential of our now well-established co-operation. The Arab Gas Pipeline is set to be finalised by the end of the year, opening important possibilities as a new transport route for gas to the EU, particularly for the Nabucco project. This is just one example of how we are working together to integrate our energy markets in our mutual interest."

Commissioner Piebalgs said: "The Mashreq countries and the European Union are facing similar energy challenges. We should seek common solutions to common problems like high oil prices for consumers, climate change or security of supply. A common response is necessary with new pipelines like the Arab gas Pipeline, but also with energy efficiency measures, the spearheading renewable energy in both sides of the Mediterranean."

The Arab Gas Pipeline currently runs from Egypt through Jordan to Syria. It has a capacity of 10 billion cubic metres per year. The pipeline, which will be interconnected with Turkey and Iraq by 2009, will provide a new transport route for gas resources from the Mashreq region to the EU. It is expected that, in the future, the pipeline will be connected with the Nabucco project.

During the meetings, discussions will also focus on prospects for reinforcing the existing cooperation through the Euro-Arab Mashreq gas centre in Damascus. The Euro-Arab Mashreq gas centre, which benefits from technical assistance provided by the European Commission, has been working since 2006 on the development of a regional market for natural gas in the Mashreq, with the objective of its progressive integration with the EU gas market. The centre has also provided support to the ongoing work on the completion of the Arab Gas Pipeline.

The meeting is a follow up to the EU-Middle East-Africa Energy Conference co-hosted by the European Commission and Egypt in November 2007 in Sharm El Sheik. The Euro-Mashreq gas initiative is one of the activities within the Euro-Med energy cooperation that is underway in the framework of the Barcelona Process. The Euro-Med Energy Ministers Conference taking place in Limassol, Cyprus in December 2007 agreed on a priority action plan for 2008-2013, which outlined harmonization of regional energy markets as one of the key activities. The European Commission is also strengthening bilateral energy cooperation with the countries in the region. A Memorandum of Understanding on Energy Partnership has been finalised with Egypt and is under discussion with Iraq. A Joint Declaration on energy cooperation between the European Commission and Jordan was signed in October 2007 and is now being implemented.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/energy/index.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/energy/africa_mideast/index.htm