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EU-Russia Summit: The Start of a New Age

The 21st EU-Russia Summit in Hanty Mansiisk, Russia, was marked by talks held in a friendly atmosphere. The Summit fulfilled the main expectation regarding mutual relations in the recent period. Leaders from both sides welcomed the start of the new phase in the process of deepening the strategic partnership introduced by the negotiations on a new fundamental agreement between the European Union and the Russian Federation.

The spirit of a new beginning was heightened by the fact that, on the Russian side, the EU-Russia Summit was chaired for the first time by the new Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, while on the EU side, the EU Presidency is for the first time being held by one of the countries that joined the EU in May 2004. Slovenia is also the first Slavic country at the helm of the EU Council.

The Hanty Mansiisk Summit has confirmed that, in planning their strategies for addressing the fundamental challenges of the twenty-first century, both sides are, with high expectations, counting on strengthening their mutual partnership. The President of the European Council, Janez Janša, commented, "Partner relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation are one of the key factors determining the success of the European Union as well as Russian Federation in the twenty-first century."

Discussions at the Summit confirmed that, on the legal basis already in place, the EU and Russia had developed cooperation of a highly diversified nature. In reviewing the implementation of the Roadmaps of the four common spaces: Common economic space, Common space of freedom, security and justice, Common space of external security and Common space of research, education and culture, both sides expressed satisfaction with the achievements made in the first half of 2008 and indicated the areas where they hoped to see more rapid progress.

Discussions on current global economic challenges and EU-Russian cooperation in that area confirmed that the European and Russian economies have withstood the first impacts of the turmoil on capital and basic goods markets relatively well. We also agreed that certain developments could be clarified only with reference to long-term trends requiring structural adjustments. One important aspect of such efforts is the shared objective of establishing an open and integrated market.

The European Union is Russia's largest trading partner and, while Russia is ranked third among the EU's trade partners, immediately after the United States and China. In the period 2000-2007, the volume of trade almost tripled, totalling €233 billion last year, while trade with Russia as a proportion of all EU foreign trade almost doubled.

In 2007, investment by the EU-27 in Russia totalled €17 billion, or more than twice the amount in 2004. In 2007, Russian investments totalled €1 billion, which was three times as much as in 2004. Among

opportunities for further growth, Russia's further integration into the world economy is especially important. The European Union welcomed the progress made by Russia on the way towards membership in the World Trade Organisation. The EU expressed the wish to see the last barriers to Russia's achieving its objective of joining the organisation by the end of the year removed as soon as possible.

The two-thirds share of energy products in Russia's exports to the EU and, on the EU side, a primary product trade deficit of €92 billion testify to the special link between the European Union and the Russian Federation in the strategically important area of energy. The European Union is the largest consumer of Russian energy, while Russia is the largest energy supplier to the EU. The Summit has confirmed the importance of open dialogue on energy and strengthening cooperation through the use of instruments which guarantee predictability and safety of demand and supply to both sides. The EU recalled the importance of the Early Warning Mechanism, which should be applied in practice at the earliest opportunity.

The EU expressed interest in further cooperation in the global fight against climate change. Russia is a particularly interesting partner because of the role played in forums such as the G8 and G8+5. The positive results of the meetings of these groups in July in Japan could make an important contribution to the success of the UN process.

Within the roadmap of a common area of research, education and culture, an important step was taken at the first session of the Permanent Partnership Council on Research in May in Ljubljana.

In April, there was a Permanent Partnership Council meeting on Freedom, Security and Justice, and the regular consultation on human rights was hosted by Ljubljana in the same month. Human rights are an important value basis underpinning our partnership. As such, they rank high on the agenda, including all the differences which we both can and wish to further discuss candidly. This is also a reflection of the maturity of our mutual relations.

In terms of the common space of external security, the EU and Russia share a great responsibility in responding to global challenges, including by cooperating effectively within multilateral frameworks. On the importance of cooperation in the field, both sides highlighted cooperation of Russia in the EU Chad/CAR operation.

The Summit also provided an opportunity for an exchange of views on broader aspects of international affairs. Special attention was devoted to resolving frozen conflicts in the shared neighbourhood, the Middle East peace process, the Iranian nuclear programme and the situation in Afghanistan.

In addition to the joint statement on the start of negotiations for the new agreement, a joint statement on cross-border cooperation was also adopted. It confirms the agreement on seven cross-border cooperation projects aimed at bolstering the economic and social development of border regions. The EU welcomed Russia's commitment and significant financial contribution to the success of these projects.

The Summit in Hanty Mansiisk was hosted by President Dmitry Medvedev. The EU side was represented at the highest level by the President of the European Council, Janez Janša, and the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso. The President of the European Council was assisted by the Council Secretary-General/EU High Representative Javier Solana and accompanied by the Slovenian Minister of the Economy, Andrej Vizjak. The President of the European Commission was accompanied by Commissioners Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Peter Mandelson. On the Russian side, the Summit was also attended by the Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov and the Minister for Economic Development Elvira Sahipzadovna Nabiullina.