

**Statement by the Department of Foreign Affairs in response to the European Commission's adoption of a Communication proposing a strategic partnership between South Africa and the European Union.**

**South Africa – European Union Strategic Partnership**

Another issue which is think is very important is the announcement by the European Union (EU) of a strategic partnership between South Africa and the EU.

The South African government welcomes this move as a positive step forward in the process of elevating SA-EU relations. SA and the EU have, since mid 2005, been informally engaging each other on the possibility of elevating their relationship. SA and the EU share many common objectives and positions, and both SA and the EU believe that intensified cooperation will be of mutual benefit.

During his visit to SA in February 2006, EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Assistance, Mr. Louis Michel, held meetings with President Mbeki and Minister Dlamini Zuma, in which he presented a non-paper entitled 'A possible South Africa-EU Strategic Partnership.' The South African government is presently studying this proposal.

A “strategic partnership” relationship will allow SA and the EU to engage in more intensive dialogue on political, economic and developmental issues. According to the EC, a strategic partnership with the EU would give SA far greater recognition in Europe's strategic global awareness, as well as in time allow SA to be placed on a high-priority diplomatic footing with the EU. SA-EU relations would thus hold similar importance to those held by the EU and the USA, Canada, China, Russia, India, and Brazil, all of whom have special agreements with the EU.

The South African Government anticipates that formal discussions regarding an elevation of relations could commence once the EC has tabled their proposed strategic partnership before the European Council (the Member States), which is expected to happen in late September this year.

This is a very important step and presents an opportunity for African developmental challenges to be placed higher on the agenda of the European Union.

The timing of this is also very important since South Africa will be a non-permanent member of the Security Council 2007-2008 and the responsibility placed on it will be greater. We will then be in better position to deal with some of our challenges.