



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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COVER NOTE

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to : Delegations

Subject : **BRUSSELS EUROPEAN COUNCIL
15/16 DECEMBER 2005**

PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

Delegations will find attached the revised version of the Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council (15/16 December 2005).

1. The meeting of the European Council was preceded by an exposé by the President of the European Parliament, Mr Josep Borrell, followed by an exchange of views.
2. The European Council recalls the importance of the common European values of solidarity, social justice and sustainability as the basis for the development of the Union's policies. This constitutes the framework in which the guidelines set out in these conclusions should be taken forward.
3. The European Council recalls the EU's support for an effective multilateral system based on the rule of law, and the need for a United Nations better equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. It underlines its commitment to early and full implementation of the reforms and commitments agreed at the 2005 UN World Summit.

I. FUTURE OF EUROPE

4. Following the Hampton Court Informal Heads of State or Government meeting, the European Council notes the reports from the President of the Commission and the Secretary General/High Representative and agrees to return to these issues under the Austrian Presidency.
5. The European Council notes the joint UK-Austrian interim report on national debates on the future of Europe underway in all Member States, further to the Declaration by the Heads of State or Government at the June 2005 European Council on this issue. The European Council will return to the issue in the first half of 2006 under the Austrian Presidency on the basis of preparatory work in the General Affairs and External Relations Council. The European Council also takes note of the discussion held at the conference "Sharing power in Europe" co-organised by the Presidency and the Netherlands in The Hague on 17 November 2005, and notes the Austrian Presidency's intention to come back to this issue.

II. FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

6. The European Council reached agreement on the Financial Perspective 2007-2013 as set out in doc. 15915/05.

III. AFRICA

7. The European Council adopts the EU strategy "The EU and Africa: Towards a Strategic Partnership" as called for at its June 2005 meeting (doc. 15702/1/05 REV 1). Building on the Cairo Summit, it stresses the importance of enhanced EU-Africa political dialogue, including holding a second EU/Africa Summit in Lisbon as soon as possible, and agrees to review regularly, starting in 2006, progress on the implementation of the Strategy, taking into account the conclusions adopted by the Council on 21 November 2005.

IV. GLOBAL APPROACH TO MIGRATION

8. The European Council notes the increasing importance of migration issues for the EU and its Member States and the fact that recent developments have led to mounting public concern in some Member States. It underlines the need for a balanced, global and coherent approach, covering policies to combat illegal immigration and, in cooperation with third countries, harnessing the benefits of legal migration. It recalls that migration issues are a central element in the EU's relations with a broad range of third countries, including, in particular, the regions neighbouring the Union, namely the eastern, south eastern and Mediterranean regions, and notes the importance of ensuring that the appropriate level of financial resources is allocated to these policies. The EU will strengthen its dialogue and cooperation with all those countries on migration issues, including return management, in a spirit of partnership and having regard to the circumstances of each country concerned.

9. The European Council emphasises that the European Union's commitment to support the development efforts of countries of origin and transit is part of a long-term process to respond to the opportunities and challenges of migration, as outlined in the Hague Programme. In this regard, the European Council recognises the importance of tackling the root causes of migration, for example through the creation of livelihood opportunities and the eradication of poverty in countries and regions of origin, the opening of markets and promotion of economic growth, good governance and the protection of human rights.
10. As part of this overall process, the European Council welcomes the Commission's Communication of 30 November 2005: Priority Actions for Responding to the Challenges of Migration and adopts the "Global approach to migration: Priority actions focussing on Africa and the Mediterranean" annexed to these conclusions, covering the following areas:
- strengthening cooperation and action between Member States;
 - increasing dialogue and cooperation with African states;
 - increasing dialogue and cooperation with neighbouring countries covering the entire Mediterranean region;
 - as well as the questions of funding and implementation.

The European Council invites the Commission to report back on progress made by the end of 2006.

V. COUNTER-TERRORISM

11. The European Council underlines the importance of a comprehensive and proportionate response to the threat from terrorism. The European Council adopts the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy (doc. 14469/4/05 REV 4) which sets out a framework for work to prevent radicalisation and the recruitment to terrorism, to protect citizens and infrastructure, to pursue and investigate terrorists, and to improve the response to the consequences of attacks. The European Council notes that the EU Counter-Terrorism Action Plan, the instrument for tracking implementation, is being revised to ensure full coherence with the new Strategy.

12. The European Council also welcomes the progress made on priority dossiers as set out in the Counter-Terrorism Co-ordinator's six monthly report and calls for this momentum to be maintained. The European Council will monitor progress on implementing the Counter-Terrorism Strategy at its meeting in June 2006.

VI. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

13. The European Council notes the presentation of the Commission's Communication on a renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy for the next 5 years. The European Council looks forward to adopting in June 2006 an ambitious and comprehensive strategy, comprising targets, indicators and an effective monitoring procedure; which should integrate the internal and external dimensions and be based on a positive long-term vision, bringing together the Community's sustainable development priorities and objectives in a clear, coherent strategy that can be communicated simply and effectively to citizens.

VII. CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

14. The European Council welcomes the progress made during 2005 in developing a medium and long-term EU strategy and re-invigorating the international negotiations on climate change, recalling its conclusions of March 2005. In this context, the European Council welcomes the positive outcome of the UN Climate Change Conference in Montreal, which advances the work under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and its flexible mechanisms, and initiates discussions on long term cooperative action to address climate change that will help ensure the widest possible cooperation by all countries and their participation in an effective and appropriate international response. The European Council looks forward to further developing the EU's medium and long-term strategy to contribute to these discussions, and to considering this strategy during the second half of 2006, as appropriate.

15. In support of this work, the European Council also underlines the importance of the implementation of the Gleneagles Plan of Action with its strong emphasis on technology transfer and managing the impacts of climate change, and taking forward the dialogue and technological co-operation agreed with India, China and Russia, including at future summits, while working to develop partnerships with all major energy-consuming countries.
16. The European Council also welcomes the Commission Communication "Reducing the climate impact of aviation", recognises that the inclusion of the aviation sector in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme seems to be the best way forward, and welcomes the intention of the Commission to bring forward a legislative proposal by the end of 2006 accompanied by an impact assessment which includes the specific analysis requested in the conclusions of the 2 December 2005 Council.
17. The European Council stresses the importance of an integrated approach to climate change, energy and competitiveness objectives, and underlines that strategies to invest in cleaner and more sustainable energy both in the EU and more widely can support a range of policy objectives, including energy security, competitiveness, employment, air quality and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. In this context, the European Council welcomes the launch of the second phase of the European Climate Change Programme and the Commission's intention to develop an Action Plan on energy efficiency.

VIII. GROWTH AND JOBS

18. Recalling the Council (ECOFIN) conclusions of 6 December 2005, the European Council notes that the world economy is experiencing a period of rapid and significant economic change and agrees that Europe needs economic reforms, social modernisation and sustainable environmental policies to safeguard its values and respond effectively to the challenges and opportunities of globalisation and demographic change. The European Council underlines the importance of innovation, Information and Communication Technology, research and human capital, in particular with respect to SMEs, for achieving higher employment, productivity and sustainable growth across the European Union, in the context of sound macroeconomic policies.

19. The European Council welcomes the Member States' National Reform Programmes and the Commission's Community Lisbon Programme and looks forward to the Commission's January progress report. It stresses the importance of National Reform Programmes to strengthen the overall governance of the Lisbon Strategy and invites Member States, the Commission and the Council to monitor and evaluate their implementation in line with the March 2005 European Council conclusions.
20. Taking due account of the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality and the importance of respecting the *acquis communautaire*, the European Council stresses that an improved regulatory framework in the European Union, at Community and Member States level, is key to delivering growth and jobs. Emphasis should be placed on implementing commitments already made by all institutions, including the provisions of the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making of 16 December 2003. On that basis, the European Council welcomes the significant progress made since its last meeting and agrees on the importance of further work as set out in the attached annex covering i) reducing burdens on business and citizens through simplification and screening; ii) the revised impact assessment system and iii) EU common methodology for assessing the administrative costs of legislation.
21. The European Council stresses the importance of ensuring, in accordance with its conclusions of March 2005, the proper functioning of the internal market, including for services. The European Council notes the progress made on the Services Directive and looks forward, with a view to sustained momentum, to the Commission's amended proposal.

IX. REDUCED RATES OF VAT

22. The European Council calls upon the ECOFIN Council to address the question of reduced rates of VAT at its January 2006 meeting with a view to finalising agreement on the issue.

X. FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

23. The European Council welcomes the Commission's Opinion on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's application for EU membership. It welcomes the significant progress made by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia towards meeting the political criteria set by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993 and the Stabilisation and Association Process requirements established by the Council in 1997.
24. In the light of the Commission's analysis, the European Council decides to grant candidate country status to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, taking into account, in particular, the substantial progress made in completing the legislative framework related to the Ohrid Framework Agreement, as well as its track record in implementing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (including its trade-related provisions) since 2001.
25. The European Council makes clear that further steps will have to be considered in the light of the debate on the enlargement strategy, as provided for by the Council conclusions of 12 December 2005; of compliance by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with the Copenhagen political criteria; of the requirements of the Stabilisation and Association Process and the effective implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement; and of the need for further significant progress to respond to the other issues and criteria for membership included in the Commission's Opinion and implementation of the priorities in the European Partnership, on the basis of specific benchmarks. The absorption capacity of the Union also has to be taken into account. The European Council invites the Commission to report on developments in future progress reports.

XI. INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

26. The European Council noted the important work carried out by the International Fund for Ireland in promoting peace and reconciliation. It asked the Commission to take the necessary steps with a view to continued EU support for the Fund as it enters the crucial final phase of its work up to 2010.

XII. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

27. The European Council adopts a declaration on the Mediterranean and the Middle East annexed to these conclusions.
28. The European Council endorses the Presidency report on ESDP (doc. 15891/05), including the mandate for the incoming Presidency.
29. The European Council adopts the EU Strategy to combat illicit accumulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition (doc. 13066/05).
30. The European Council welcomes the adoption by the Council, the Member States, the Commission and the European Parliament of "the European consensus on development", which provides the Union with a common vision of values, objectives, principles and means for development (doc. 14820/05). The European Council welcomes the fact that the Council will make a regular assessment, on the basis of a Commission monitoring report, of the aid volume targets agreed in the Council conclusions of May 2005.
31. The European Council invites the future Austrian Presidency to continue work on improving cooperation in the consular and visa field.

GLOBAL APPROACH TO MIGRATION:
PRIORITY ACTIONS FOCUSING ON AFRICA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

The European Council welcomes the Commission's Communication of 30 November 2005, *Priority actions for responding to the challenges of migration: first follow-up to Hampton Court*.

The European Council, against the background of the EU's Strategy for Africa and the Strategy for the external dimension of Justice and Home Affairs, as well as recent events in the Mediterranean region, agrees to initiate priority actions with a focus on Africa and the Mediterranean countries.

The European Council agrees on the urgent need in the short term for broad-ranging concrete actions, which form part of ongoing work to ensure that migration works to the benefit of all countries concerned. Action must be taken to reduce illegal migration flows and the loss of lives, ensure safe return of illegal migrants, strengthen durable solutions for refugees, and build capacity to better manage migration, including through maximising the benefits to all partners of legal migration, while fully respecting human rights and the individual's right to seek asylum. The immediate actions set out below form part of a broader agenda for developing the EU's relationship with Africa and the Mediterranean countries through genuine partnership. The European Council also welcomes the complementary dialogue and cooperation being pursued by Member States in this area.

The European Council further underlines the necessity of an integrated and global approach for some of the proposed priority actions, such as the initiatives on the migratory routes and safety at sea, which concern both the Mediterranean and certain African countries.

The European Council, in the light of the Commission Communication, endorses the following actions and invites the Council and Member States to work closely with the Commission to implement these actions during the course of 2006.

Increasing operational cooperation between Member States

- Call on FRONTEX to:
 - implement border management measures in the Mediterranean region, in particular joint operations and pilot projects, as early as possible in 2006;
 - present a Risk Analysis report on Africa, building on recent studies, by May 2006;
 - launch a feasibility study on reinforcing monitoring and surveillance of the southern maritime border of the EU, namely in the Mediterranean Sea, and on a Mediterranean Coastal Patrols Network involving EU Member States and North African countries, as early as possible in 2006.
- Explore the technical feasibility of establishing a surveillance system covering the whole southern maritime border of the EU and the Mediterranean Sea by the end of 2006. Such a system would use modern technology with the aim of saving lives at sea and tackling illegal immigration.
- Establish regional networks of Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs) involving priority countries or regions as early as possible in 2006, and present reports on illegal immigration and trafficking, with the assistance where appropriate of ILOs in key countries, by May 2006.
- Bring forward a proposal for the creation of rapid reaction teams made up of national experts able to provide rapid technical and operational assistance at times of high influxes of migrants, in accordance with the Hague Programme, by Spring 2006.
- Ensure a substantial follow-up to the report of the Global Commission on International Migration, and prepare for the UN High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development that will be launched in September 2006.
- Present an analysis of the existing international instruments on the law of the sea, including relevant aspects of refugee law, by March 2006.

Dialogue and cooperation with Africa

- Work to make migration a shared priority for political dialogue between the EU and the African Union, including through regular senior officials' meetings to prepare for EU-Africa Ministerial Troika discussions.
- Work in partnership with African countries and regional organisations, such as ECOWAS, through a range of fora, initiatives and regional meetings, including an EU-Africa Ministerial Conference in Morocco in 2006 and a conference on migration and development in Brussels in March 2006.
- Explore the feasibility of a migration routes initiative for operational cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination, with a view to developing a concrete initiative in 2006.
- Enhance dialogue by spring 2006 with key sub-Saharan African states on the basis of Article 13 of the Cotonou Agreement, covering a broad range of issues from institution and capacity building and effective integration of legal migrants to return and the effective implementation of readmission obligations, in order to establish a mutually beneficial cooperation in this field.
- Establish and implement a pilot Regional Protection Programme (RPP) involving Tanzania as early as possible in 2006, with a steering group to oversee the programme. Based on findings from the pilot, develop plans for further programmes in Africa.
- Carry out a study to improve understanding of the root causes of migration to underpin the long-term approach.
- Develop regular dialogue with UNHCR as early as possible in 2006, to share experience and expertise on working with countries in Africa.

- Launch initiatives in early 2006 to promote cheaper and more easily available remittance services, and support ongoing efforts by international organisations to improve data on remittance flows; consider supporting efforts of African states to facilitate members of diasporas to contribute to their home countries, including through co-development actions, and explore options to mitigate the impact of skill losses in vulnerable sectors.
- Establish information campaigns targeting potential migrants to highlight the risks associated with illegal migration and raise awareness about available legal channels for migration.

Work with neighbouring countries

- Hold a EuroMed Ministerial meeting on migration in 2006.
- Engage Mediterranean third countries in the feasibility study of a Mediterranean Coastal Patrols Network, Mediterranean surveillance system and related pilot projects, where appropriate.
- Make available experiences and best practices where appropriate from other regional cooperation structures, including those relating to the Baltic Sea.
- Use all available frameworks for cooperation with Mediterranean partners, including those mentioned below, to prevent and combat illegal migration and trafficking in human beings, build capacity to better manage migration, and explore how best to share information on legal migration and labour market opportunities, for example through the development of migration profiles and through strengthening sub-regional fora.

- Undertake priority work with the following three countries:
 - Morocco – implement projects to combat trafficking and conclude negotiations of the EC-Morocco readmission agreement as early as possible;
 - Algeria – hold a first meeting in early 2006 to take forward cooperation on the basis of the migration provisions of the EC-Algeria Association Agreement and begin the negotiation of the readmission agreement as quickly as possible on the basis of the mandate given to the Commission;
 - Libya – conclude the work to agree the EU-Libya Action Plan on migration as early as possible in 2006, in accordance with the Council Conclusions of 3 June 2005 on initiating dialogue and cooperation with Libya on migration issues, and implement projects as soon as possible thereafter.

- Intensify research to improve understanding and management of migratory flows, building on the migration component of the regional JHA I MEDA programme.

- Help strengthen links between North and sub-Saharan African countries in the framework of the possible migration routes initiative.

- Continue dialogue and cooperation with UNHCR in helping third countries develop capacity for refugee protection.

- Hold a conference on *The role of internal security in relations between the EU and its neighbours* in Vienna in May 2006.

Funding

The European Council welcomes the increased priority being given to migration and the Commission's intention to intensify its financial assistance in areas concerning or related to migration in respect of its relations with third countries, including by an allocation of up to 3% of the ENPI, and comparable efforts in respect of other relevant financial instruments. Equivalent efforts will in particular be considered in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a view to tackling the root causes of migration.

The European Council also underlines the importance of ensuring that appropriate priority is given within AENEAS to Africa and the Mediterranean to actions to be financed in 2006, including actions promoting synergies between migration and development. Adequate resources for the thematic programme for cooperation with third countries in the areas of migration and asylum under the future financial perspectives should also be ensured with a sufficiently flexible means of disbursing funding quickly in cases of serious and urgent need.

Implementation and reporting

The European Council underlines the importance of swift implementation of the priority measures identified and calls on the Commission to organise coordination meetings between Member States, FRONTEX, UNHCR and other relevant organisations as necessary.

The European Council invites the Commission to report back on progress made by the end of 2006.

BETTER REGULATION

Reducing burdens on business and citizens through simplification and screening

The European Council reaffirms the importance of reducing unnecessary burdens for business and citizens. In this respect it welcomes the Commission's new programme for simplifying EU legislation ¹, and calls on the Council and the European Parliament to give high priority to progressing simplification proposals through the legislative system. It welcomes the Commission's screening initiative, notes the outcome and invites the Commission to continue to monitor pending proposals in terms of their impacts, including economic, social and environmental, with a view to modification, replacement or withdrawal, where these would be appropriate.

Revised impact assessment system

The European Council welcomes the Commission's revised impact assessment system ², including the commitment to prepare integrated impact assessments for all major legislative proposals and policy defining documents in its work programme. These assessments should include exploring a range of options, drawing on sectoral analyses where available, which could potentially meet the set objectives of a proposal, including non-legislative options and further harmonisation, as appropriate. It calls on the Council and the European Parliament to make full use of Commission impact assessments as a tool to inform political decision making and to implement the inter institutional common approach to impact assessment. It reaffirms the importance of transparency in policy making and timely and effective stakeholder consultation and looks forward to the comprehensive independent evaluation of the Commission's impact assessment system to be launched early in 2006.

¹ Doc. 13976/05

² http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general/impact/index_en.htm

EU common methodology for assessing administrative costs imposed by legislation

The European Council welcomes the Commission Communication on an EU common methodology for assessing administrative costs imposed by legislation³, and invites the Commission to start measuring administrative burdens, on a consistent basis and in line with transparent criteria, as part of integrated impact assessments launched as of January 2006. In this context it stresses the important contribution this methodology could play in identifying legislation in need of simplification and invites the Commission to explore options for establishing measurable targets in specific sectors for reducing administrative burdens. The European Council recognises the importance for Member States to provide, on request and in a proportionate manner, the information needed to assess administrative costs imposed by EU legislation.

³ Doc. 13629/05

DECLARATION OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

1. The European Council renews its commitment to a secure, prosperous and peaceful Middle East and Mediterranean, based on respect for the rule of law, democracy and human rights.
2. The European Council recognises the challenges that the countries of the Middle East and Mediterranean face. It urges all its partners to settle their disputes peacefully, renounce the threat or use of force, end incitement and promote regional security. It urges them to adhere to and comply with international non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament agreements, and to pursue a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. It urges them to tackle terrorism and terror-networks. The EU is committed to working with all countries to deal with these challenges.

Iran

3. The European Council condemns unreservedly President Ahmadinejad's call for the eradication of Israel and his denial of the Holocaust. These comments are wholly unacceptable and have no place in civilised political debate. The European Council recalls that in November this year the UN General Assembly adopted by consensus, including Iran, a resolution which "rejects any denial of the Holocaust as an historical event either in full or in part" urging all Member States to educate their population about the Holocaust. The European Council reaffirms the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure and recognised borders. The European Council recalls that all Members of the United Nations have undertaken to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State. The EU calls on the Iranian leadership to join the international consensus on the need for a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israel conflict, to support the search for peace between Israel and its neighbours and to end support for groups which advocate or engage in acts of terrorism.

4. The European Council is gravely concerned at Iran's failure to build confidence that its nuclear programme is exclusively peaceful. Iran's resumption of activity at the Uranium Conversion Facility in Esfahan, its continuing lack of transparency and its refusal to take the steps required of it in successive IAEA Board Resolutions only add to the EU's profound concerns about Iran's intentions. While the EU continues to work for a diplomatic solution, the window of opportunity will not remain open indefinitely and the European Council urges Iran to respond constructively, including by implementing all the confidence-building measures the IAEA Board has sought and refraining from any further unilateral move which might aggravate the situation.

5. The European Council underlines that whether the EU's long-term relationship with Iran improves or deteriorates will depend on progress on all issues of concern. Given provocative political moves by Iran since May, the Council agrees on the need to keep the EU's diplomatic options under close review and continue to calibrate the EU's approach in light of Iranian declarations and actions. The European Council reiterates its deep concern about the lack of respect for human rights and fundamental political freedoms in Iran, and calls on Iran to demonstrate respect for these principles by taking concrete steps, including permanently releasing Akbar Ganji and other prisoners of conscience. In the spirit of EU solidarity, it calls on Iran to lift all discriminatory restrictions against individual Member States.

Iraq

6. The European Council reaffirms the EU's continued support for Iraq's political transition in line with UNSCRs 1546 and 1637 and its commitment to assist the Iraqi people in building a secure, stable, unified and prosperous Iraq. It warmly welcomes the 15 December elections as a further step towards democracy and stability in Iraq, and encourages the swift formation of a new government thereafter. The European Council recognises that divisions remain within Iraq. It calls on all parties in Iraq to commit themselves to exclusively peaceful activities, and to work actively towards reconciliation. It condemns utterly the terrorist atrocities. The European Union stands ready to support the Iraqi people in broadening further the consensus on the future of their country, including through the review of the Constitution, and continuing to build up a new and inclusive post-Saddam political system. The European Council welcomes the meeting on Iraq organised by the Arab League on 19-21 November and supports the convening of a conference on national accord in early 2006. The European Council strongly urges regional states, in particular Syria and Iran, to support the political process in Iraq and to develop good neighbourly relations, including by co-operating with Iraq to prevent cross-border transit and support for terrorists.

7. The European Council reiterates its commitment to supporting Iraq's reconstruction, including through the EU's Rule of Law mission. The European Council expresses its concern about recent reports of human rights violations in Iraq, and urges the Iraqi authorities to address these urgently and transparently. It underlines the EU's strong opposition to the use of the death penalty. It remains committed to regular political dialogue with Iraq under the Joint EU-Iraq Political Declaration. The EU hopes to broaden and enhance its relationship further with Iraq once the constitutionally elected government is set up, including through the establishment of contractual relations.

Lebanon

8. The European Council reiterates its support for Lebanon's unity, stability and independence, and reminds its neighbours of their obligations to respect Lebanon's sovereignty. The European Council strongly condemns the assassination of Gibran Tueni and the murder of companions travelling with him. This assassination is the latest in a vicious campaign against Lebanese citizens, journalists, political leaders and their right to freedom of expression. The European Council also notes with extreme concern the conclusions of the second report of the UN International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIC) under Mr. Detlev Mehlis. It notes the confirmation of serious indications of the involvement of Lebanese and Syrian security services in the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, and expresses its concern at the incomplete co-operation provided by the Syrian authorities to the Commission. It urges Syria to co-operate unconditionally with UNIIC as they continue their efforts to bring to justice those responsible for the assassination of Rafiq Hariri. It welcomes the unanimous adoption of UNSCR 1644 of 15 December which extends the mandate of the UNIIC; authorises the UNIIC to provide technical assistance to the Lebanese Authorities in their investigations into other terrorist attacks perpetrated in Lebanon since 1 October 2004; and acknowledges the Lebanese Government's request that those charged with involvement in Rafiq Hariri's assassination should be tried in a tribunal of an international character.

9. The European Council reaffirms its full support for the Government of Lebanon and urges it to extend its authority throughout the country and to tackle urgently economic and political reform as agreed at the Core Group meeting held in New York last September. It welcomes the International Conference to be held in early 2006. It reminds all concerned of their obligation to implement UNSCR 1559 in its entirety, including the disbanding and disarmament of all militias.

Middle East Peace Process

10. The European Council reaffirms its commitment to the full implementation of the Quartet Roadmap. It welcomes the Israeli disengagement from Gaza and parts of the West Bank as a significant step towards implementing the Roadmap. The launch of the EU Border Assistance Mission to monitor the operation of the Rafah crossing and EU assistance to reinforce Palestinian border management capacities reflect the strong commitment of the EU to support the parties as they work together for a lasting, negotiated settlement. It calls for swift implementation of all aspects of the 15 November agreement on movement and access. It commends the efforts of the Quartet Special Envoy and underlines the importance of continued international engagement in the Peace Process.

11. The European Council emphasises that all Palestinian factions, including Hamas, should renounce violence, recognise Israel's right to exist, and disarm. Those who want to be part of the political process should not engage in armed activities, as there is a fundamental contradiction between such activities and the building of a democratic state. In this respect, the European Council welcomes the Palestinian Authority's statements condemning violence and urging groups who have engaged in terrorism to abandon this course and engage in the democratic process. It urges the Palestinian Authority to take firm action against those committing acts of violence or intimidation and assume full control of security in the areas under its authority. The EU remains committed to supporting Palestinian reforms and strengthening the Palestinian security forces and civil policing capacity, including through the EU Civil Policing Mission and working with the US Security Co-ordinator.

12. The European Council emphasises the importance of the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council foreseen for January 2006. It urges Israel to co-operate fully with the Palestinian Authority on the preparation and conduct of the elections, especially concerning freedom of movement for all candidates, election workers and voters, in particular in East Jerusalem, and welcomes the launch of the EU's Electoral Observation Mission.

13. The European Council urges the Israeli government to cease all activities in the Palestinian Territories that are contrary to international law, including settlement building, the demolition of Palestinian homes and the construction of the separation barrier on occupied land. These threaten to make any solution based on the co-existence of two viable states physically impossible. Israeli activities in and around East Jerusalem cause particular concern, especially with regard to reaching a final settlement agreement on Jerusalem.

Regional Stability

14. The European Council urges all states concerned to take immediate practical measures to support regional stability. This includes supporting the search for peace between Israel and its neighbours, the inclusive political process within Iraq and the implementation of UNSCR 1559 and other relevant Resolutions in Lebanon, and by ending support for groups which use violence, by preventing their movement, organisation and arms supplies, and by influencing them to abstain from terrorism.

Political, Social and Economic Reform

15. The European Council underlines its commitment to support political, social and economic reform. It emphasises the importance it attaches to full implementation of the EU's Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and Middle East and its commitment to work with all countries of the region, including the GCC countries, Yemen, Iran and Iraq.

Barcelona Process

16. The European Council recalls that the Barcelona Process, enhanced through the European Neighbourhood Policy, provides the central framework for relations with the Mediterranean countries. The European Council welcomes the progress on implementing the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans that have been concluded with Israel, Jordan, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority and Tunisia; notes the start of negotiations with Egypt and the preliminary consultations with Lebanon; and invites the Commission to draw up a national report on Algeria with a view to negotiating an action plan.

17. The European Council welcomes the 10th Anniversary Euromed Summit in Barcelona on 27-28 November, which adopted a jointly agreed Five-Year Work Programme and a Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism. The Five-Year Work Programme contains medium term targets in the field of political and security partnership; sustainable economic growth and reform; education and socio-cultural exchanges; and migration, social integration, justice and security. It recommends that every Presidency, after consulting with the Commission and Member States, present a report to the Council detailing their plans to implement the Work Programme and invites the Commission to update the Council periodically on its implementation. The Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism represents a significant advance in our political and security co-operation with Mediterranean partners.

Libya

18. The European Council notes the progress in the development of the EU's relations with Libya, while urging a continued effort to resolve EU concerns and other outstanding bilateral issues. It recalls the EU's wish to see Libya become a full member of the Barcelona Process, in which Libya could play a valuable role. Participation in the Process, and subsequent progression towards the conclusion of an Association Agreement, would require Libya to accept the Declaration and Barcelona acquis in full.

