



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



9210/04 (Presse 149)

PRESS RELEASE

2582nd Council Meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

- EXTERNAL RELATIONS -

Brussels, 17 May 2004

President **Brian COWEN, TD**
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland

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Minister for Defence of Ireland

* The 2581st meeting on General Affairs is the subject of a separate press release (9211/04 Presse 150)

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Main Results of the Council

The Council meeting was marked by a strong **security and defence** component. In the presence of Defence Ministers, it reviewed progress under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), including on crisis management operations (prospect of an EU-led mission with a military component after SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina), capabilities, the "Headline Goal 2010", rapid response and the Defence Agency that is to be created shortly.

The concurrent development of these dossiers is likely to lead to a further substantial reinforcement of the ESDP in 2004.

The Council also examined the situation in the **Middle East**, welcoming the outcome of the meeting of the Quartet on 4 May and condemning terrorist attacks on Israel as well as calling on Israel to cease the demolition of houses in Gaza.

On **Iraq**, it condemned the assassination of the Chairman of the Iraqi Governing Council and all forms of violence and terrorist attacks, and expressed abhorrence at recent evidence of mistreatment of prisoners in Iraqi prisons.

The Council also reviewed the situation in the **Western Balkans** and decided to ask the Commission to give its opinion on the application for membership of the EU presented by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 22 March 2004.

A number of important points in the area of external relations adopted without debate are included in the press release on General Affairs (9211/04).

This session was the first meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council since enlargement on 1 May.

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OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

see "General Affairs" press release 9211/04

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- The documents whose references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site <http://ue.eu.int>.
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the above mentioned Council Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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Mr Pascal LAMY

Member
Member

Other participants:

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

ITEMS DEBATED

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"1. The Council reviewed progress on operations and on the development of military and civilian capabilities for crisis management within the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and in support of the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

Crisis management operations

2. The Council noted that lessons learned have been drawn from the two EU-led military operations (CONCORDIA in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and ARTEMIS in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) that have been successfully completed. Regarding civilian aspects of the ESDP, the Council welcomed the progress being made by the existing EU police missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, while noting that certain challenges still remain to be addressed over the period ahead. The Council expressed its intention to revert to these issues and also noted that ongoing contingency planning is under way in relation to possible additional civilian missions.

3. The Council received information on the state of play regarding the preparation of a possible EU-led ESDP mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina following SFOR, and expressed its satisfaction on the progress made to date. The Council underlined the importance of close co-operation between the EU and NATO, including the exchange of information with a view to ensuring a smooth and efficient transition and also of close consultations with the BiH authorities.

The 2010 Headline Goal

4. The Council approved the document entitled Headline Goal 2010 (6309/6/04) which will be submitted to the European Council in June 2004, which includes the main parameters for the development of EU military capabilities with a 2010 horizon, notably the definition of the level of ambition for rapid reaction battlegroups. Rapid reaction calls for rapid decision-making and planning as well as rapid deployment of forces. On decision making, the ambition of the EU is to be able to take the decision to launch an operation within 5 days of the approval of the Crisis Management Concept by the Council. On the deployment of forces, the ambition is that the forces start implementing their mission on the ground no later than 10 days after the EU decision to launch the operation. The PSC will direct the necessary steps leading to the more precise definition of the Headline Goal 2010 based on the elements set out in this document, drawing on the advice of the EUMC as appropriate. The new Headline Goal reflects the European Security Strategy, the evolution of the strategic environment and of technology and draws on lessons learned from EU-led operations. It builds on the Headline and capability goals defined by the Helsinki European Council and recognises that existing shortfalls still need to be addressed.

5. Member States' decision to commit themselves to be able by 2010 to respond to a crisis with rapid and decisive action applying a fully coherent approach to the whole spectrum of crisis management operations covered by the Treaty on the European Union is welcomed. This includes humanitarian and rescue tasks, peace-keeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking. As indicated by the European Security Strategy, this might also include joint disarmament operations, support for third countries in combating terrorism and security sector reform.

6. Interoperability, deployability and sustainability will be at the core of Member States' efforts and will be the driving factors of the Headline Goal 2010. In this regard Member States have identified an indicative list of specific milestones within the 2010 horizon.

7. The ability of the EU to deploy force packages at high readiness as a response to a crisis either as a stand-alone force or as part of a larger operation enabling follow-on phases, is a key element of the Headline Goal 2010. These minimum force packages, which must be militarily effective, credible and coherent, will be broadly based on the EU battlegroups concept.

8. The necessary set of benchmarks and milestones in order to evaluate progress towards the achievement of the objectives of the Headline Goal 2010 will be developed.

Current development in military capabilities

9. The Council noted the Single Progress Report on military capabilities, which was prepared in accordance with the EU Capability Development Mechanism (CDM) and welcomed progress made. In this framework, taking into account the comprehensive Spring 2004 military capability assessment, the Council recognised that further progress will be required on the recognised shortfalls and deficits from the Headline Goal 2003.

10. The Council also noted the Force Catalogue 2004, which incorporates contributions from the ten new EU Member States and new contributions from other Member States, the national and multinational Projects & Initiatives Catalogue 2004 and the Supplement to the Force Catalogue 2004, which includes additional contributions from non-EU European NATO members.

11. The Council noted the continuing work on the European Capability Action Plan (ECAP), which demonstrates Member States' determination to address the remaining shortfalls. The Council welcomed the elaboration of an ECAP Roadmap and the Capability Improvement Chart, which formed an integral part of the Single Progress Report, as a means of monitoring ECAP progress. The Council also welcomed the overview of the Capability Improvement Chart to inform public opinion and the media.

12. Notable progress was achieved in addressing capability shortfalls. Some shortfalls such as NBC and aspects of medical were remedied and in others, such as Headquarters, progress has been made. The Council noted that multinational efforts are ongoing to enhance strategic sea- and airlift capabilities.

13. The Council underlined the importance of the coherent and mutually reinforcing development of military capabilities in the EU and in NATO, where requirements overlap and, in this regard, the importance of the EU-NATO Capability Group, as defined by the EU Capability Development Mechanism.

Rapid Response

14. The Council welcomed the report presented by the SG/HR at the beginning of April on Rapid Response and agreed its recommendations. With the document on Headline Goal 2010, work has already begun on taking forward implementation of these recommendations.

15. Concerning the capabilities required for rapid response, the Council asked the relevant EU bodies to work on the basis of the Headline Goal 2010, drawing on the SG/HR's report, as appropriate, with a view to achieving full operational capability for the rapid response capabilities of the European Union by 2007. Work on the battlegroup concept should be pursued as a matter of urgency and completed by the end of the Irish Presidency. Commitments will be sought from Member States in order to achieve an initial battlegroup capability in early 2005 and complete development in 2007. Particular attention will have to be paid to the questions of standards, training and assessment of the rapid response capabilities, to ensure their interoperability and effective use. With a view to the EU's ambitions on rapid response, the Council recognised in particular the need to achieve further progress in improving capabilities for strategic mobility.

16. The Council underlined that a rapid decision making and planning process is necessary for rapid response. It asked the PSC to monitor the implementation of the relevant lessons learned from Operation Artemis, and requested the SG/HR to ensure the availability of advance planning, building on the tools already available and taking into account the implementation of the European Council Conclusions of December 2003. On planning and decision making, the SG/HR is also asked to present as early as possible in the second semester of 2004 his evaluation of the implication of and his proposal for the effective implementation of the level of ambition defined in the document Headline Goal 2010.

17. The Council welcomed the progress on the further development of the EU/UN dimension of rapid response and asked the Presidency and the SG/HR, to continue discussions with the UN on the modalities for EU/UN co-operation in military crisis management operation. These modalities would include identifying the possibilities of and modalities for co-operation in the event of rapid response type operations.

18. The Council underlined the importance it attaches to the principle of complementarity and mutual reinforcement between NATO and the EU. This means capabilities developed by Member States being made available to the EU and/or to NATO by the Member States concerned within timeframes compatible with the requirement of a rapid response. In this regard, intensified dialogue should be pursued between the EU and NATO at different levels, including by the SG/HR in close co-operation with the Presidency, within the established co-operation framework.

Civilian capabilities

19. The Council welcomed the fact that in the context of the Union's enlargement, a process has been launched aimed at identifying civilian crisis management capabilities available from the 10 new Member States.

20. The Council welcomed the fact that further progress is being made on the development of EU capabilities for the civilian aspects of crisis management, drawing on experience to date and addressing identified shortfalls. Work is underway on a way ahead to enhance the EU capability in this area, including in the light of the European Security Strategy, and covering the need for increased operationality, rapid deployment and possible additional capabilities. An Action Plan will be considered by the Council at its next meeting in June with a view to its endorsement by the European Council the same month.

21. The Council welcomed the letters sent recently by SG/HR Solana in relation to the planning and mission support capability for civilian crisis management within the Council Secretariat. Recalling his report of 22 July 2003 the Council invites the SG/HR to keep this issue under close review, given the evolving needs.

Agency in the field of defence capabilities development, research, acquisition and armaments

22. The Council took note of the proposals contained in the report from the Agency Establishment Team (AET), as submitted through the Ad Hoc Preparation Group. The Council commended the work of the AET in bringing well-prepared proposals to the Council in good time. The Council welcomed the fact that, based notably on the work of the AET, there is now a good basis for further work in the process of establishing the Agency. This should enable the Agency to achieve operational status by the end of 2004, in line with the mandate given by the European Council in Thessaloniki.

23. The Council asked the relevant Council bodies to complete work on the draft Joint Action, so that the legal act establishing the Agency is adopted in advance of the June European Council. Key appointments should follow as soon as possible.

Other aspects

24. The Council underlined the importance of developing the potential of ESDP, in both its military and civil aspects, to assist in effective conflict prevention and management in Africa, while encouraging and ensuring African ownership. In this regard, the Council welcomes the dialogue with the African Union, sub-regional organisations and African States. The Council will revisit this issue at its meeting in June.

25. The Council recalls the Declaration of the European Council of 25 March on the solidarity clause.

26. The Council endorses the PSC report on modalities, procedures and criteria for making available to the Community Civil Protection Mechanism the content of the database of military assets and capabilities relevant to the protection of civilian populations against the effects of terrorist attacks, including CBRN, developed on the basis of the December 2003 Council Conclusions, and requests the appropriate bodies to implement these modalities, procedures and criteria. In this context, and also in the light of the recent enlargement of the EU, Member States are invited to expand and deepen the contents of this database on the basis of their voluntary contributions. These modalities constitute an initial practical measure contributing to the implementation of the 25 March 2004 European Council Declaration on combating terrorism, notably the ESDP contribution."

WESTERN BALKANS - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO / KOSOVO

The Council exchanged views on the situation in Kosovo. The Council reiterated its strong support for the work of SRSG Holkeri and UNMIK in the implementation of UNSCR 1244. It emphasised its commitment to the policy of Standards before Status, welcomed the Kosovo Standards Implementation Plan, and called upon the Provisional Institutions of Self Government (PISG), with the support of UNMIK, to speed up the active implementation of the standards, including effective local government. The EU stands ready to contribute to the implementation of this policy. The Council again urged the PISG to demonstrate in an unambiguous manner their commitment to a multi-ethnic Kosovo and to the security and rights of members of all communities in Kosovo.

ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION PROCESS

The Council concluded its annual review of the Stabilisation and Association Process for South East Europe, assessing progress made by the countries of the region towards the objective of European integration. It adopted the annexed Conclusions and urged the countries of the region to subscribe to them.

The Council welcomed the Commission proposals for the first European Partnerships with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro including Kosovo as defined by UN Security Council Resolution 1244. The Council noted that the adoption of the Partnerships in the coming weeks will be an important demonstration of the commitment of the European Union to the implementation of all aspects of the Thessaloniki Agenda."

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FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

"On 22 March 2004, the Prime Minister Mr Branko CRVENKOVSKI of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia presented the application of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for membership of the European Union (8077/04).

The Council decided to implement the procedure laid down in Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union. Accordingly, the Commission is requested to submit to the Council its opinion on this application."

*ANNEX to the conclusions on the Western Balkans***"2004 Annual Council Review of the SAP for South Eastern Europe**

In line with its conclusions of 9 April 2001, the Council conducted its annual review of the Stabilisation and Association Process for South Eastern Europe (SAP). The 2004 SAP review, coming immediately after the recent enlargement, by which the EU membership has been extended from 15 to 25, should be considered an important reminder of the readiness of the Western Balkans to follow the same path and move closer to the EU, which, for its part, remains committed to their future membership. The Council reconfirmed that the SAP will remain the overall framework for the European course of the Western Balkans countries, all the way to their future accession. It welcomed and endorsed the content of the European Commission's third annual report on the SAP, covering Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, including Kosovo as defined by UN Security Council Resolution 1244. The Commission assessment on Croatia is contained in the Opinion on the application for EU membership, which will be considered by the GAERC in June.

As agreed at the Thessaloniki Summit, and following its Regulation of 22 March 2004 on the establishment of individual European Partnerships within the SAP, the Council welcomed the Commission proposals for the first European Partnerships with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro including Kosovo as defined by UN Security Council Resolution 1244. Based on the evaluations contained in the SAP reports, the Partnerships will serve as a checklist tailored to the specific needs of each country against which to measure progress, identifying priorities for action in supporting efforts to speed up progress to eventual EU membership. The Council emphasised that implementation of these priorities will require the exercise of political will and the allocation of adequate resources on the part of the countries concerned.

The Council noted the work already undertaken by its competent bodies in examining the Commission proposals, which will allow it to adopt the first set of European Partnerships shortly. The Council strongly encouraged the SAP countries to respond to their European Partnership by preparing a plan, including timetables, for implementing the identified priorities. It invited the Commission to monitor progress in implementation regularly, notably in its Annual SAP Reports and through SAP structures.

GENERAL REVIEW OF THE SITUATION AND ASSESSMENT OF SAP INSTRUMENTS

Recalling the Thessaloniki Summit Declaration and Agenda, the Council reconfirmed that the EU will continue to support the efforts of the countries of the region in moving closer to the Union. It welcomed progress made in the implementation of the Thessaloniki Agenda, enhancing the SAP with elements from the enlargement process. Twinning has already been introduced in all Western Balkan countries; the services of TAIEX have been extended to the countries of the region; a Feasibility Study on the establishment of a Regional School for Higher Education and Public Administration has been started; participation in the work of selected Community programmes has been made possible; European Partnerships are about to be adopted and political dialogue and co-operation in the area of CFSP have been enhanced. The Council recalled that the rate of progress lies effectively in the hands of the countries in the region. It noted that the effectiveness of the new instruments in supporting the reform process depends crucially on improved levels of implementation by the countries of the region.

The Council welcomed the overall progress in the region and the continuing stabilisation of the security situation. It emphasised, however, that the recent violence in Kosovo has been a serious setback for Kosovo, endangering the progress made in recent years. The Council confirmed that the instruments developed in the context of the SAP would be used to assist the Provisional Institutions of Self Government in their efforts to ensure substantive progress in implementing the UN-endorsed Standards for Kosovo.

Recalling that the future of the Western Balkans lies within the European Union, the Council reiterated the importance it attached to respect for democratic principles and human rights, the protection of minorities and the full implementation of international obligations, including full co-operation with the ICTY, the strengthening of judicial systems, reform of public administrations, the establishment of functioning market economies and the promotion of regional co-operation.

The Council noted that progress in the region remains uneven. It noted in particular the need for improvement in the levels of co-operation with the ICTY and for greater progress in the fight against organised crime and corruption. In this context, the Council expects the countries of the region to implement fully the specific action-oriented measures presented at the EU-Western Balkans JHA Ministerial in November 2003. It welcomed the significant improvements in regional co-operation, notably in the areas of infrastructure, trade, transport and energy. It reiterated that regional co-operation is a practical means for promoting reconciliation and underpinning reform and called for further efforts to improve good neighbourly relations between the countries of the Western Balkans.

Recalling that economic prosperity is essential to long-term stability and democracy in the region, the Council noted with satisfaction that the economies of the countries generally continued to grow with inflation remaining low. It expressed concern over the high unemployment and the persistence of the large informal sector. It encouraged the countries to improve the business climate and the competitiveness of their industries by implementing relevant legislation, modernising their administrations and upgrading trade related institutions, in order to take full advantage of the substantial trade preferences provided by the EU.

The Council welcomed the evaluation by the Commission of the effects of the European Union's trade measures granted in September 2000 to the SAP countries. It noted that the measures have served to create an enabling environment for an increase in exports. However, the countries did not manage to take full advantage of these measures. The Council stressed the need for an increase in the efforts by the countries involved, in order to make economic operators aware of the potential of these trade measures and to develop export promotion activities, thus allowing the countries of the region to take full advantage of the substantial preferences available to them. Further progress was needed to ensure full co-operation in the area of customs control and respect of the rules of origin.

The Council reiterated the importance of the CARDS programme in assisting the beneficiary countries as well as the region as a whole in their reform efforts. It looked forward to receiving the Commission's evaluation report on this regulation together with concrete proposals regarding its future by June 2004.

INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT OF THE SAP COUNTRIES

The Council welcomed the country assessments annexed to the Commission's report.

► Albania

The Council noted the progress made in the SAA negotiations with Albania. It noted that the implementation over the past year of the reforms necessary for the required implementing capacities had been limited. The Council encouraged Albania to accelerate reforms, particularly as regards implementation of legislation, thus allowing the SAA negotiations to advance without delay. In this context, the Council emphasised the urgent need to address fully the Commission's recommendations and to ensure the necessary political climate for sound reform implementation. In this context, the Council highlighted the need to strengthen the judiciary and public administration and to ensure free and fair elections at all levels and devote more attention to guaranteeing full respect for human and minority rights. It commended Albania for the reduction in smuggling and trafficking in human beings, but noted that more substantial efforts in the fight against organised crime and corruption were necessary. The Council commended Albania for its constructive role in the region and for its responsible attitude with regard to the mid-March events in Kosovo. The Council urged Albania to demonstrate political will, determination and the capacity to address all remaining issues in the areas of organised crime, corruption, the judicial system and public administration reform, in order to enable further progress on Albania's path towards the EU.

► Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Council noted that the Feasibility Study for Bosnia and Herzegovina confirmed that considerable progress had been made in stabilisation, but that substantial progress was needed on the 16 priorities identified therein as necessary for a recommendation to open negotiations for an SAA. It also noted that government at State level remained under-developed and that public administration reform had just begun. It called for further sustained reform efforts to ensure that progress made in state-building has become self-sustainable and is not reversed. The Council called upon all parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina to co-operate fully with the ICTY. The Council noted that though progress had been made in many areas, international pressure had often been the key to advancing reform. The Council urged the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to take full responsibility for the reform process. The Council recognised reforms promoting economic development but remained concerned at major economic challenges facing BiH. Bosnia and Herzegovina required a framework favouring investment and enterprise and needed to manage effectively the funds at its disposal. The Council reminded the BiH authorities that a move to open SAA negotiations is contingent on their willingness to effect the necessary reforms. The EU, for its part, would continue its contribution to a stable environment in which reforms could proceed.

► Croatia

The Council noted that the Commission Opinion on Croatia's application for EU membership replaces the annual SAP report and will be considered in June by the Council and the European Council.

► former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The Council welcomed the entry into force of the SAA with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which will lead to greater co-operation between the EU and the country. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's application for EU membership will be considered in accordance with the rules laid down in the Treaty. The Council welcomed the further consolidation of stability and encouraged the Government to continue the full implementation of the Ohrid Framework

Agreement and to strengthen the rule of law. It invited the Government to accelerate preparatory efforts for the implementation of the decentralisation process. It also called for further progress on good governance, the fight against corruption, the strengthening of the judicial system, reform of the security sector, as well as in strengthening administrative capacity and the reform of public administration. The Council further noted that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been successful in maintaining a stable macro-economic framework and urged the country to address the weaknesses identified in the functioning of the economy, business climate, competitiveness and enforcement of contractual and property rights.

► Serbia and Montenegro, including Kosovo as defined by UNSCR 1244

The Council regretted that the Constitutional Charter had not yet been fully implemented and that the Internal Market and Trade Action Plan had not been completed. The Council noted that the feasibility report had been postponed in order to give the authorities more time to address the remaining key issues, including in particular political conditionality, constitutional issues and the Action Plan. While progress had been made in defence reform, minority rights and regional co-operation, there has been insufficient reform in the police and the judiciary. The Council urged the authorities of Serbia and Montenegro to do their utmost to ensure full co-operation with the ICTY. The Council expressed concern that the lack of consensus over the functioning of the State Union was weakening policies necessary for reforms and developing Serbia and Montenegro's relations with the EU.

The Council recalled that Kosovo benefited from all the elements of the SAP to ensure compatibility of reforms in Kosovo with the *acquis*. The SAP Tracking Mechanism (STM) established by the Commission plays a key role in providing policy advice and measuring progress. The ethnically-motivated violence in March 2004 was a major setback for Kosovo. The Council urged the PISG to demonstrate their full and unconditional commitment to a multi-ethnic Kosovo. The Council reconfirmed that in the aftermath of the violence, the immediate priorities were to ensure security, to facilitate the return of displaced persons, to reconstruct destroyed property and to bring those responsible to justice. The medium and long-term stability of Kosovo is also dependent on its economic development. The Council further emphasised its full support for the policy of Standards before Status and urged the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government to demonstrate their commitment to achieving concrete progress on its implementation. Progress on standards will be assessed periodically. It noted that the instruments developed in the context of the SAP would be used to help Kosovo's institutions in their efforts to implement the UN-endorsed Standards for Kosovo. The Council urged the PISG to make full use of the competencies already transferred to it to take greater responsibility for the reforms and their implementation. It called for a strengthening of the rule of law, in particular as regards effective implementation and enforcement of the legislation."

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: PREPARATION OF EU-LAC SUMMIT

The Council assessed final preparations for the EU-Latin America and Caribbean summit to be held in Guadalajara (Mexico) on 28 May.

The Council approved a text as the basis for a Political Declaration to be issued at the meeting and was briefed by the Commission on the trade aspects of the summit and of various regional sub-summits to be held in Guadalajara.

RUSSIA: PREPARATION OF EU-RUSSIA SUMMIT

The Council took note of preparations for the EU-Russia summit to be held in Moscow on 21 May and held a brief exchange of views.

Preparations for the summit have been ongoing within the framework of the EU-Russia Partnership and Co-operation Agreement, which was extended to the EU's new Member States by virtue of a Protocol signed in Luxembourg on 27 April.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council considered recent developments in the Middle East Peace Process. The Council welcomed the meeting of the international Quartet held in New York on 4 May and the statement issued after that meeting. The Council considered the situation in Gaza and the violence which has led to the deaths of numerous Palestinians and Israelis. The Council recalled that the Quartet had called for renewed efforts towards a comprehensive cease fire as a step towards dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure and renewed progress towards peace through the implementation of the Roadmap.

The Council condemned terror attacks on Israel and called on the Palestinian Authority to take immediate action against terrorist groups and individuals who plan and execute such attacks. The Council recalled that Israel's legitimate right to self-defence must be exercised within the parameters of international law. The Council condemned the large scale demolition of Palestinian houses in the Rafah district of Gaza as disproportionate and in conflict with international law and also with Israel's obligations under the Roadmap as recalled by the Quartet on 4 May. The Council called on the Israeli Government to cease such demolitions immediately.

The Council condemned any statements inciting violence. The Council also condemned the inhuman treatment of the remains of Israeli soldiers in Gaza."

IRAQ - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council condemned the assassination earlier today of the Chairman of the Iraqi Governing Council, Mr. Abdul Zahra Othman Mohammad also known as Izzedin Salim. The Council expressed concern that the current campaign of terrorist violence is leading to significant loss of life, particularly among civilians, and is impeding the path to political progress and economic reconstruction in Iraq.

The Council condemned all violence and terrorist attacks, including the kidnappings and brutal murder of hostages, in particular the savage execution of Mr Nicholas Berg. They deplored the taking of hostages in all circumstances and called on those responsible to release hostages immediately and unharmed and to desist from any further such activity.

The Council expressed its abhorrence at recent evidence of the mistreatment of prisoners in Iraqi prisons. The Council condemned any instances of abuse and degradation of prisoners in Iraq, which are contrary to international law, including the Geneva Conventions. The Council welcomed the commitment by the relevant governments to bring to justice any individuals responsible for such acts involving the abuse of Iraqi detainees, and their commitment to rectify any failure to adhere to international humanitarian law.

The EU continues to look forward to the transfer of sovereignty in Iraq to a transitional government at the end of June and to future national elections, with a vital and growing role for the UN endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. It fully supports the work carried out to this end by the UN Special Advisor, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi."

OTHER BUSINESS

Under "Other business", the Council discussed the three issues below and adopted the following conclusions:

– *An International Society Based on the Rule of Law - Council conclusions*

"The Council underlined the need to work towards an international society based on the rule of law, which is a key aspect of effective multilateralism and an important part of the follow-up and implementation of the European Security Strategy.

In particular, the Council recalled its strong support for the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Council will continue to work for the greatest possible participation in these two instruments.

In this context, the Council invited SG/HR Solana and the Commission, having considered any suggestions put forward by Member States, to submit proposals on concrete steps designed to promote the development of a rules based international order."

– *Sudan - Council conclusions*

"The Council expressed its serious concern over the latest developments in Darfur in the western part of Sudan. The recent reports by the acting High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Director of the World Food Program confirm the vast extent of the humanitarian and human rights disaster.

The Council calls upon all parties to respect fully the cease fire agreement and to abstain from all activities which could impede a peaceful solution of the conflict.

The Council calls upon the Sudanese Government to meet its obligations agreed upon in the cease fire agreement of 8 April 2004. In particular, the Government of Sudan should accept its responsibility for ensuring that the Janjaweed militias are disarmed and withdrawn immediately from Darfur.

The Council reiterates the importance of allowing unrestricted humanitarian access to the region.

The Council welcomes the plans of the African Union to establish a Commission to observe the cease-fire and to guarantee that it is respected by all parties. The Council calls upon the African Union to start operating the Commission as quickly as possible and confirms its readiness fully to support the Commission in its endeavours. A monitoring mechanism is also of utmost importance to improve humanitarian access to Sudan."

– *Burma/Myanmar*

"The Council expressed its concern and deep disappointment that the Burmese authorities, despite previous assurances, have not released Aung San Suu Kyi and have not allowed the National League for Democracy to re-open their offices. The Council regrets this failure by the Burmese authorities to create the conditions which would have allowed the National League for Democracy to take part in the National Convention, which commenced today. The Council regrets that this opportunity to begin a real process of national reconciliation and a peaceful transition to democracy has not been taken by the Burmese authorities. The European Union reiterates its commitment to democratic change in Burma as well as ongoing humanitarian assistance to the people of Burma/Myanmar and remains committed to working with its Asian partners to that end."

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

see "General Affairs" press release 9211/04
