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THE EUROPEAN UNION**



14172/05 (Presse 289)

PRESS RELEASE

2691st Council meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

External Relations

Brussels, 21-22 November 2005

Presidents **Mr Jack Straw**
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Mr Douglas Alexander
Minister of State for Europe

of the United Kingdom

* Some external relations items were adopted without debate at the 2690th meeting on General Affairs (14171/05 Presse 288).

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Main Results of the Council

*On the basis of the agreement on movement and access between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which it welcomed as a major breakthrough, the Council agreed that the EU should undertake the third party role proposed in the agreement and decided to launch, as a matter of urgency, an **ESDP mission to monitor the operations of the Rafah border crossing point**. The Council also endorsed the appointment of Major General Pietro Pistoiese as head of mission, approved a Concept of Operations for this mission and looked forward to the early deployment of an initial team of monitors to allow operations at Rafah to begin as soon as possible.*

*On the tenth anniversary of the Dayton/Paris peace agreement, the Council warmly welcomed progress made by **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and authorised the Commission to open negotiations on a stabilisation and association agreement at the earliest opportunity. The Council also:*

- agreed to establish a follow-on mission to the EU Police Mission in BiH (EUPM) with a mandate refocused on supporting the fight against organised crime in a more proactive way and implementation of police reform;*
- reviewed the EU military operation, Althea, on completion of its successful first year and approved high representative Javier Solana's recommendation that force levels should remain broadly unchanged for the coming year;*
- agreed to strengthen the EUSR's role in co-ordinating all its instruments in Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

*Ahead of the **WTO** ministerial conference in Hong Kong, the Council reconfirmed the objective of a comprehensive, balanced and ambitious trade agreement with an ambitious development perspective. It examined a package of "aid for trade" measures that could enable developing countries to gain from the agreement.*

*The Council also agreed on adjustments to the framework of the EU's **development policy** in order to take account of changes both within the EU and internationally over the last few years.*

*In its six-monthly review of developments in the **European security and defence policy**, in the presence of defence ministers, the Council noted progress in military capabilities, including on EU battlegroups and in the work of the European Defence Agency (EDA).*

In the margins of the Council:

- The EDA steering board agreed a voluntary **code of conduct for defence procurement** in order to encourage competition in the European defence equipment market, which will take effect from July 2006.*
- At a **civilian capabilities improvement conference**, ministers emphasised the growing role of civilian crisis-management in the EU's support for international peace and security and reiterated their commitment to the further development of civilian crisis-management.*

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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 abovementioned Council Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

Please see General Affairs press release: 14172/05 Presse 289.

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Member
Member

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Ms Meglena KUNEVA
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Minister for Defence
Minister for European Affairs
Deputy Minister for Economy

Romania:

Mr Teodor ATANASIU

Minister for Defence

ITEMS DEBATED**WESTERN BALKANS**– *Council conclusions*

Defence ministers discussed the EU military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR Althea.

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

1. On the tenth anniversary of the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement, which made a historic contribution to peace and stability in the region, the Council reviewed developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It applauded the progress that Bosnia and Herzegovina has made in the ten years since the end of the war.
2. The Council warmly welcomed the fact that the progress made by Bosnia and Herzegovina had now made it possible for the Commission to recommend the opening of negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The Council authorised the Commission to open negotiations at the earliest opportunity.
3. The opening of negotiations marks an historic moment in Bosnia and Herzegovina's development, as the first important step towards its establishment of contractual relations with the EU. It demonstrates the EU's determination fully to implement the Thessaloniki agenda, according to which the future of the Western Balkans lies in the EU. It underlines how far Bosnia and Herzegovina has come in the ten years since the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement, and marks a key moment in the region's transition from stabilisation towards the EU. The Council noted with satisfaction that all the countries in the region have made sufficient progress to have established, or to be negotiating, contractual relations with the EU.
4. The Council recalled that the speed with which Bosnia and Herzegovina moves closer to the EU will depend on how quickly it adopts and implements the necessary reforms for it to become a fully functioning and viable state and conforms to the Copenhagen criteria and requirements of the Stabilisation and Association process. The Council judged that the pace and conclusion of negotiations would depend in particular on Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress in developing its legislative framework and administrative capacity, the implementation of police reform in compliance with the Agreement on Police Restructuring of October 2005, the adoption and implementation of all necessary Public Broadcasting legislation, and full co-operation with the ICTY. The Council and Commission will jointly review Bosnia and Herzegovina's performance in these areas before negotiations conclude.

5. Recalling UN Security Council resolutions 1503 and 1534, the Council emphasised its expectation that Bosnia and Herzegovina will now take decisive action to ensure that all fugitive indictees, notably Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, are finally brought to justice. Full cooperation with the ICTY is essential to achieve lasting reconciliation in the country and the region, and to lift a fundamental obstacle to EU integration.
6. Bosnia and Herzegovina's journey towards the EU has now begun in earnest. The Council encouraged all parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina to build on the dynamic provided by the opening of negotiations to pursue with commitment the shared reform agenda, and thereby realise the country's full potential to the benefit of all its citizens. The Council reaffirmed the EU's continuing readiness to support Bosnia and Herzegovina in achieving its ambitions of moving closer to the EU.
7. The Council expressed its gratitude for the work of EU Special Representative (EUSR) and High Representative Lord Ashdown for the key role he has played in Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress. The Council agreed to strengthen the EUSR's role in co-ordinating all its instruments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and invited the EUSR to maintain an overview of the EU's efforts to strengthen the rule of law. These changes reflect the EU's changing relationship with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Council looked forward to an increasing role for the EUSR with the transition from the OHR to an EUSR-led mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
8. The Council reviewed the EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUPM), and commended its contribution to sustainable policing arrangements in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Council agreed to establish a follow-on mission with a mandate refocused on supporting the fight against organised crime in a more proactive way and implementation of police reform, working closely with other EU actors and local law enforcement agencies. In this context, the Council welcomed the recent decisions by Bosnia and Herzegovina on police restructuring, recalled the three key principles endorsed by the Commission which should guide that work, and urged the authorities to move forward rapidly on implementation.

9. The Council also reviewed the EU Military Operation, Althea, on completion of its successful first year. The Council welcomed the positive contribution of the operation to ensuring a safe and secure environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and confirmed that a continuing EU military presence remained at this stage essential to that end. It noted that the operation was a practical example of the strategic partnership with NATO in crisis management. It approved the SG/HR's recommendation that force levels should remain broadly unchanged for the coming year and that decisions on the future size and structure of EUFOR should be based on an assessment of conditions on the ground. The Council furthermore confirmed that EUFOR should retain its tasks for the coming six months. Sustained progress within the Stabilisation and Association process, and an assessment of the impact of elections in 2006 will allow Ministers then to consider options for the future presence of EUFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
10. The Council expressed its determination that all EU instruments should be employed in a coherent manner to enable Bosnia and Herzegovina to overcome the remaining legacy of the war and to make progress towards a brighter future as a modern democratic country in Europe. The Council called on the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities to play their full role in this process."

– ***Bosnia and Herzegovina - Stabilisation and association agreement***

The Council adopted a decision authorising the Commission to negotiate a stabilisation and association agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

– ***EU monitoring mission***

The Council also decided to extend until the end of 2006 the mandate of the EU monitoring mission in the Western Balkans and the mandate of the EUMM head of mission (*see "General Affairs" press release 14171/05*).

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY - *Council conclusions*

The Council, in the presence of defence ministers, discussed recent progress under ESDP and adopted the following conclusions:

"A. Military Capabilities Issues

Headline Goal 2010

The Council approved the Requirements Catalogue 05. This identifies the military capabilities and force requirements needed for the EU to fulfil the tasks stemming from the Treaty of the European Union (Art. 17.2) and the European Security Strategy and for the objectives set out in the Headline Goal 2010. The remaining shortfalls from the Helsinki Headline Goal are included in this catalogue. The strategic planning assumptions and illustrative scenarios used in the Catalogue form the basis for the further development of military requirements and subsequently of military capabilities. The work leading to the production of RC 05 has been validated by computer-assisted operational analysis. This catalogue represents an improved level of refinement over the previous Requirements Catalogue.

The Requirements Catalogue 05 represents an important step in the capability development process of the Headline Goal 2010. It identifies the agreed military requirements against which Member States will be invited to make their commitments using the Headline Goal Questionnaire. Those commitments, once collated and analysed, will allow the outstanding capability gaps, to be identified and addressed. The process of developing an information gathering instrument and an operational analysis tool for EU's use to meet the EU's specific needs continues.

The Requirements Catalogue 05 focuses on developing the qualitative approach to capability planning called for by the Headline Goal 2010. It puts renewed emphasis on rapidly deployable, highly interoperable armed forces that can be sustained as necessary over long periods on operations through rotation of forces and provision of the requisite enabling, support and logistic elements. The Catalogue takes account of the EU's ambition to be able to run concurrent operations thus sustaining several operations simultaneously at different levels of engagement.

The use of capability reference units, reflecting the military units or assets necessary to deliver the capabilities, will assist Member States in understanding the qualitative aspects of producing effective capabilities and will help them to frame their commitments to the Headline Goal 2010. The Illustrative Scenarios include some elements for a possible EU response to both man-made and natural disasters, and a realistic assessment of the terrorist threat, in view of which capabilities need to be developed for planning purposes.

Single Progress Report on Military Capabilities

The Council noted the Single Progress Report on military capabilities, drawn up in line with the EU Capability Development Mechanism, including the Capability Improvement Chart, which records progress made under the European Capability Action Plan (ECAP).

An overview of the chart will keep the public and the media informed. In this context, the Council recognized that there has been further progress in capability development since the Helsinki Progress Catalogue 03, but stressed the urgent need for further progress to be made in the development of military capabilities to remedy the current shortfalls and to address the largely qualitative limitations and constraints stemming from them.

The increasingly active role played by the European Defence Agency, working with the EU Military Committee assisted by the EU Military Staff and in close co-ordination with the Political and Security Committee, will give added impetus to this work.

Rapid Response

In the context of Rapid Response, the Council noted the successful outcome of the Battlegroups Co-ordination Conference on 8 November. It welcomed, in particular, the agreement by Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Cyprus to fill the outstanding gap in Member States' commitments in the second half of 2007. This ensures that from January 2007, the EU will have the full operational capability to undertake two battlegroup size operations of rapid response, including the ability to launch two such operations nearly simultaneously. The Council also welcomed the progress made by its subsidiary bodies in implementing the Battlegroups Concept, and particularly on aspects of strategic movement and transportation, logistics issues and health and medical support. The Council looks forward to further progress on the outstanding issues.

The Council noted that the EU-NATO Capability Group had continued to address issues of coherent and mutually reinforcing development of military capabilities in the EU and NATO where requirements overlap, including on EU Battlegroups-NATO Response Force. All EU Member States were informed of these issues.

European Defence Agency

The Council welcomed the report submitted by the Head of the Agency on its activities during the year and noted with satisfaction the establishment of systematic EDA processes for tackling capability shortfalls. The Council welcomed progress in encouraging competition in, and consolidating the European defence equipment market, and agreed that much of the Agency's work next year should focus on the flagship projects of 2005 and their follow-on work, with further priorities emerging organically during the operation of the aforementioned systematic processes.

The Council urged the Agency also to focus work in 2006 on the elaboration of a sound and viable financial framework for 2007-2009, to be approved by the Council unanimously, to take work forward in association with participating Member States, the EUMC and other competent Council bodies, and to continue to establish relations with third States, organisations and entities as provided for in Article 25 of the EDA Joint Action.

B. EU concept on comprehensive planning as part of civil-military co-ordination:

The Council noted that the PSC had noted the EU Concept for Comprehensive Planning as a practical framework for effective planning co-ordination between EU actors for EU crisis management in accordance with the agreed EU Crisis Management Procedures which it does not supersede. The concept is a living document which will be amended in the light of experience. It underlined the importance of adhering to the approach contained therein when planning for EU engagement in crisis management activities.

The Council noted with approval that work was already underway to provide a single comprehensive overview of EU engagement in the DRC.

The Council underlines the need for further operationalisation of the concept in the light of experience and lessons learnt from ongoing EU operations and actions. The Council welcomes the intention of the SG/HR and the Commission to join efforts also to provide a single comprehensive review of all EU activities in each of the following three areas: Aceh; Sudan/Darfur and Bosnia and Herzegovina during the course of the Austrian Presidency.

The Council also recognised the need for further work on the improvement of civil-military co-ordination, in particular concerning the management of operations.

C. EU Concept for ESDP support to Security Sector Reform (SSR):

The Council noted that the PSC had agreed on an EU Concept for ESDP support to Security Sector Reform (SSR), and recalled that support to SSR in partner countries is a core area for EU action as identified in the European Security Strategy (ESS). A concrete manifestation of this is the ongoing ESDP mission in support of SSR in the DRC (EUSEC RD Congo). The Council underlined that this concept will facilitate the planning and conduct of ESDP missions in the field.

The Council furthermore noted that EU support to SSR would be based on democratic norms, internationally accepted principles of human rights, the rule of law, respect for local ownership, and coherence with other areas of EU external action. The Council welcomed the Commission's intention to develop an EC Concept for SSR covering first pillar activities, and agreed that due consideration be given to joining these two strands within the framework of an overarching EU concept for SSR."

TRADE POLICY – DOHA DEVELOPMENT AGENDA - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council heard an update from the Commission on the state of the negotiations, ahead of the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference. It recalled its conclusions of October 18, 2005 and in particular the commitment by the Commission that the Council is fully informed of the developments in the negotiations, and that its action remained in line with the mandate it has received from the Council. In this context, the Council welcomes confirmation by the Commission that cotton will be dealt with in negotiations on the basis of the 30 July 2004 Framework Agreement.
2. The Council reconfirmed the objective of a comprehensive, balanced and ambitious agreement within and across all the main elements of the Doha Agenda. In light of its commitment to the needs of developing countries, and in particular least developed countries, the Council expressed its support for an ambitious development package at Hong Kong.
3. The Council confirmed that it would meet in special session throughout the Conference in order to provide the Commission with any further necessary guidance in the final stage of the negotiations and, in accordance with its practice, take a position on any draft WTO ministerial Declaration resulting from the negotiations, and take any necessary decisions in this connection."

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council recalls its detailed conclusions of 7 November. It reiterates to both parties the importance of maintaining forward momentum towards full implementation of the Roadmap.
2. The Council welcomes the Agreement on Movement and Access between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. These issues are fundamental to improving the humanitarian situation in Gaza and essential for promoting peaceful economic development. The Agreement signifies a major breakthrough. The priority now is to ensure that the commitments made in it are translated into reality. On the basis of the Agreement and the detailed planning undertaken by the EU with the parties, the Council agrees the EU should undertake the Third Party role proposed in the Agreement. It therefore decides to launch, as a matter of urgency, an ESDP mission to monitor the operations of the Rafah border crossing point and welcomes the provision of EU assistance to reinforce Palestinian border management capacities. The Council endorses the appointment of Major General Pietro Pistolese as Head of Mission, approves a Concept of Operations for the EU Mission and looks forward to the early deployment of an initial team of monitors to allow operations at Rafah to begin as soon as possible. The Council expects the team to be supplemented rapidly to enable the full operation of the EU mission and the full opening of the border crossing point. The Council noted that letters of invitation from the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority are expected, to which the Secretary General/High Representative will reply and ensure that the necessary arrangements are put in place. The Council also notes that the necessary capacity building, through training, equipment and technical assistance is being taken forward through the Community's assistance to the Palestinian Authority.
3. The Council welcomes the holding of multi-party elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council foreseen for 25 January 2006. The Council underlines that free and fair elections are an indispensable step in the process of consolidating democratic institutions.

4. The Council urges the Palestinian Authority to uphold all provisions of the electoral law. In this regard, the Council welcomes the Code of Conduct for Political Parties and encourages all parties to adhere to its terms. The Council notes that the independent Palestinian Central Election Commission should have sole responsibility for organising the elections. The Council urges Israel to co-operate fully with the Palestinian Authority in facilitating the preparation and conduct of the elections. The Council is especially concerned about freedom of movement for all candidates, election workers and voters, including in occupied East Jerusalem where it calls on Israel urgently to improve voting arrangements, including to facilitate effectively voter registration, access to polling stations and campaigning. The Council urges the Israelis and Palestinians to implement the recommendations made in the final report of the EU Election Observation Mission headed by Mr Rocard for the Palestinian Presidential election of January 2005.
5. The Council welcomes the Palestinian Authority's statements condemning violence and urging Palestinian groups who have engaged in terrorism to abandon this course and engage in the democratic process. The Council recalls the EU's position that all factions, including Hamas, should renounce violence, recognise Israel's right to exist, and disarm. Ultimately, 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.
6. The EU stands ready to assist the Palestinian Authority financially, technically and politically with the elections, and to send an observer mission which, in liaison with other members of the Quartet and international community, would assess whether the electoral process is conducted in accordance with international principles for genuine democratic elections. Members of an EU Election Observation Mission would have contact with all candidates, but this would be strictly limited to that necessary to observe the election satisfactorily and in a credible manner. EU observers would not engage in political discussions, unrelated to the election process, with candidates of any parties.
7. The Council once again underlined its grave concern at Israeli activities in and around East Jerusalem, including construction of the separation barrier, settlement building and house demolitions. These reduce the possibility of reaching a final status agreement on Jerusalem, threaten to make any solution based on the co-existence of two viable states physically impossible and are contrary to international law. In this light, the Council tasks relevant Council bodies to submit a detailed EU analysis on East Jerusalem to be adopted and made public at the next GAERC."

IRAQ

Over lunch, ministers discussed the situation in Iraq ahead of the elections planned for December as well as future steps in EU-Iraq relations, including in terms of a contractual relationship, possible extension/expansion of the rule of law mission EUJUST LEX and political dialogue.

IRAN

Over lunch, ministers had a discussion on the nuclear issue on the basis of an update by high representative Javier Solana and ahead of the International Atomic Energy Agency board of governors meeting starting on 24 November. Further coordination will take place between heads of mission in Vienna.

MIGRATION AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council reaffirms the importance for the EU to increase its efforts on migration internationally, working in partnership with third countries. The Council recognises the importance of taking a balanced and comprehensive approach to migration, and the need to enhance the benefits of migration for both third countries and the EU as well as migrants themselves, whilst ensuring co-ordinated action against illegal migration, trafficking in human beings and people smuggling. It further recognises the need to protect the human rights of migrants, particularly women. The Council reiterates the value of joining up work in the field of migration and external relations across interior affairs, foreign affairs and development.
2. The Council acknowledges that migration can be an essential part of the development agenda and development policy. In this regard, the Council welcomes the Commission's Communication of 1 September 2005, *Migration and Development: Some concrete orientations*, as a significant first step to enhancing the coherence of the external dimension of the EU's migration policy with the EU's development policy. The Council notes that the links between migration and development are complex, but that migration, when managed effectively, can have a substantial positive impact both for the host country and for the country of origin. The Council invites the Commission to play an active role in promoting an integrated and coherent approach to migration and development, including encouraging the involvement of migrants themselves.
3. As a first step, the Council will support Commission efforts to give concrete expression to the orientations contained in its Communication, in particular as regards migrant remittances, diaspora and 'brain drain' issues. The Council agrees on the importance of safer, easier and cheaper channels for remittances, and of enhancing their developmental impact, bearing in mind their private nature, and on the need to facilitate the role of diaspora as agents of development in their home countries, including through co-development actions, recognising the importance of early actions which promote integration in this regard.

4. The Council invites the Commission to establish appropriate arrangements for Member State experts on migration and on development to continue examining the Communication and share best practice. The Commission, in cooperation with Member States, should take measures to begin early implementation of the proposals contained in the Communication, and should regularly report back to the Council on progress made. In this context, the Council invites the Commission to further develop its ideas on temporary and circular migration and return for consideration by Member States, in particular in light of the discussion underway on the Green Paper on economic migration, and how to mitigate the negative impact of 'brain drain' on vulnerable sectors. Recognising the relevance of migration as an element of development for all actors involved, the Council looks forward to the action plan on economic migration to be presented by the Commission before the end of 2005. The Council also invites the Commission to make migration and development issues an integral part of the dialogue, partnership and cooperation with interested countries or their regional organisations, on the terms proposed in the Hague Programme. Multiannual cooperation programmes with partners (i.e. country and regional strategies and actions plans) at a bilateral and regional level should incorporate specific cooperation provisions on migration issues when appropriate.
5. The Council notes the need for an approach addressing regional and Pan-African dimensions of migration so as to facilitate dialogue and cooperation between countries of origin and transit and the EU. The Council agrees that work should cover a broad and balanced agenda, including a long-term strategy to address the causes of migration, including crisis or post-crisis situations. The Council believes this should be based on a case-by-case approach, with the EU working together with African states to identify gaps where the EU could assist their efforts on migration and asylum issues. The Council supports the inclusion of migration management measures in the comprehensive EU Strategy for Africa that the European Council is expected to approve in December 2005.
6. The Council urges the Commission to further develop dialogue and cooperation with key countries of origin and transit and relevant regional organisations in Africa, working closely with Member States. Such dialogue and cooperation could include issues such as building capacity for managing migration, improving channels for remittance flows, raising awareness about legal channels for migration, addressing 'brain drain' issues, enhancing refugee protection and access to durable solutions (including via Regional Protection Programmes), fighting illegal immigration, negotiating readmission agreements and ensuring the implementation of existing readmission obligations, combating trafficking in and smuggling of human beings, and ensuring return. The EU will promote such cooperation through its policies, reflecting the central importance of these issues for the EU and its Member States.

7. The Council welcomes the Commission's Communication on the *monitoring and evaluation mechanism of third countries in the field of the fight against illegal immigration* of 28 July 2005, which is a first step in implementing measures to combat illegal immigration, as requested by the European Councils of Seville and Thessaloniki. The Council agrees that it is important to provide a benchmark against which to measure the effectiveness of cooperation to combat illegal immigration, and to highlight the areas where further work is necessary. The Council invites the Commission to continue the monitoring and evaluation process, refining the mechanism and identifying relevant countries in close cooperation with Member States, and ensuring coherence with the EU Country and Regional Strategy Papers. The Council invites the Commission to present its next monitoring and evaluation report to the Council by December 2006.
8. The Council notes that the Cotonou Agreement, Stabilisation and Association Agreements, Neighbourhood Action Plans and Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements already provide for dialogue and cooperation on a broad range of migration-related issues. The Council supports the increased focus on migration within the framework of the Barcelona Process in order to promote a comprehensive approach to the efficient management of migration flows. In this regard the Council welcomes the reinforcement of cooperation on migration issues, including return management, between the EU and its neighbours.
9. The Council welcomes steps to increase engagement by the EU on migration issues with international and regional bodies. The Council notes the work done by the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) and its report published on 5 October 2005. The Council invites the Commission to make an analysis of the recommendations of GCIM, taking into consideration the EU's current efforts and policies on migration issues, to allow a fully-fledged contribution and participation of the EU in the follow up to GCIM's work. This will also serve as a contribution to the EU's input into the UN High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development in 2006. The Council recommends that the EU and Member States continue to contribute actively to the debate on the linkages between migration and other policy areas at the international level.
10. The Council notes that work is ongoing in the Commission and Council to meet the Hague Programme's objective for agreement of a strategy covering all external aspects of the Union's policy on freedom, security and justice by the end of 2005. This strategy should reflect the balanced approach to migration and incorporate the priorities identified by the Council in these Conclusions.
11. The Council emphasises the importance of reflecting adequately migration-related issues in the external relations policies as well as in the overall policy framework of the EU and its financial appropriations. The EU must also be able to achieve its objectives on migration with respect to third countries. In order to ensure that the EU will be able to live up to its political commitments, the importance of structured programmes on migration management should be duly taken into account, as a matter of priority, in the new financial instruments, with a clear form of management that allows funds to be accessed easily."

EU STRATEGY FOR AFRICA - Council conclusions

The Council held an exchange of views on preparation of an EU strategy for Africa to be endorsed by the European Council at its meeting on 15 and 16 December.

Concluding the debate, the president of the Council noted consensus on the following issues:

- the need for increased support for peace and security, including through substantial and long-term replenishment of the EU's African peace facility;
- the importance of good governance;
- the importance of trade and regional integration for growth;
- establishment of an EU-Africa infrastructure facility;
- strengthened assistance in the fight against AIDS;
- increased aid funding to health, services and education, including through the European Development Fund;
- the importance of African ownership in the context of the strategy;
- the importance of implementation and delivery and the need for continuing oversight by the European Council.

The president welcomed the intention of the incoming Austrian presidency to take work forward on the new strategy, in coordination with subsequent presidencies.

The Council adopted the following conclusions.

- "1. The Council notes the reports of the UN Millennium Project and the Commission for Africa; the outcome of the Millennium Review Summit including the commitment to address the special needs of Africa; and other recent international commitments to Africa, including those made at the G8 Gleneagles Summit and the African Partnership Forum, Paris High Level Forum and the African Union (AU) Sirte Summit.

2. The Council recalls its conclusions of May 2005 and the European Council conclusions of June 2005 calling for a long-term strategy for Africa. The Council reaffirms its commitment to existing EU agreements with Africa, notably the newly revised Cotonou Agreement, the EU-South Africa Trade and Development Cooperation Agreement, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the European Neighbourhood Policy and associated EC financial instruments.¹
3. The Council welcomes the Commission Communication on “An EU Strategy for Africa: Towards a Euro-African pact to accelerate Africa’s development”, and the paper by the Secretary General/High Representative as central contributions to the Strategy to be considered by the European Council in December 2005. It also welcomes the Report on a Development Strategy for Africa by the European Parliament. The Council agrees that it will focus attention on the areas set out below. The Council notes a number of other proposals not covered in these conclusions and looks forward to more information from and dialogue with the Commission, SG/HR and Parliament on them.

General Approach

4. The Council calls for a comprehensive strategy, based on shared values and agreed UN principles, encompassing development, security and human rights which; covers all African countries, taking into account country-specific needs as, inter alia, defined in national poverty reduction strategies; entails a prioritised approach aiming at the promotion of peace and security and sustainable economic and social development in Africa through the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Millennium Declaration; takes into account the European Security Strategy; is coherent between policy areas and regional approaches, taking account of development objectives cooperation in all EU policies.

¹ All potential new commitments of EC funds from 2007 are subject to ongoing discussions on the Financial Perspectives and without prejudice to financing and implementing decisions.

5. The Council further calls for a strategy which; enhances African ownership and mutual accountability including in the area of political and economic governance, working through African institutions and civil society, within the framework of international law, and in particular with full respect for human rights norms and in cooperation with human rights mechanisms; focuses strongly on the AU, NEPAD and effective sub-regional organisations; calls on each country to take primary responsibility for its own development and recognises the role of national policies and development strategies in the achievement of this; engages public opinion in Europe and Africa; involves leadership from and co-ordination within the EU, recognising the value of Member States' individual efforts, including the specific added value of those with recent experience of political and economic transition; strengthens political dialogue with Africa including an EU-Africa Summit meeting in Lisbon as soon as possible; emphasises Africa as a key partner for promoting effective multilateralism; and improves international coordination and aid effectiveness in support of Africa, involving the UN system and International Financial Institutions, other donors and rapidly developing economies.

In support of this we will:

Peace and Security

6. Broaden and invigorate the EU-AU political dialogue and co-operation in the field of peace and security, including crisis management, as well as on multilateral issues such as the UN Peace Building Commission, the Responsibility to Protect, and counter-terrorism. Structure this political dialogue through meetings at the EU or AU, involving EU HOMs. Enhance joint monitoring and reporting on these related subjects by EU HOMs for enhanced EU policy response. Reinforce co-operation with the UN, AU and sub-regional Organisations in the areas of conflict prevention and peace support, including issues of good governance and human rights. Develop the ESDP/Euromed dialogue in this context.
7. Exploit, develop and refine CFSP and ESDP instruments, policies and activities (including training and education of EU experts), building on the ESDP Africa Action Plan including, on a case-by-case basis as appropriate, deploying EU-led civilian, military or joint civilian/military missions (including operations involving EU Battlegroups) in support of UN or AU crisis management objectives. Seek a more comprehensive and coherent approach in order to achieve synergy between CFSP/ESDP, first pillar instruments, policies and activities, and the approaches of individual Member States, including in the area of reinforcing African peace support capabilities. ESDP is one of the key instruments that the EU has at its disposal and, as such, needs to be resourced accordingly.

8. In this context, provide and review support for the AU, sub-regional organisations and national governments in strengthening their early warning, mediation, analytical and operational capacity; and in undertaking peacekeeping and peace support operations, thus implementing the UN high-level meeting decision on a long-term (10 year) plan for African capacity building. In particular, this will include:
- agreement to secure long-term funding for the Africa Peace Facility; and ensure that its impact on the ground is maximised and sustained;
 - advisory, technical, planning, and logistical support and working with the AU and sub-regional organisations on a broad training agenda covering civilian and military aspects, including through support for training centres in Africa (taking into account ideas on “Europeanising” the RECAMP project);
 - support regional dialogue and reconciliation in the context of conflict resolution and peace-building;
 - support the development of the African Standby Force, initially through the AU-organised workshops; and
 - support Responsibility to Protect to ensure the protection of people against genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.
9. Further address the illicit flow of weapons, and their financing. In particular, in line with the EU-Strategy to combat illicit accumulation and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and ammunition, the EU will: encourage third States to associate themselves with the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports; support effective border management controls; develop mechanisms to exploit the information it has on illegal trafficking; consider the possibility of restrictive measures to discourage transfers; support the incorporation of minimum common standards of transfer controls into a strengthened UN Programme of Action; support regional initiatives to combat the illicit trade in SALW; and support the early establishment of an international treaty to establish common standards for the global trade in conventional arms.
10. Further address conflict resources, to help ensure that Africa's timber, water, diamonds, oil and other minerals foster peace and prosperity, not war and suffering; sustain and enhance our support for the Kimberley Process.

11. Enhance conflict prevention efforts, to help prevent African conflicts from starting, through the development of a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention, which seeks to integrate policies and action in the field of security, development and democratic governance, in order to address the root causes of conflict and instability (e.g. poverty, exclusion and discrimination of ethnic or religious minorities) in a timely and effective manner, and facilitate the transition from conflict to peace and development and to prevent countries from relapsing into violent conflict. Conflict prevention should also address those security threats that are likely to result in significant movements of people away from areas of conflict.
12. Improve its engagement in post conflict reconstruction, so wars do not restart after they end, in particular through support to an effective UN Peace Building Commission; and post-conflict reconstruction efforts through long term political and practical support. Increased attention will be given to a more coherent transition from short- to long-term strategies and support. Continue to support efforts for the reconstruction and consolidation of institutions in former failed States and contribute to preventing the collapse of States.
13. Support coherent regional and national strategies for Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) and further implementation, in partnership with the AU, sub-regional organisations and national governments, of Security Sector Reform (SSR), building on the EU's experience in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Given the increasing involvement of the EU in SSR activities, develop plans for integrated military and civilian SSR teams. Support UNHCR's 4R strategy (Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction). Support the implementation of the EU's Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) policies.
14. Encourage the application of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, through ensuring that a gender perspective informs planning, implementing and evaluating the impact of conflict, the needs of different actors in conflict and the level and nature of participation in decision-making in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, including peace processes and negotiations, taking account of the EU action plan on the implementation of UNSCR 1325.
15. Building on past and ongoing activities, address the short, medium and long term impact of armed conflict on children in an effective and comprehensive manner, making use of the variety of tools at the EU's disposal, in accordance with UNSCRs 1460 and 1539 on Children and Armed Conflict and the EU Guidelines on Children in Armed Conflict.
16. Support African efforts to fight terrorism through the provision of technical assistance and enhanced information sharing; and assist African countries in meeting their international counter-terrorism obligations while calling on them actively to co-operate in international counter-terrorism efforts, in particular with the UN. Enhance the EU-Africa and intra-African cooperation in the fights against organised crime, all forms of exploitative and forced labour and drugs.

17. Address the issue of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. Support African partners' full compliance with, and national implementation of, existing international obligations; promote their accession to, and implementation of, other relevant international instruments and exports control regimes; and co-operate in their development of effective systems of national export controls.

Human Rights

18. Reinforce the EU's support for the promotion and protection of human rights, inter alia, as a basic requisite for the establishment of democracy, good governance and the rule of law by: strengthening EU-African cooperation within the human rights system, including addressing urgent issues in international human rights fora, encouraging adherence to UN human rights instruments and compliance with their mechanisms, supporting the development and reinforcement of national judicial systems and national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights in cooperation with existing national, regional and UN mechanisms, supporting civil society organisations and engaging in dialogue with them on human rights; monitoring in line with inter alia: EU guidelines on: human rights; the use of the death penalty; torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; and human rights defenders.

Governance

19. Reinforce the EU's support to strengthening the capacity of the African Union, sub-regional organisations and countries.
20. Promote governance through support of African efforts and in co-ordination with other donor efforts, including backing for the AU and NEPAD governance agenda and for the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), through (i) support for the APRM structures to facilitate country level 'self assessments' and learning across countries (ii) development of an EU Governance Initiative to support the implementation of reforms triggered by the APRM process and (iii) continue to implement a governance facility under the future European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument.
21. Support the building of effective and credible central institutions, including the police and judiciary systems and national parliaments, and launch a dialogue with national governments and local authorities on support to the decentralisation processes.
22. Support the rule of law and the combating of impunity, inter alia, through the International Criminal Court.

23. Encourage the use of the Public Financial Management (PFM) Performance Measurement Framework and the implementation of the Strengthened Approach to supporting PFM reforms; continue poverty reduction budget support where appropriate; and increase the accountability and responsiveness of governments, parliaments, local authorities and public bodies, including support to civil society.
24. Ensure early ratification of the UN Convention against Corruption and full implementation of relevant OECD agreements, especially concerning the combating of bribery of foreign public officials in international business transactions; and provide political and financial support to African governments, regional bodies and civil society organisations tackling corruption.
25. Help enhance governance in the exploitation of natural resources. This will include the further development of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and support for countries and companies implementing it; and implementation of the EU Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT).
26. Encourage the further development of transparent and participatory democracy, including through support to national Parliaments and a more coherent approach to political dialogue and Election Observation Missions.

Economic Growth and Regional Integration and Trade

27. Support national and regional strategies for growth and poverty reduction that enhance macro-economic stability, encourage private investment and promote economic growth for all, ensuring the direct participation of the poor; continue to help mitigate the effects of exogenous shocks, notably sharp swings in commodity prices, through the implementation of EU programmes such as the EU Action Plan on Agricultural Commodities and the EU-Africa Cotton Partnership.
28. Support African initiatives to improve the investment climate and business opportunities that help create wealth and employment for the poor; promote investment in Africa, including measures related to the rural economy and to provide a market for agricultural products; promote the OECD guidelines for Multinational Enterprises in Africa, as well as other relevant instruments and initiatives that aim to encourage corporate social responsibility and support for public-private partnerships and Small and medium-sized enterprises through local institutions.
29. Facilitate a better-connected Africa, through the development of an EU–Africa Infrastructure Partnership in coordination with other donors, complementary to the new Infrastructure Consortium for Africa. The Partnership should encompass existing EU and African initiatives in the fields of water and sanitation, energy and ICT, including addressing the digital divide and ensure people’s access to services.

30. Press for an ambitious and balanced outcome to the Doha Development Agenda which combines progressive trade liberalisation with stronger multilateral rules, ensure special differential treatment, in particular for LDCs, and address the issue of preference erosion, in ways that maximise development gains and Africa's integration into the multilateral trading system and thus contribute to the MDGs.
31. Support the negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) as development instruments that will improve access to European markets, help ACP countries integrate into world markets, foster their regional integration, help establish transparent and predictable rules to spur investment and growth and liberalise services that are key to their development interest and support the progressive building-up of the EUROMED Free Trade Area (between North African countries and the EU and between North African countries themselves) in the framework of the Barcelona Process. Promote the participation of Ultra Periferic Regions (UPRs) in the process of regional integration in Africa, as proposed in the Commission's Communication of May 2004.
32. Provide financial support for building trade capacity and implementing supply side reforms linked to EPAs and WTO implementation; Support countries facing adjustment needs arising from EPA implementation or regional and multilateral liberalisation efforts through adequately tailored EU instruments. Establish and implement an improved monitoring mechanism against development objectives within the EPA process.
33. Commit to an ambitious negotiating outcome of the EPAs with a perspective of substantial improvements in access for ACP products to EU markets; and in respect of liberalisation steps to be undertaken by African countries, support the objectives of asymmetry and flexibility, particularly as regards transition periods and safeguard measures, in line with development needs and WTO requirements; assist African countries to comply with rules and standards and reduce non-tariff barriers to trade; and aim to simplify rules of origin and render them more development-friendly.
34. Continue to implement and help African LDCs take advantage of the Everything But Arms initiative; encourage, in the context of the Doha negotiations or more generally, other developed and major developing countries to follow this example.

Environment

35. Encourage sustainable development by integrating environmental priorities into development strategies, in order to achieve internationally agreed goals and targets on environmental sustainability; pay special attention to integrated water resources management (including through implementation of the Johannesburg plan of action, the EU Water Initiative and the ACP-EC Water Facility and support for the African network of Basin Organizations); energy for sustainable development and the ACP-EC Energy Facility; forestry management and deforestation; fisheries protection and development; biodiversity conservation; sound management of chemicals; and disaster preparedness.
36. Counter the effects of climate change, including through assisting African efforts to implement the relevant UN agreements in accordance with the EU Action Plan on Climate Change and Development. Combat desertification and land degradation by promoting the use of national action plans, including local capacity building, under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

Development Assistance

37. Monitor, through existing mechanisms, implementation of the aid volume targets agreed by the Council in May 2005, including specific commitments for Africa, and agreed debt relief initiatives.
38. Take into account evolving EU development policies.
39. Ensure early implementation for Africa of the recommendations of the EU Working Group on Harmonisation and the Paris commitments; make EU action in Africa more harmonised and transparent based on ownership and alignment; focus EU aid on results; support the principles of complementarity and mutual accountability; accelerate the simplification of rules and procedures, setting up common EU arrangements where feasible and appropriate.
40. Secure more effective and predictable EU financial assistance to Africa, including reaching agreement on a successor to the 9th EDF as soon as possible, on the basis of the commitments made at the Joint ACP-EC Council of February 2005 and ensure adequate resources for North Africa, in future EC budgets.
41. Ensure EU assistance takes into account, inter alia, the specific needs of fragile States and those emerging from conflict.

42. Note the plans of some Member States, in the context of the Millennium Review Summit, to develop and implement innovative financing mechanisms, including implementing a contribution on airline tickets to enable financing development projects, in particular in the health sector.

Investing in People

43. Strengthen national education systems including: contributing to the Education Fast Track Initiative to help ensure that all girls as well as boys have access to free and compulsory quality primary education; and support for education as a lifelong learning process.
44. Promote development of Euro-Africa networks of universities and centres of excellence, in tandem with AU higher education and science and technology flagship programmes, including support for the Nyerere programme for students across Africa.
45. Strengthen health systems in Africa, including addressing human resource shortages in health, to help ensure all Africans have access to essential health care which is free or affordable for poor people.
46. Continue contributions to the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM), thereby maintaining the EU's share of global contributions and its leadership role on communicable diseases; continue to support the distribution of insecticide treated bed-nets and associated commodities; encourage research and development of vaccines and increase immunisation coverage, development of microbicides and drugs for HIV/AIDS, malaria, TB and other communicable diseases by 2010; and support countries to enhance sexual and reproductive health and rights, including delivery of universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment and care services by 2010, as set out in the Cairo Agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development. Consider HIV/AIDS as an issue which should be mainstreamed in all policy areas.
47. Strengthen country-led safety nets for chronically food insecure populations that rely on humanitarian programmes and support effective food security policies. In particular, seek to engage fragile States and those emerging from conflict. In this context, a multilateral approach under UN leadership should be explored.
48. Ensure mainstreaming of gender issues across all policies towards Africa, recognising the important role women play in economic growth and development, the relevance of gender equality in education, and the disproportionate effects on women of conflict (see paragraph 14 above), poverty-related diseases and lack of maternal health care.
49. Promote the rights of children and other vulnerable groups in society, including disabled persons, in line with relevant UN agreements.

50. Reinforce EU disaster response capability through ECHO, as well as through continued bilateral channels and in accordance with the central UN coordination role; and consider EU support for the UN Humanitarian Central Emergency Revolving Fund.

Migration

51. Agree approaches on migration to optimise the benefits of migration for all partners in a spirit of joint partnership, including:
- engaging in a balanced dialogue on the broad range of migration issues, in partnership with the African Union, regional organisations and African states;
 - building capacity for better management of migration, including providing technical and financial assistance;
 - addressing the root causes of migration, such as poverty and insecurity;
 - fostering the linkages with development and co-development to promote safer, easier and cheaper remittance transfers also in an effort to enhance their development impact, facilitate the role of diasporas as agents of development in their home countries, recognising the importance of early actions to promote integration in this regard, explore options for temporary or circular migration, including within Africa and mitigate the impact of skills losses in vulnerable sectors;
 - and combating smuggling and trafficking in human beings and illegal immigration, including implementing readmission obligations, as provided for, inter alia, in Article 13 of the Cotonou Agreement.

And agree to strengthen protection for displaced persons and refugees and their access to durable solutions, in accordance with the relevant international instruments.

The EU will promote cooperation in this field through its policies, reflecting the central importance of these issues for the EU and its Member States.

Follow up

52. Our commitment to supporting sustainable development in Africa is long-term and comprehensive. The Council looks forward to the adoption of an integrated EU Strategy for Africa at the December European Council, taking into account the contributions of the Commission and the Secretary General/High Representative. The Council will build on existing mechanisms to monitor and review progress on the EU Strategy, in consultation with African partners. The EU-Africa dialogue needs to be broadened and invigorated. In this context, the organisation of a second EU-Africa Summit should remain a priority for the EU. The Commission and the SG/HR are invited to report on progress within their fields of competence, including assessment against agreed indicators of progress consistent with international action on Africa, and welcoming the contribution of EU Heads of Mission in this area. They should also feed into annual EU reporting mechanisms and the orientation debate. The Council instructs its Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER) to maintain a regular overview of progress overall."

REVISION OF THE EU'S DEVELOPMENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Council reached consensus, in agreement with the Commission, on a draft declaration, entitled "*the European consensus on development*", aimed at adjusting the framework of the EU's development policy (14820/05). It expressed the hope that the European Parliament would be able to associate itself with this joint statement.

The framework for the EU's development policy is provided by both the EC treaty and the current "*development policy statement*", which determine the main thrust of policy and lay down the basic principles underlying the Community's approach to development cooperation. The revised statement is intended to take account of changes both within the EU and internationally since it was adopted in November 2000.

The new joint statement is structured in two parts, which set out:

- in the first part, "*the EU vision of development*", the objectives, principles and methods by which the EU at Community and member state levels implement their development policies;
- in the second, "*the European Community's development policy*", guidance for implementation at Community level.

EFFECTIVENESS OF EU EXTERNAL ACTION - *Council conclusions*

The Council, and the representatives of the governments of the member states meeting within the Council, held their sixth annual debate on improving the effectiveness of EU external action, on the basis of a discussion paper from the presidency. They adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council recognises that transaction costs on partner countries of receiving aid are too high, and will increase as new aid comes on stream, unless donors focus on the quality of the aid and the nature of partnerships.
2. The Council affirms that the EU, in its capacity as a global leader in providing development aid with the ambition to contribute positively to eliminating poverty and meeting the MDGs, must be fully equipped to deliver rapidly increasing aid volumes in ways that support best practice and strengthens partner government processes and systems.
3. In this context, the Council reaffirms its intention to take concrete action on the commitments made in the GAERC in November 2004, at the DAC High Level Forum on Aid effectiveness in Paris in March 2005 and again at the Millennium Review Summit in September 2005 by increasing partner country ownership of the development process and aligning support with partners' development strategies, institutions and procedures; by promoting more harmonised, transparent and collective EU actions; by focusing on results and mutual accountability; and by promoting more decentralised aid delivery.

Promoting more effective delivery of European aid

4. The Council recognises the need to monitor progress against recent commitments to improve the effectiveness of European aid. Therefore, the Council calls upon the Commission and Member States to work for a system for monitoring progress against the Paris Declaration indicators by the DAC, to be in place in early 2006. The Council should also monitor the additional EU commitments made at the November 2004 GAERC and in Paris, and should review progress in the context of the annual Monterrey review exercise starting in April 2006 and in the yearly Annual Report on Community external action;

5. The Council supports the need for Member States and the Commission to increase their participation in joint multi-annual programming based on partner countries' development strategies and preferably led by the partner country, as a key element to promote more effective aid. This should progressively apply to all European official development assistance as soon as national contexts permit. Joint multi-annual programming will pave the way for coordination of policies, harmonisation of procedures and opportunities and decisions relating to complementarity. In this process the EU should respect partner countries' ownership and leadership for multi-annual programming with donor-wide engagement. Alignment with the partner countries' multi-annual programming cycles (Poverty Reduction Strategies and budget processes) will increase opportunities to synchronise the Member States' and the Commission's multi-annual programming processes. In that regard, it is recommended that Member States and the Commission ensure flexibility in their own procedures. The Council invites the Commission to present a proposal for an updated Common Framework for Country Strategy Papers by February 2006, and for Council to discuss this in spring 2006. The Council looks forward to the next generation of Community country strategies, which will progressively be based on the revised Common Framework for Country Strategy Papers;
6. The Council wishes to promote mutually supporting actions between EU donors as well as other donors at field level to avoid duplication, ensure more focused aid, reduce transaction costs and maximise impact. Arrangements of delegated cooperation and lead donors may be explored in this context. The establishment of EU roadmaps in support of national harmonisation plans will, where feasible and appropriate, support such actions;
7. The Council notes the need for better quality, outcome and impact-based indicators linked to meeting the MDGs. In this context, the Council welcomes the Commission's assessment framework based on 10 indicators related to the MDGs, and encourages the use of this framework in the programming of forthcoming Community country strategies.

Promoting more effective allocation of resources

8. Since the Community is the world's third largest provider of official development assistance, the Council invites the Commission to do its utmost to help partners meet the MDGs, including by increasing its support to low income countries, as set out in the Development Policy Statement 2005¹;

¹ See 14820/05 DEVGEN 229 RELEX 678 ACP 155

9. The Council reconfirms the importance of using objective and transparent resource allocation criteria based on needs and performance within global geographic and thematic allocations of Community external assistance. The particular difficulties faced by countries in crisis or in conflict will be borne in mind, alongside the specificity of the different programmes. The Council invites the Commission to share with Member States their criteria for allocating resources to countries as soon as possible in 2006 and stresses the importance of applying these criteria from the start of the next Financial Perspective;
10. The Council recognises partner countries' need for more long-term, predictable development funding; and therefore encourages the Commission to bring forward detailed proposals for a new long-term, flexible and harmonised budget support mechanism, targeted on the best-performing poor countries, by April 2006;
11. The Council recognises the need to improve predictability of aid and calls upon both Member States and the Commission to make further efforts to this effect. The Council invites Member States and the Commission to publish, where possible, indicative projections of aid by type (according to DAC criteria) and country over the next three years, and possibly also over a longer term.

Promoting more effective management of Community aid

12. The Council welcomes the reforms made in the field of Community external action since 2000, and considers that the steps taken have had a positive impact on the effectiveness of Community aid. Likewise, the Council welcomes the assessment of the review exercise of all Community strategies and agrees that the programming framework, and mechanisms set up to develop strategies, have improved the focus and coherence of Community aid. The Council invites the Commission to inform Council of the further impact of its reform efforts on an annual basis;
13. The Council stresses the importance of a country-based approach to development where decisions are taken close to the beneficiaries and in partnership with stakeholders. The Council therefore welcomes the devolution of aid management to Commission delegations and considers this a crucial step in making Community aid more effective and responsive. The Council invites the Commission to further strengthen its delegations in terms of staffing and skills mix without jeopardising the skills base at headquarters, and also to explore ways to further increase their financial authority, thereby reinforcing their capacity to interact with partner governments and donors;
14. The Council notes that Community aid is still hampered by complex rules and procedures. Therefore, the Council invites the Commission to further rationalise and streamline its systems and rules, including its Financial Regulations, with a view to facilitating its role in co-funding, joint donor actions and national harmonisation efforts, to further improving the quality of its actions, and to helping it to deliver aid in line with best practice, including through budget support, in the context of the next Financial Perspective;

15. The Council welcomes the steady improvement in financial performance since 2000, and invites the Commission to set targets to eliminate as far as possible its old RAL (*Reste à Liquider*) and inactive commitments, and to further increase the speed of delivery across all regions.
16. The Council notes the importance of concentrating Community aid in partner countries so as to maximise its impact and promote the most effective use of resources. The Council invites the Commission to adhere closely to this principle when programming the next generation of country strategy programmes.
17. The Council welcomes the Commission's commitment to further deepen its reform efforts with a focus on impact, quality and more devolution, building on the achievements of the 2000 reform programme, and aiming to equip the Commission with the right tools to deliver more effective and higher quality aid. The Council invites the Commission to keep it informed of progress in deepening its reform efforts.

Strengthening the EU's role in Middle-Income Countries

18. The Council acknowledges the need to provide the most effective mix of support to partners based on country-specific circumstances. The Council therefore invites the Commission and the European Investment Bank to develop proposals for a more coherent deployment of loans and Community external grant resources, including an increased role for lending where the economic and political conditions are appropriate; and suitable measures to encourage the emergence of projects for loan funding, and to present such ideas to Council in 2006;
19. The Council asks the Commission to articulate clearly its purposes and role in using official development assistance in middle-income countries, distinguishing between upper middle-income and lower middle-income countries, including: its particular advantages in different contexts; the range of its objectives, policies and approaches and their impact, including on poverty and inequality; the way in which it is implementing the Paris commitments on aid effectiveness; the criteria by which it allocates its resources and the proportion of its aid that is focused on reducing poverty and inequality."

AID FOR TRADE

The Council held a policy debate on a package of "*aid for trade*" measures presented by the presidency with the aim of strengthening the export capacity of developing countries and trade-related assistance provided by the EU and the international community (14617/05).

The initiative is intended to help developing countries gain from measures to be submitted to the World Trade Organisation's ministerial conference in Hong Kong from 13 to 18 December under the WTO's Doha Development Agenda.

The Council welcomed the announcement by the Commission of its intention to increase aid to trade to EUR 1 billion annually, and supported the adoption of an ambitious strategy to increase resources for trade development.

It requested the permanent representatives committee to continue work with a view to enabling the Council to adopt conclusions on aid for trade at its meeting on 12 December.

OTHER BUSINESS

– ***ASEM: Asia-Europe meeting process***

The Council briefly addressed the question of the 2006 ASEM meetings to be held in Europe. The issue will be discussed it in greater depth at working level.

– ***Bulgarian nurses in Libya***

The Bulgarian minister briefed colleagues on the latest developments regarding the medical personnel held in Libya.

– ***Earthquake in Pakistan***

The Council took note of concerns expressed by the Danish minister regarding the provision of aid to the victims of the recent earthquake in Pakistan. It held a brief exchange of views.

– ***Ethiopia and Eritrea***

The Netherlands minister briefed colleagues on the recent escalation in tension between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL

The following events were held in the margins of the Council:

- Civilian capabilities improvement conference (*see declaration 14713/05*);
- European Defence Agency steering board (*see EDA SB press release dated 21 November*);
- Defence ministers' troika with Turkey, Iceland, Croatia and Norway;
- EU-European Economic Area council (*see conclusions 14739/05*);
- Northern Dimension ministerial meeting (*see press release 14701/05*);
- EU-Jordan association council;
- EU-Morocco association council.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

Please see General Affairs press release: 14172/05 Presse 289.
