



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



5565/06 (Presse 22)

PRESS RELEASE

2706th Council Meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

External Relations

Brussels, 30-31 January 2006

President **Ms Ursula PLASSNIK**
Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria

* Some external relations items were adopted without debate at the 2705th meeting on General Affairs (5562/06).

P R E S S

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Main Results of the Council

*Following the 25 January **elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)**, the Council stressed the need for the continuous commitment of all parties to the Palestinian constitutional process, underlined that violence and terror were incompatible with democratic processes and urged Hamas and all other factions to renounce violence, to recognise Israel's right to exist, and to disarm.*

The Council indicated that it expected the newly elected PLC to support the formation of a government committed to a peaceful and negotiated solution of the conflict with Israel based on existing agreements and the Roadmap as well as on the rule of law, reform and sound fiscal management. On this basis, the EU stands ready to continue to support Palestinian economic development and democratic state-building.

*Regarding **Iran's** nuclear programme, the Council expressed the EU's grave concern at the removal of seals at several nuclear installations and Iran's decision to resume enrichment-related activities. In the light of recent Iranian actions which run counter to IAEA resolutions, EU member states will closely coordinate and work for the forthcoming extraordinary meeting of the IAEA board of governors in Vienna to involve the UN Security Council to reinforce the authority of the IAEA.*

*The Council called on the authorities of **Belarus** to ensure that the 19 March presidential elections are conducted in a free and fair manner in accordance with international standards. Welcoming the invitation by Belarus to the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission, it urged the responsible Belarusian authorities to allow the mission to operate unimpeded; to ensure that all eligible candidates are allowed to register for the elections, to campaign freely and to enjoy equal access to state-controlled media; and to allow domestic and international media to report freely on the electoral process.*

*The Council appointed Christian Schwarz-Schilling as EU special representative for **Bosnia and Herzegovina**. It commended the departing EU special representative and high representative, Lord Paddy Ashdown, for his extraordinary commitment to and achievements for Bosnia and its European future.*

A number of decisions concerning external relations are reflected in the Council's General Affairs press release (5562/06).

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OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

Please see General Affairs press release: 5562/06 Presse 21.

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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.

PARTICIPANTS

The Governments of the Member States and the European Commission were represented as follows:

Belgium:

Mr Karel DE GUCHT
Mr Didier DONFUT

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary for European Affairs, attached to the
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Vladimír MÜLLER

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs with responsibility for
EU issues

Denmark:

Mr Per Stig MØLLER

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

Mr Frank-Walter STEINMEIER

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Greece:

Mr Petros MOLYVIATIS
Mr Ioannis VALINAKIS

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr Miguel Ángel MORATINOS CUYAUBÉ

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

France:

Mr Philippe DOUSTE-BLAZY
Ms Catherine COLONNA

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister with responsibility for European Affairs

Ireland:

Mr Dermot AHERN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Italy:

Mr Gianfranco FINI

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

Mr George IACOVOU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Artis PABRIKS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Antanas VALIONIS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg:

Mr Jean ASSELBORN

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister with responsibility for
Foreign Affairs and Immigration

Mr Nicolas SCHMIT

Minister with responsibility for Foreign Affairs and
Immigration

Hungary:

Mr Ferenc SOMOGYI

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr Michael FRENDO

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Netherlands:

Mr Bernard BOT
Mr Atzo NICOLAÏ

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for European Affairs

Austria:

Ms Ursula PLASSNIK
Mr Hans WINKLER

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Poland:

Mr Stefan MELLER

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Portugal:

Mr Fernando DE OLIVEIRA NEVES

State Secretary for European Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Dimitrij RUPEL

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Eduard KUKAN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Erkki TUOMIOJA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ms Mari KIVINIEMI

Minister for Foreign Trade and Development

Sweden:

Ms Laila FREIVALDS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

United Kingdom:

Mr Jack STRAW

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Mr Douglas ALEXANDER

Minister of State for Europe

Commission:

Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER

Member

Mr Peter MANDELSON

Member

Mr Olli REHN

Member

General Secretariat of the Council:

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

The Governments of the Acceding States were represented as follows:

Bulgaria:

Mr Ivailo KALFIN

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Romania:

Mr Anton NICULESCU

State Secretary for Public Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

ITEMS DEBATED

WORLD TRADE NEGOTIATIONS – DOHA DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The Council was briefed by the Commission on latest developments in the current round of trade negotiations under the World Trade Organisation's Doha Development Agenda, following the sixth WTO ministerial conference in Hong Kong on 13-18 December, and took note of the Commission's assessment of the prospects for the negotiations.

The ministerial conference agreed to complete the Doha round by the end of 2006.

WESTERN BALKANS - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"Western Balkans

1. The Council welcomed the Commission's Communication "The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: Consolidating stability, raising prosperity" as a good basis for further work in preparing discussions at the Gymnich and at the informal EU-Western Balkans Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Salzburg in March 2006. The EU remains committed to help the Western Balkans countries on their road to the EU through practical measures to make the European perspective more tangible.

Serbia and Montenegro/Kosovo

2. The Council expressed its sadness at the death of the President of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova. Kosovo has lost a historic leader who devoted his life to promoting peacefully the rights of his people. In this time of important decisions for the future of Kosovo the Council called on all Kosovar parties and leaders to work together so that further progress is achieved in implementing standards and that Kosovo participates constructively in the Status process.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

3. The Council appointed Christian Schwarz-Schilling as EU Special Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Council commended the departing EU Special Representative and High Representative Lord Paddy Ashdown for his extraordinary commitment to and achievements for Bosnia and Herzegovina and its European future.
4. The Council welcomed the discussions on constitutional reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina, assisted in recent months by the international community. It called on all parties in BiH to continue this process in a dynamic fashion and stressed the need for local ownership. In this context, the Council encouraged Bosnia and Herzegovina's political leaders to ensure that the country's central institutions function more effectively in order to meet European standards.

Serbia and Montenegro/Montenegro

5. The Council recognised that the Constitutional Charter of Serbia and Montenegro allows the Republics after a three-year period to hold a referendum on independence. It also stressed that such a process has to conform to internationally recognised democratic standards, a critical element for stability and for the pace of progress towards the EU. In this respect, the Council supported the recommendations of the Venice Commission's Opinion issued last December.
6. The Council expressed its full support for the mission of Ambassador Miroslav Lajcak, the Personal Representative of SG/HR Javier Solana. It called on all political forces in Montenegro to cooperate with each other and the Personal Representative to agree on the conduct and implementation of the proposed referendum and to refrain from unilateral actions that might reduce the chances of success of the dialogue. Ensuring a broad consensus on the modalities of the referendum in Montenegro, and conducting it in line with international standards, will provide the process and the outcome with the necessary legitimacy and sustainability.

Cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

7. The Council expressed concern at the comments of the ICTY President and Chief Prosecutor in their presentations to the UN Security Council on 15 December 2005. The Council underlined again the importance of full cooperation with the ICTY by both Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. While welcoming the parties declared commitment to continue the implementation of the reform agenda, the Council recalled that the pace and conclusion of negotiations on Stabilisation and Association Agreements with these countries will depend *inter alia* on full cooperation with the ICTY and that it would jointly review with the Commission the performance in this area and other key areas before negotiations conclude. The Council called on both countries to take decisive action to ensure that remaining fugitive indictees, notably Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, are finally brought to justice in The Hague. Full cooperation with the ICTY is essential to achieve lasting reconciliation in the region and lift a fundamental obstacle on the way towards the European Union."

LATIN AMERICA

The Council took note of the presentation by the Commission of a communication entitled "*A stronger partnership between the European Union and Latin America*".

The Council will examine the communication at its meeting on 27 and 28 February.

The Commission proposes, in the run-up to the EU-Latin America/Caribbean summit to be held in Vienna on 11 and 12 May, that the EU renew the strategy that has enabled it to develop its relations with Latin America since 1995.

AFGHANISTAN - Council conclusions

On the eve of the London conference on Afghanistan, the Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The EU welcomes the international conference to be held in London on 31 January and 1 February 2006 as an important opportunity to generate momentum for reforms and reconstruction in Afghanistan, and to define follow-on to the process launched at Bonn in December 2001.
2. The Council particularly welcomes the launch of the Afghanistan Compact on the basis of partnership between the Afghan Government, with its sovereign responsibilities, and the international community, with a central and impartial coordinating role for the United Nations. This is in line with the EU's long-standing support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of an Afghanistan accountable to its citizens, able to assume its rightful place in the international community and to contribute to regional stability. The EU fully supports all three pillars of activity identified by the Compact (security; governance, rule of law and human rights; sustainable economic and social development), as well as the cross-cutting priority of counter-narcotics.
3. The EU remains committed to long-term support for the Government and people of Afghanistan through Afghan-led reconstruction efforts and will further enhance the effectiveness of its action. The EU-Afghanistan Joint Declaration of 16 November (14519/05) is a clear expression of that. EU assistance will mainly aim at fostering the establishment of a democratic, accountable and sustainable Afghan State capable of exercising its sovereignty and protecting the rights of its citizens.
4. The EU will build on its already extensive engagement in the political, security, development and humanitarian fields, and will ensure that counter-narcotics is mainstreamed throughout its activities in each of these areas. The challenges of the phase following the successful completion of the Bonn process call for the deepening and consolidation of progress achieved so far.
5. Counter-narcotics will remain a cross-cutting priority in overall EU policy toward Afghanistan. The EU will sustain and increase its efforts in support of the priorities highlighted in the Government of Afghanistan's National Drugs Control Strategy. Specifically, it will support the development of strong and effective counter-narcotics institutions, law enforcement and criminal justice agencies, including through the provision of mentors and trainers, and will provide financial support for efforts by the Government of Afghanistan to strengthen and diversify opportunities for legal rural livelihoods.

6. Another cross-cutting priority will be the promotion of human rights, paying special attention to women's and children's rights.
7. The EU will pay special attention to governance and administrative reform, including at provincial level, and to promoting human rights and the rule of law. It will increase financial support for justice sector reform at both central and provincial level. The EU will directly support PRT civilian activities led by EU Member States, which will include activities focused on rule of law and good governance at provincial level.
8. The EU will increase support for security sector reform, including by providing training and increased financial support for the creation of an effective and sustainable Afghan National Police and by making available further contributions to support the disarmament and reintegration of former combatants.
9. The EU will continue to support Afghanistan's sustainable economic and social development, and its efforts to achieve its Millennium Development Goals. The EU will provide assistance within the framework of the Afghan National Development Strategy and the Afghanistan Compact. Programmes and projects will be coordinated with the Afghan Government in order to ensure that they are consistent with its priorities and that donor activities are rationalised. The EU will, where appropriate, provide assistance directly through the budget and will continue to encourage the Afghan Government to reach greater financial self-sustainability.
10. Establishment of regular political dialogue between the EU and Afghanistan is an important step in developing EU-Afghanistan cooperation. The Council welcomes the formal ministerial Troika meeting with Foreign Minister Dr Abdullah to be held on 31 January 2006, in the margins of the London conference.
11. The EU looks forward to continuing to cooperate closely with the rest of the international community, drawing on the Afghanistan Compact and the EU-Afghanistan Joint Declaration as frameworks for cooperation. The EU supports the continued central role of the UN, including in the monitoring and coordination of donor activity by the international community. The EU will coordinate closely its actions and programmes with the UN, its agencies, and other relevant international organisations."

BELARUS - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. Recalling its previous conclusions on Belarus, in particular those of 7 November 2005, the Council reiterates its deep concern at the deteriorating situation in respect of democracy, human rights and political freedoms in Belarus. The Council once again calls on the Belarusian authorities to ensure that the Presidential elections on 19 March are conducted in a free and fair manner in accordance with international standards and in line with Belarus' commitments in the OSCE and the UN.
2. In this context, the Council welcomes the invitation by the Belarusian authorities to the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission and notes the willingness of Member States to make timely and adequate contribution to such a mission. In that respect, the Council urges the responsible Belarusian authorities:
 - to allow the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission to operate unimpeded in Belarus;
 - to ensure that all eligible candidates are allowed to register for the elections, to campaign freely and to enjoy equal access to state-controlled media;
 - to allow domestic and international media to report freely on the electoral process;
 - to fully implement recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR report on the 17 October 2004 parliamentary elections in time for the Presidential elections of 2006.
3. The Council is continuing to closely monitor the situation in Belarus. The Council restates its readiness to take further appropriate restrictive measures against the responsible individuals in the event of failure to uphold international standards in the electoral process, in particular those of the OSCE.
4. The Council reiterates its support for initiatives aimed at supporting democratisation and civil society in Belarus and encourages the intensification and facilitation of contacts between the people of the EU and Belarus. The Council recalls that the EU wishes to have closer and better relations with Belarus - including within the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the European Neighbourhood Policy - once the Belarusian authorities clearly demonstrate their willingness to respect democratic values, human rights and the rule of law."

IRAN - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The European Union is gravely concerned at the removal of seals at several nuclear installations, including at Natanz, and Iran's decision to resume enrichment related activities. The EU calls on Iran to reinstate the seals and to re-establish full, sustained and verifiable suspension of all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities as called for repeatedly in IAEA Board of Governors' resolutions as an essential confidence-building measure.

In line with the requests made in IAEA Board of Governors' resolutions the EU emphasises the need for Iran to refrain from all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities until international confidence is restored.

This is not a dispute between Iran and Europe, but between Iran and the international community. The EU does not question the right of Iran to the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in conformity with its obligations under the NPT, a right which we have consistently reaffirmed. The dispute is about Iran's failure to build the necessary confidence as to the exclusively peaceful nature of its programme. This confidence has further eroded as a result of the unilateral steps Iran has taken contrary to its commitments. The Council noted with concern that the Director-General has reported that the IAEA is not yet in a position to clarify some important issues after two and a half years of intensive inspections and investigation and that Iran's full transparency is indispensable and overdue.

In the light of recent Iranian actions, which run counter to IAEA resolutions and which are a rejection of the efforts to explore whether a basis can be agreed for resuming negotiations, the European Union Member States will closely coordinate and work for the forthcoming extraordinary meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors in Vienna to involve the UN Security Council to reinforce the authority of the IAEA in line with these conclusions. This is a necessary and appropriate step, fully in line with the IAEA Board of Governors' resolution of September 2005, which found that Iran had been non-compliant with its Safeguards Agreement and that the history of concealment of Iran's nuclear activities and the nature of these activities had given rise to questions within the competence of the Security Council.

The EU believes that the issue can still be solved by negotiations; but this will require a cooperative and transparent approach on the part of the Iranian government with the IAEA, and the return to full suspension. The EU remains committed to a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue in which the IAEA should play a central role. Involvement of the Security Council does not end the IAEA's responsibilities; on the contrary it strengthens them.

The EU will remain fully engaged in this issue. The EU Member States will closely coordinate their action both in the framework of the IAEA in Vienna and of the United Nations in New York, in coordination also with international partners.

The Council recalls in this context its support for the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, including their means of delivery.

The Council recalls that in its conclusions of 7 November 2005 it repeated that the evolution of its long-term relationship with Iran would depend on action by Iran to address effectively all the EU's areas of concern. The Council regards Iran's resumption of enrichment-related activities as a negative development that will impact on the overall relationship which we will review in the light of actions taken by Iran. The Council reiterates that it is up to Iran to determine, through its actions, whether its long-term relationship with the EU will improve or deteriorate."

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council welcomed the holding on 25 January of elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and congratulated President Abbas and the Palestinian people on an electoral process that was free and fair. The Council fully endorsed the statement made by the Quartet issued on 26 January.

The Council stressed the need for the continuous commitment of all parties to the Palestinian constitutional process and emphasised the central role of President Mahmoud Abbas in ensuring stability in this transitional period. It reiterated its full support for President Abbas' determination to pursue a peaceful solution of the conflict with Israel.

The Council underlined that violence and terror are incompatible with democratic processes and urged Hamas and all other factions to renounce violence, to recognise Israel's right to exist, and to disarm.

The Council expects the newly elected PLC to support the formation of a government committed to a peaceful and negotiated solution of the conflict with Israel based on existing agreements and the Roadmap as well as to the rule of law, reform and sound fiscal management. On this basis the European Union stands ready to continue to support Palestinian economic development and democratic state building.

The Council reaffirmed its strong support for a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict leading to the emergence of an independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

The Council expects Israel to adhere to its obligations under the Roadmap.

The Council reaffirmed the central role of the Quartet in promoting progress on the peace process and looked forward to the meeting of Quartet Principals in London."

IRAQ - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council welcomes the announcement by the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq of the provisional results of Iraq's 15 December 2005 elections with a broad scope of participation and high turnout.

The Council pays tribute to the courage of the Iraqi people, who voted in impressive numbers despite difficult and challenging circumstances. It congratulates the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) together with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq on the efficient running of the elections. The European Union was pleased to support these elections and welcomes that the IECI has taken note of suggestions for improvement in view of future elections.

The election results, coming against the background of large participation from all of Iraq's communities, reflect a very serious commitment by the Iraqi people to democracy and the establishment of democratic institutions. They provide a clear working agenda for the new government to overcome remaining divisions within Iraq.

The Council encourages the swift formation of a new constitutionally elected and truly representative government taking into account the need for inclusiveness and a broad participation by all relevant political groupings dedicated to reaching their goals by peaceful and democratic means. Such an inclusive government will represent another important step towards reconciliation and consensus in Iraq, thereby continuing the building of a secure, stable, unified and prosperous Iraq.

The European Union reaffirms its readiness to support the Iraqi people in broadening further the consensus on the future of their country, including through a thorough and transparent review of the Constitution. The EU calls upon the international community to provide support for the new Iraqi Government and the Council of Representatives. To this end the Council strongly supports efforts by the Arab League to convene a conference of national accord in early 2006. The Council remains committed to supporting Iraq's political transition and its economic and social reconstruction. It recalls the support it is already bringing through EU's Integrated Rule of Law Mission (EUJUST LEX), as well as through support to the political process and to improving the delivery of basic services. It also remains committed to holding a regular political dialogue with Iraq in accordance with the Joint EU-Iraq Declaration and to entering into contractual relations with Iraq."

ASEM - ASIA-EUROPE MEETING PROCESS

Over lunch, Ministers discussed the forthcoming meetings to be held in Europe in 2006 under the ASEM (Asia-Europe meeting) process.

OTHER BUSINESS– *Nepal*

The Netherlands delegation expressed concern over recent developments in Nepal and in particular over human rights violations.

In a statement on 27 January, the EU expressed its deep concern over the situation in the country, where political forces seem to be moving towards an ever more severe confrontation and polarisation, thus increasing the risk of deepening political crisis.

– *Côte d'Ivoire*

The Netherlands delegation raised the issue of the deteriorating situation in Côte d'Ivoire and stressed the importance of the international community's engagement.

– *Middle East: Reactions to cartoons in a Danish newspaper*

The Danish and Swedish delegations raised the issue of reactions in the Middle East following the publication last September of cartoons in an independent Danish newspaper.

The Council adopted the following statement in this respect:

"The Council strongly rejects any threats by militant factions against EU citizens."

The presidency also underlined the importance of both freedom of expression, as a fundamental freedom, and respect for religious beliefs.

IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL

A meeting of the EU-Bulgaria association council was held in the margins of the Council (*see press release 1903/06*).

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

Please see General Affairs press release: 5562/06 Presse 21.
