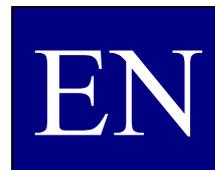




**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



7426/08 (Presse 68)

PRESS RELEASE

2859th Council meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Brussels, 10 March 2008

President **Mr Dimitrij Rupel,**
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovenia

* Some external relations items were adopted without debate at the 2858th meeting on General Affairs (7425/08).

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Main results of the Council

*The Council discussed the state of play in the **WTO** Doha Development Agenda (DDA) negotiations, ahead of possible WTO ministerial discussions in Geneva. It reconfirmed the importance of achieving a comprehensive, ambitious and balanced final outcome within and across all of the areas of the DDA, in agriculture and non-agricultural market access and also including services, rules, trade facilitation and geographical indications. It also reconfirmed its commitment to a successful result, meeting the main objectives of the EU and the needs and interests of developing countries, in particular LDCs. To that end, it urged WTO partners to make meaningful contributions to the negotiations, commensurate with their level of development. For emerging economies, in industrial tariffs in particular, this requires granting additional market access. In this context, the Council expressed its support for the Commission in seeking the further improvements of the Chairs' negotiating texts needed to move the negotiations forward, alongside further progress on the Single Undertaking as a whole, including services and geographical indications.*

*The Council expressed continued concern about the humanitarian, political and economic situation in **Zimbabwe** and conditions on the ground, which may endanger the holding of free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections on 29 March. It noted that no formal invitation has been made to the European Union to send an official EU observation mission. It urged the government of Zimbabwe to ensure that the forthcoming elections meet international norms and standards.*

In the context of its general affairs session (see press release 7425/08), the Council

- *took note of the fact that the parliamentary and provincial elections in **Pakistan** on 18 February were competitive, despite significant problems with the election framework and environment. The elections were an important step in the democratic development of Pakistan. The EU Council reaffirmed the EU's commitment to supporting Pakistan in building a prosperous and stable society based on the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights.*
- *reaffirmed the EU's commitment to long-term support for the people and government of **Afghanistan** and supported the approach taken towards an international conference to be held in Paris in June to review progress in implementation of the Afghanistan Compact and reaffirm the international community's commitment to the country. The Council also welcomed the progress of the EU police mission in Afghanistan towards full deployment at central, regional and provincial level by the end of March and expressed its readiness to consider further enhancement of EU engagement, particularly in the field of police and wider rule of law.*

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OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

none

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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.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- 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 Council's 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 Minister for Foreign Affairs

Bulgaria:

Mr Ivailo KALFIN Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Alexandr VONDRA Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for European Affairs

Mr Tomáš POJAR First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs with responsibility for bilateral relations

Denmark:

Mr Per Stig MØLLER Minister for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

Mr Frank-Walter STEINMEIER Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Günter GLOSER Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr Peter HINTZE Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Technology

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ireland:

Mr Dermot AHERN Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr John McGUINNESS Minister of State with special responsibility for Trade and Commerce at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Greece:

Ms Dora BAKOYANNI Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Ioannis VALINAKIS State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr. Miguel Ángel MORATINOS Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
Mr Albert NAVARRO GONZÁLEZ State Secretary for the European Union

France:

Mr Bernard KOUCHNER Minister for Foreign and European Affairs
Mr Jean-Pierre JOUYET Minister of State for European Affairs

Italy:

Mr Famiano CRUCIANELLI State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

Mr Markos KYPRIANOU Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Normans PENKE State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Petras VAITIEKŪNAS Minister for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg:

Mr Jean ASSELBORN Deputy Prime Minister, Minister with responsibility for Foreign Affairs and Immigration

Hungary:

Ms Kinga GÖNCZ Minister for Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr Richard CACHIA CARUANA Permanent Representative

Netherlands:

Mr Maxime VERHAGEN Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Frans TIMMERMANS Minister for European Affairs

Austria:

Ms Ursula PLASSNIK

Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Poland:

Ms Grażyna BERNATOWICZ

Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Portugal:

Mr Luís AMADO

Mr Manuel LOBO ANTUNES

Ministro de Estado, Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary for European Affairs, attached to the
Minister for Foreign Affairs**Romania:**

Mr Adrian CIOROIANU

Mr Stefan IMRE

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Secretary of State for Trade**Slovenia:**

Mr Dimitrij RUPEL

Mr Matjaž ŠINKOVEC

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary**Slovakia:**

Mr Ján KUBIŠ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Ilkka KANERVA

Mr Paavo VÄYRYNEN

Ms Astrid THORS

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Foreign Trade and Development
Minister for Migration and European Affairs**Sweden:**

Mr Carl BILDT

Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖM

Ms Ewa BJÖRLING

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for European Affairs
Minister for Trade**United Kingdom:**

Mr David MILIBAND

Mr Jim MURPHY

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Minister of State for Europe**Commission:**

Mr Olli REHN

Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER

Member

Member

General Secretariat of the Council:

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

ITEMS DEBATED**WORLD TRADE NEGOTIATIONS – DOHA DEVELOPMENT AGENDA - Council conclusions**

Ministers held a working dinner on 9 March to discuss the latest developments in negotiations under the World Trade Organisation's Doha Development Agenda (DDA), as well as the theme of energy and trade.

The Council was briefed by commissioner Peter Mandelson on the DDA negotiations, ahead of possible WTO ministerial discussions in Geneva in April, and held an exchange of views.

It adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council heard an update from the Commission on the state of play in the WTO DDA negotiations, ahead of possible WTO Ministerial discussions in Geneva. Recalling all its earlier conclusions on this matter, the Council reiterated the crucial importance that the EU has attached to the DDA negotiations since their inception in 2001, and recalled the substantial contribution that the EU has made throughout the negotiations.
2. The Council reconfirmed the importance of achieving a comprehensive, ambitious and balanced final outcome within and across all of the areas of the DDA, in agriculture and non-agricultural market access and also including services, rules, trade facilitation and geographical indications, in conformity with the negotiating directives as defined in its previous conclusions. It also reconfirmed its commitment to a successful result, meeting the main objectives of the EU and the needs and interests of developing countries, in particular LDC's. To that end, the Council urged WTO partners to make meaningful contributions to the negotiations, commensurate with their level of development. For emerging economies, in industrial tariffs in particular, this requires granting additional market access.
3. In this context, the Council expressed its support for the Commission in seeking the further improvements of the Chairs' negotiating texts needed to move the negotiations forward, alongside further progress on the Single Undertaking as a whole, including services and geographical indications.
4. The Council agreed that a special session of the Council, as well as meetings of the Article 133 Committee, would be convened in the margins of the possible WTO DDA ministerial negotiations in Geneva. The date will be determined by the Presidency in the light of developments."

WESTERN BALKANS - Council conclusions

At lunch, ministers discussed the situation in the Western Balkans, particularly developments regarding Kosovo since their last meeting on 18 February when they noted the adoption on 17 February by the Kosovo Assembly of a resolution declaring Kosovo to be independent.

The Council also adopted the following conclusions:

"BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Council noted the outcome of the last session of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) Steering Board that took place in Brussels on 26-27 February 2008. The Council welcomed the PIC Steering Board's unanimous decision that the Office of the High Representative (OHR) will remain in place and continue to carry out its mandate under the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement until necessary objectives and conditions as set out in the PIC Steering Board Declaration are met. The Council shared the PIC Steering Board's concern over challenges to the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement. The Council confirmed its agreement to the goals of transition and ownership and reiterated its readiness to continue its engagement.

The Council noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has made progress with regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). It urged BiH authorities to make further efforts to ensure swift and effective fulfilment of all the four conditions necessary for signing the SAA. Furthermore, the Council noted that important underlying problems remain and called upon all parties in BiH to work together in order to overcome them as soon as possible.

The Council reiterated its full support to BiH's European perspective. Recalling its conclusions of 28 January 2008, the Council welcomed the intention of the European Commission to launch soon a visa dialogue with BiH.

STABILITY PACT/REGIONAL CO-OPERATION COUNCIL

The Council underlined the importance of regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe and welcomed the successful outcome of the joint meeting of the final Regional Table of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the inaugural meeting of the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC) on 27 February 2008 in Sofia, which marked the formal handover from the Stability Pact to the RCC. The establishment of the RCC is proof of substantial progress in regional co-operation on democratic, economic and security issues.

The Stability Pact has generated broad acceptance of the view that regional co-operation is necessary and has created shared understanding and strategies for common issues, in particular in the fields of energy, trade, refugee return and border control. The RCC will build on these achievements as a more regionally owned, streamlined and effective regional co-operation framework. The RCC can play its full role only if the entire region is committed to regional co-operation and if all parts of the region take an active stand in its activities. Regional co-operation is important for the European perspective of the Western Balkans.

The EU is committed to support the RCC, co-operating in the context of the SEECP (South-East European Co-operation Process), and looks forward to the RCC providing the framework for increased ownership and leadership by South Eastern European countries, while representing a forum for the continued involvement of the donor community.

The Council thanked Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact Dr Erhard Busek and expressed its support for the Secretary General of the RCC Mr Hido Bišćević and the future activities of the RCC."

GEORGIA

The Council had an exchange of views on the situation in Georgia, in particular regarding the upcoming Georgian parliamentary elections in May 2008.

ZIMBABWE - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council remains very concerned about the humanitarian, political and economic situation in Zimbabwe and conditions on the ground, which may endanger the holding of free and fair Parliamentary and Presidential elections. The Council notes that no formal invitation has been made to the European Union to send an official EU Observation Mission.
2. The Council therefore urges the government of Zimbabwe to ensure that the forthcoming elections meet international norms and standards including the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) principles and guidelines concerning elections, of which Zimbabwe is a signatory.
3. The Council recognises the efforts of President Mbeki, on behalf of SADC, to improve relations between the Government of Zimbabwe and the opposition and the progress achieved so far. The Council hopes this process will continue in order to settle fundamental issues and that the changes agreed thereby will be implemented in such a way as to allow for the holding of free and fair elections. The Council calls on the SADC countries to remain actively engaged.
4. The Council recalls its continued commitment to the people of Zimbabwe and emphasises that the EU remains the most important donor to Zimbabwe. The Council reiterates that its targeted measures (consisting of a visa ban, an assets freeze and an arms embargo) are exclusively aimed at those leading figures responsible for Zimbabwe's crisis of governance and human rights' abuses and do not penalise the Zimbabwean population.
5. The EU will continue to closely monitor the situation in Zimbabwe and support efforts towards ensuring democracy, stability, economic recovery and respect for human rights. The Council also wishes to confirm its willingness to continue to make use of any opportunity provided to carry on the dialogue with the Government of Zimbabwe and, as soon as conditions allow, to begin working towards the resumption of full cooperation."

IRAN

At lunch, ministers had an exchange of views on Iran following the adoption on 3 March of a third resolution by the UN Security Council regarding the nuclear issue. It was noted that the adoption of Security Council resolution 1803 was a clear signal of the international community's unity. At the same time, the representatives of China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK and the United States also expressed on 3 March their continued commitment to an early negotiated solution and reaffirmed their commitment to a dual-track approach.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

At lunch, ministers discussed the situation regarding the Middle East peace process as well as Lebanon, notably on the basis of a briefing by High Representative Javier Solana on his recent visit to the region from 2 to 5 March.

EU-US SUMMIT - STATE OF PREPARATIONS

At lunch, ministers were briefed on the EU ministerial troika dinner with US Secretary of State Rice held on 6 March.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

See press release 7425/08.
