



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



6496/08 (Presse 41)

PRESS RELEASE

2851st Council meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Brussels, 18 February 2008

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

* Some external relations items were adopted without debate at the 2850th meeting on General Affairs (6946/08).

P R E S S

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Main results of the Council

*The Council discussed **Kosovo** following the adoption on 17 February by the Kosovo Assembly of a resolution declaring Kosovo independent. It took note of the fact that the resolution commits Kosovo to the principles of democracy and equality of all its citizens, the protection of the Serb and other minorities, the protection of the cultural and religious heritage and international supervision. It noted that member states will decide, in accordance with national practice and international law, on their relations with Kosovo. It reiterated the EU's readiness to play a leading role in strengthening stability in the region. Reaffirming its commitment to fully and effectively support the European perspective for the Western Balkans, it asked the Commission to use Community instruments to promote economic and political development and to propose to the broader region concrete measures in order to advance in that direction.*

*The Council firmly condemned the recent attacks of armed groups against the government of **Chad** and called on all Chadian parties to unconditionally renounce the use of force and engage in a constructive dialogue aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the current situation. Noting the decision of the Chadian authorities to declare a state of emergency, it indicated that it will closely monitor the respect of civil rights and liberties and the fundamental principles of the rule of law in this context. It expressed its concern over the arrest of members of the unarmed political opposition. The Council also noted that recent events underscored the need for the deployment of EUFOR Tchad/RCA and MINURCAT to contribute to the required security in Eastern Chad.*

*The Council expressed its concern at the continuing violence, uncertainty and instability in **Kenya**. It called on the Kenyan parties to engage constructively in a genuine spirit of compromise in order to find a legitimate political settlement. It strongly supported the efforts by the Panel of Eminent African Personalities, led by Kofi Annan, and stood ready to provide any further assistance it can to this process.*

*The Council noted the announcement by the **Burma/Myanmar** authorities on 9 February of a referendum on a new Constitution in May 2008 and multi-party elections in 2010. It underlined that only a process that involves the full participation of the opposition and ethnic groups will lead to national reconciliation and stability. To this end, it called for the release of all political detainees, including Aung San Suu Kyi, the start of a substantial time-bound dialogue with all political stakeholders, and full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.*

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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 Karel SCHWARZENBERG Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark:

Mr Per Stig MØLLER Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Michael ZILMER-JOHN State Secretary for Foreign and Security Policy, EU Policy and EU Coordination

Germany:

Mr Frank-Walter STEINMEIER Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Günter GLOSER Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ireland:

Mr Dermot AHERN Minister for Foreign Affairs

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 Massimo D'ALEMA Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Prime Minister

Cyprus:

Ms Erato KOZAKOU-MARCOULLIS Minister for Foreign Affairs

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Mr Māris RIEKSTIŅŠ Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Petras VAITIEKŪNAS Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Žygimantas PAVILIONIS Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for EU 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:

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:Mr Radosław SIKORSKI
Mr Mikołaj DOWGIELEWICZMinister for Foreign Affairs
Secretary of the Committee for European Integration,
Secretary of State of the Office of the Committee for
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Mr Manuel LOBO ANTUNESMinistro de Estado, Minister for Foreign Affairs
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Minister for Migration and European Affairs**Sweden:**Mr Carl BILDT
Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖMMinister for Foreign Affairs
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Mr David MILIBAND

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Commission:Mr Olli REHN
Mr Louis MICHEL
Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER
Mr Peter MANDELSONMember
Member
Member
Member**General Secretariat of the Council:**

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

ITEMS DEBATED

WESTERN BALKANS - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council condemned recent acts of violence in Belgrade, Mitrovica and other places, in particular against foreign diplomatic missions and urged respective authorities to ensure security and safety of the EU citizens and their property. The Council called on Belgrade and Pristina to respect previous commitments to refrain from any activities or statements which might endanger the security situation."

– ***KOSOVO - Council conclusions***

The Council discussed developments in Kosovo and adopted the following conclusions:

"On 17 February 2008 the Kosovo Assembly adopted a resolution which declares Kosovo to be independent. The Council takes note that the resolution commits Kosovo to the principles of democracy and equality of all its citizens, the protection of the Serb and other minorities, the protection of the cultural and religious heritage and international supervision. The Council welcomes the continued presence of the international community based on UN Security Council resolution 1244.

The Council notes that Member States will decide, in accordance with national practice and international law, on their relations with Kosovo.

The Council recalls the European Union's longstanding commitment to the stability of the Western Balkans region. The Council reiterates the European Union's readiness to play a leading role in strengthening stability in the region, and recalls the European Union's commitments contained in the conclusions of the European Council of 14 December 2007, as well as the agreement to Joint Actions establishing an ESDP Police and Rule of Law mission and appointing an EU Special Representative in Kosovo. The European Union will continue to cooperate with the UN, KFOR, OSCE and other international actors in order to preserve stability in the region.

The Council reaffirms its commitment to fully and effectively support the European perspective for the Western Balkans. It asks the Commission to use community instruments to promote economic and political development and to propose to the broader region concrete measures in order to advance in that direction.

The Council reiterates the EU's adherence to the principles of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act, *inter alia* the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity and all UN Security Council resolutions. It underlines its conviction that in view of the conflict of the 1990s and the extended period of international administration under SCR 1244, Kosovo constitutes a *sui generis* case which does not call into question these principles and resolutions."

EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY - Council conclusions

The Council had an exchange of views on the basis of a presentation by the Commission and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council recalls its Conclusions of 18/19 June 2007 on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It reiterates the key principles of partnership and joint ownership, as well as differentiation and tailor-made assistance. The ENP is a single, inclusive, balanced and coherent policy framework. It remains distinct from the question of EU membership and does not prejudge any possible future developments of partner countries' relationship with the EU.
2. In light of the Council's invitation in June 2007 for successive Presidencies and the Commission to take the work forward on strengthening the ENP, the Council welcomes the Commission Communication on "A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy" and takes note of the progress made so far. The Communication provides a useful basis for further reflection by the Council on making the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) more effective and more attractive to our ENP partners, with the aim of making full use of the ENP's potential.
3. Deepened economic integration must remain an essential building block of our relations with our neighbours. The scope of existing free trade agreements with ENP partners should be deepened where possible. Deep and comprehensive free trade agreements (DFTAs) should be considered with ENP partners having acceded to the WTO and following a thorough economic analysis. In this context, the EU welcomes the start of negotiations on a DFTA with Ukraine.

As for the possible start of negotiations on DFTAs with Georgia and Armenia, the Council will decide on the basis of the Commission's recommendations that will include, inter alia, the results of the ongoing feasibility studies. The Council emphasises the importance of concluding agreements with the ENP partner countries of the Mediterranean region on the liberalisation of services, trade in agricultural products and the right of establishment. In this context, the Council welcomes the creation of the Euromediterranean Senior Officials Group as a way to stimulate the economic integration process and with a view to establishing a Euromediterranean Free Trade Area by 2010. The Council encourages Mediterranean countries to accelerate the negotiation and entry into force of FTAs with one another so as to strengthen south-south regional integration.

4. The Council underlines the importance of people-to-people contacts and the role of civil society in the context of ENP, in particular in the fields of education, science, culture and business, for promoting shared principles, enhancing EU visibility in the ENP region and strengthening local civil societies. In order to increase mobility, legitimate short-term travel by nationals from ENP countries to the EU should be facilitated, on the basis of a country-by-country approach, by a more flexible use of existing possibilities to simplify visa procedures, as well as inter alia through the consideration of Common Application Centres and the rapid conclusion by Member States of bilateral agreements relating to local border traffic, particularly with those partner countries bordering the Schengen area. The implementation of the 2003 Council Conclusions concerning flexibility in issuing visas to participants in Euro-Mediterranean meetings should be extended to include all ENP partners when participating in ENP-related meetings.
5. The ENP has already proven to be an important tool for promoting reform in the ENP countries. The EU reiterates its willingness and determination to continue to assist its neighbours in sectoral reform and modernisation, in line with the ENP Action Plans, as an important step towards prosperity and stability in our neighbourhood, based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The EU, through Community assistance and support, combined and coordinated with bilateral assistance of EU Member States, stands ready to work with ENP partners to help implement ENP Action Plans, in particular in the areas of energy security, climate change, environment, transport, research, information society, education and training, employment and social development, health, maritime policy, agriculture, fisheries and regional policy.
6. In the area of financial cooperation with ENP partners, considerable progress has already been achieved. The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument has led to an increase in financial assistance to ENP partners. The Governance Facility has been established, encouraging partner countries in carrying out the reforms agreed in their ENP Action Plans. The Council looks forward to the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF) starting to make more financial resources available for ENP partners this year, once the modalities for the NIF have been finalised. The NIF will provide considerable additional funding in ENP countries, including for infrastructure projects such as in the energy, environment and transport sectors, while ensuring coordination among partners and avoiding any overlapping with existing facilities.
7. The Council recognises the importance of cooperation with ENP partner countries and international organisations and other actors towards the prevention and resolution of conflicts, including through confidence-building measures, in the EU's neighbourhood, while taking into account agreed negotiating processes. The Council and Commission will continue to seek ways of using the relevant policy tools in a concerted fashion, so as to strengthen regional stability and security.

8. The Council considers that regional cooperation represents an important tool for deepening the EU's relations with its neighbours and their interaction with each other, as well as for encouraging joint ownership of ENP. The Council also recalls the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2007 regarding the invitation to upcoming Presidencies to develop both the eastern and southern dimensions of the ENP in bilateral and multilateral formats on the basis of the relevant Commission communications and proposals.
9. The Council notes that the established regional organisations and processes can play an important role and underlines that the strengthening of contacts with them would benefit the whole neighbourhood area. In this context, the Council welcomes the Joint Statement made at the Black Sea Synergy Ministerial meeting held on 14 February 2008 in Kiev and looks forward to the Commission's review of the development of the Black Sea Synergy Initiative.
10. The Council underlines the importance of implementation by ENP partner countries of their ENP Action Plans, which will bring partner countries closer to the EU, in line with the principle of differentiation. The Council looks forward to the Commission's Progress Reports foreseen in April 2008 and reaffirms its willingness to deepen EU cooperation with ENP partners."

AFRICA**– KENYA - Council conclusions**

The Council discussed the situation in Kenya and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council expresses its deep concern that the violence, uncertainty and instability in Kenya continue.
2. The Council reiterates the urgent need for Kenya's leaders to engage seriously and flexibly in order to bring an immediate end to the violence and to ensure security, stability and the protection of human rights for all in Kenya. The Council calls on the Kenyan parties to engage constructively in a genuine spirit of compromise in order to find a legitimate political settlement.
3. The Council strongly supports the efforts by the Panel of Eminent African Personalities, led by Mr. Kofi Annan, and stands ready to provide any further assistance it can to this process. The Council reiterates the necessity for the International Community to stand united behind the dialogue process chaired by Mr. Annan. The Council will monitor this process closely. Individuals who obstruct the dialogue process or who encourage violence will have to face the consequences.
4. The Council welcomes the agreement between the Kenyan parties on 1st February to take immediate steps to end the crisis. It is encouraging that the parties plan to address the long term issues as well as the short term ones. The Council welcomes the intention by the Kenyan parties to establish a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission aimed at bringing about debate and consensus on how Kenya should address the root causes of the crisis.
5. The Council welcomes the response by the United Nations to events in Kenya, both politically and in support of the affected civilian population.
6. The Council welcomes the agreement by all parties to an international investigation into the violence since the elections and calls for further co-operation by the Kenyan authorities with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide of the Secretary General of the UN.
7. The Council reiterates that until a legitimate political settlement is agreed, the EU and its Member States cannot conduct business as usual with Kenya. The Council will continue to closely monitor the situation in Kenya and support all efforts towards ending the violence and ensuring democracy, stability and respect for human rights. "

– *CHAD - Council conclusions*

The Council discussed the situation in Chad and the ongoing deployment of operation EUFOR/Tchad/RCA and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council firmly condemns the renewed attacks of armed groups against the government of Chad. The Council calls on all Chadian parties to unconditionally renounce the use of force and engage in a constructive dialogue aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the current situation. The Council supports the initiative taken by the African Union to engage the parties to end fighting and its efforts aimed at seeking a lasting solution to the crisis.
2. The Council expresses its deep concern regarding the regional ramifications of the conflict in Darfur and attempts of overthrowing the Chadian government and fully backs the African Union and the United Nations' call for the respect of the sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity of Chad. In order to de-escalate the current confrontation the Council calls on the governments of Sudan and Chad to immediately stop supporting and equipping armed groups and to improve their relations. It calls on the countries of the region to contribute to good neighbourhood relations and improve their cooperation.
3. The Council notes the decision of the Chadian authorities to declare a state of emergency. It will closely monitor the respect of civil rights and liberties and the fundamental principles of the rule of law in this context and expects them to be fully respected. The Council would like to recall its full support to the 13 August 2007 Political Agreement set up with almost all political parties belonging to the legal opposition. The Council considers this agreement, sponsored by the European Union, as the cornerstone of a broader road map leading to legislative elections in 2009. Therefore, it welcomes the efforts provided by the international community, to which the European Union has contributed, to help implementing this Political Agreement, with regard to the civil and electoral census as well as the promotion of democratic freedom and freedom of speech. The Council calls upon Chadian authorities to keep supporting this process and re-establish confidence with the political parties of the legal opposition and civil society with the aim of strengthening democracy in Chad. The Council calls on all parties to the agreement to renew dialogue and to start working in the framework of the "follow-up committee" of the agreement. The Council expresses its deep concern over the arrest of members of the unarmed political opposition in Chad, including Mr. Lol Mahamat Choua. The Council calls on President Deby to show restraint and immediately release these detainees.

4. The Council emphasises the urgent need to protect civilians and improve the humanitarian situation in the whole region. The Council reaffirms its full commitment to contribute to the implementation of UNSCR 1778 (2007) which authorises the deployment in Chad and the Central African Republic of a multidimensional presence, the military element of which will be provided by the EU. In accordance with this resolution, the EU conducts this military EU bridging operation for a period of 12 months from the declaration of initial operational capability. The situation on the ground will be constantly assessed by the competent Council bodies and the Operation Commander. In the light of the recent events the need for the deployment of EUFOR Tchad/RCA and MINURCAT to contribute to the required security in Eastern Chad has been underscored. EUFOR's mandate is to contribute to the protection of civilians in danger, particularly displaced persons and refugees, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of humanitarian personnel and to contribute to the protection of UN personnel, facilities, installations and equipment. In observance of its mandate EUFOR Tchad/RCA will act in an impartial, neutral and independent manner. Regarding systematic mainstreaming of human rights, gender issues and protection of children in armed conflicts, the Council recalls its conclusions of 28 January 2008. The Council welcomes the contribution of the European Commission to provide financial support to MINURCAT and to deliver humanitarian aid to the people in need, to support the reconciliation process and to contribute to the rehabilitation of conflict-affected areas.
5. The Council strongly condemns the attacks by the Sudanese forces against three villages of Western Darfur that took place on 8 February. The Council is deeply concerned by the information from UNAMID and OCHA on the number of deaths and casualties among the civilians. The Council further condemns the military activities of the rebel movements in Western Darfur. The Council calls upon all the parties to commit to an immediate cessation of hostilities. The consequences of this attack for Eastern Chad, with the arrival of more than 10000 new refugees near Guereda, underlines the urgent need to upgrade international efforts to secure refugees and IDPs with the deployment of EUFOR and MINURCAT as well as full deployment of UNAMID in Darfur.
6. The Council stresses the importance of the international community acting and pronouncing itself in a coordinated and concerted manner. The deployment of EUFOR Tchad/RCA is a major EU contribution, which together with the UN mission MINURCAT in Chad and Central African Republic and in coordination with the Hybrid AU/UN mission UNAMID in Darfur helps to address the conflict in the region and its effects on the humanitarian situation. In this context, the Council urged the Government of Sudan to facilitate a speedy deployment of UNAMID. Efforts to generate stability and create a proper security environment will be conducive for negotiations. The Council will continue its close cooperation and coordination with all actors involved, in particular with the UN and the AU."

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

At lunch, ministers discussed developments regarding Middle East peace process, notably on the basis of a briefing by High Representative Javier Solana on his recent visit to Egypt. The Commission informed ministers about the humanitarian situation, particularly in Gaza, and the follow-up to the Paris donors' conference.

BURMA/MYANMAR - Council conclusions

At lunch, ministers discussed developments in Burma/Myanmar. The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The European Union remains deeply concerned by the situation in Burma/Myanmar and urges the authorities to take rapid steps to transition to a democratically elected government. The Council notes the authorities' announcement on 9 February of a referendum on a new Constitution in May 2008 and multi-party elections in 2010. It underlines that only a process that involves the full participation of the opposition and ethnic groups will lead to national reconciliation and stability. To this end the EU reiterates its call for the release of all political detainees, including Aung San Suu Kyi, the start of a substantial time-bound dialogue with all political stakeholders, and full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
2. The EU reiterates its full support to the UN Secretary General's good offices mission to help the transition to democracy in Burma/Myanmar, and calls on the authorities to re-admit UN Special Adviser Professor Ibrahim Gambari as soon as possible and to fully cooperate with him and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar Sergio Pinheiro.
3. The EU commends the work of Special Envoy Piero Fassino in co-ordinating the EU's diplomatic efforts with Asian partners, and reaffirms his role in supporting and promoting the UN mission.
4. The EU continues to support the humanitarian needs of the people of Burma/Myanmar and has recently increased aid to that end.
5. The EU remains determined to assist the people of Burma/Myanmar to achieve stability, prosperity and democracy. The EU stands ready to review, amend or reinforce the measures it has already agreed in the light of developments."

WTO/ DOHA DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The Council was briefed by the Commission on the state of play and prospects for the future in the WTO's Doha Development Agenda negotiations, following the submission in Geneva of revised draft modalities papers on agricultural and non-agricultural market access. It held an exchange of views.

The Council will return to the issue at a forthcoming session.

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

The Council was briefed by the Commission on the state of negotiations on Economic partnership agreements (EPAs) with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions and states, after the results achieved at the end of 2007, and held an exchange of views.

The Council will return to the issue at a forthcoming session. In May, in the presence of development ministers, the General Affairs and External Relations Council will focus on the issue in preparation for the joint ACP-EC Council scheduled for June in Addis Abeba.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

See press release 6945/08.
