



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



16863/08 (Presse 360)

PRESS RELEASE

2915th Council meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

External Relations

Brussels, 8 and 9 December 2008

President **Bernard KOUCHNER**
French Minister for Foreign and European Affairs
Anne-Marie IDRAC
Minister of State with responsibility for Foreign Trade

* Some External Relations items were adopted without debate at the General Affairs meeting (16862/08).

P R E S S

Main results of the Council

*The Council discussed the situation in the east of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** and the Union's response to this crisis. In this connection, the Council noted the letter sent by the UN Secretary-General to the Secretary-General/High Representative and asked the latter rapidly to outline technical, humanitarian and political responses in the light of the comments made.*

*The Council took stock of the progress made by the Western Balkans with a view to their European perspective and welcomed the deployment of the EULEX mission in **Kosovo** on 9 December 2008.*

*The Council discussed the immediate challenges as regards the political and security situation in **Pakistan** and assistance to the Pakistani government.*

*It endorsed the report by the High Representative Javier Solana on the implementation of the **European security strategy** and approved the reinforcement of the EU's **capabilities** for dealing with the risks and threats to its security.*

*As regards the **Middle East** peace process, the Council reaffirmed its support for the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation process undertaken since the Annapolis Conference. In order to promote a lasting settlement, and noting the discussions begun by the High Representative Javier Solana and the Commission, the EU is willing to help implement a final peace agreement. The Ministers will return to this matter on 11 December, in the margins of the European Council.*

*At its meeting on General Affairs (16862/08), the Council decided to launch the EU military operation to contribute to the deterrence, prevention and repression of acts of piracy and armed robbery off the **Somali** coast (EU NAVFOR Somalia).*

*With regard to **Zimbabwe**, it decided to update the list of persons covered by the EU's individual sanctions, in particular by including further names of persons actively involved in acts of violence or human rights violations. This list will be published in the Official Journal.*

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OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

none

¹

- 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

Germany:

Mr Günter GLOSER Minister of State ("Staatsminister"), Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ireland:

Mr Micheál MARTIN Minister for Foreign Affairs

Greece:

Ms Theodora BAKOYANNI Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Ioannis VALINAKIS State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr Miguel Ángel MORATINOS CUYAUBÉ Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

Mr Diego LÓPEZ GARRIDO State Secretary for the European Union

France:

Mr Bernard KOUCHNER Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

Mr Jean-Pierre JOUYET Minister of State with responsibility for European Affairs

Ms Anne-Marie IDRAC Minister of State with responsibility for Foreign Trade

Italy:

Mr Franco FRATTINI Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Adolfo URSO State Secretary for Economic Development

Cyprus:

Mr Marcos KYPRIANOU Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Māris RIEKSTIŅŠ Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Žygimantas PAVILIONIS Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg:

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

Hungary:

Ms Kinga GÖNCZ Minister for Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr Tonio BORG Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Netherlands:

Mr Maxime VERHAGEN Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Frans TIMMERMANS Minister for European Affairs

Austria:

Mr Michael SPINDELEGGER Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Poland:

Mr Radosław SIKORSKI

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Portugal:

Mr Luís AMADO

Ms Teresa RIBEIRO

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

Mr Lazăr COMĂNESCU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Samuel ŽBOGAR

Mr Mitja GASPARI

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister without portfolio responsible for European
Affairs**Slovakia:**

Mr Ján KUBIŠ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Alexander STUBB

Ms Astrid THORS

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

Mr Carl BILDT

Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖM

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

Mr David MILIBAND

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Commission:

Mr Olli REHN

Mr Louis MICHEL

Ms Mariann FISCHER BOEL

Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER

Baroness Catherine ASHTON

Member

Member

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 had an exchange of views on the Commission's communication entitled "Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2008-2009" and on the progress reports "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", "Albania", "Montenegro", "Bosnia and Herzegovina", "Serbia" and "Kosovo (under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/99)". The Council broadly shares the assessment made by the Commission.

The Council reaffirms its full support for the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries, which remains essential for the stability, reconciliation and future of the region. It also reaffirms the need for fair and rigorous conditionality, in the framework of the stabilisation and association process and in accordance with the renewed consensus on enlargement approved by the European Council on 14 and 15 December 2006.

The Council recalls that by making solid progress in economic and political reform and by fulfilling the necessary conditions and requirements, the remaining potential candidates in the Western Balkans should achieve candidate status, according to their own merits, with European Union membership as ultimate goal. Further, a country's satisfactory track-record in implementing its obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreements, including trade-related provisions, is an essential element for the EU to consider any membership application.

The Council restates its support for the dialogue on visa liberalisation with Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, based on the roadmaps containing clear and realistic benchmarks. It invites the countries concerned to focus on full implementation of these benchmarks. The Council and Commission will closely monitor the process, based on country-by-country assessment.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The Council welcomes the progress made in a number of key areas, in particular judicial and police reform, as well as the implementation of obligations arising from the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. It encourages the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to improve the dialogue between the major political players so as to allow the normal functioning of institutions and accelerate the pace of reforms. Actions and statements which could negatively impact on good neighbourly relations should be avoided. The Council recalls, in accordance with the conclusions of the European Council on 19 and 20 June 2008, that maintaining good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution on the name issue, remains essential. The Council recalls that further steps by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in its progress towards the EU will be possible as soon as the conditions set out in the December 2005 European Council conclusions, the Copenhagen political criteria and the outstanding key priorities of the accession partnership are fulfilled. It points out that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia must in particular guarantee that free and fair elections are held in 2009.

Albania

The Council welcomes the progress achieved in a number of areas such as electoral reform, improvement of the business environment and good implementation of the interim agreement. It stresses, however, that good governance, enforcement of the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, as well as the strengthening of administrative capacity, are still major challenges requiring resolute action. The Council encourages Albania to continue its constructive role in the region's stability. It also encourages Albania to guarantee that free and fair elections are held in 2009.

Montenegro

The Council welcomes the important progress achieved, in particular the pursuit of political and economic reforms and good implementation of the interim agreement. It stresses, however, that sustained effort is still necessary in order to achieve progress in a number of areas, in particular strengthening of the rule of law and administrative capacity, judicial reform, media independence, and the fight against corruption and organised crime.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

While the signing of the SAA constituted a milestone in the relationship between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EU, the Council is very concerned by developments in the political situation, including the recent declarations and unilateral actions, and the slowdown in reform. The need for a shared vision of the country's future, enforcement of the rule of law, the strengthening of institutions and administrative capacity, and the fight against corruption and organised crime remain major challenges. While reaffirming Bosnia and Herzegovina's European perspective, the Council calls upon Bosnian political leaders to assume their responsibilities in order to make progress on the necessary reforms. The Council notes that Bosnia and Herzegovina has begun to implement the interim agreement. It notes with satisfaction the agreement reached on 8 November between three of the main parties and urges that the proposals be swiftly implemented. The Council takes note of the statement by the Peace Implementation Council on 19 and 20 November 2008. The Council reaffirms its full support for the HR/EUSR, Mr Lajčák. It calls on the Bosnian authorities to intensify their efforts to fulfil all those objectives and conditions. In accordance with its conclusions of 10 November 2008, the Council emphasises the European Union's renewed willingness to step up its involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to assume its responsibilities by making use of all the instruments at its disposal, including on the basis of the joint report by the SG/HR and the Enlargement Commissioner.

Serbia

The Council welcomes Serbia's reaffirmation of its commitment to Europe. It recognises the progress achieved in terms of cooperation with the ICTY, but points out, however, that Serbia must complement this positive development by full cooperation. It also stresses the importance of tangible progress in priority areas such as strengthening of the rule of law, economic reform, and the fight against corruption and organised crime. It emphasises the importance of a constructive attitude towards regional cooperation. The Council restates its view that Serbia, with its strong administrative capacity, can accelerate its progress towards the EU, including candidate status, as soon as all necessary conditions are met.

Kosovo

While noting the progress made in certain areas, in particular the adoption of many important laws, the Council stresses that major challenges remain: the strengthening of institutions and the rule of law, protection of the Serb and other minorities, the fight against corruption and organised crime, budgetary and fiscal reform and the improvement of living conditions, in particular. In this framework it encourages a constructive attitude in terms of regional cooperation. In this context, the Council recalls the European Union's willingness to assist the economic and political development of Kosovo through a clear European perspective, in line with the European perspective of the region. The Council welcomes the Commission's intention to present, in the autumn of 2009, a study examining means to further Kosovo's political and socio-economic development in accordance with the conclusions of the European Councils in December 2007 and June 2008."

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO – Council conclusions

The Council discussed the situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Union's response to this crisis.

Following the discussions, it adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council recalls the conclusions on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) adopted at the General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting on 10 November and continues to be very concerned by the situation in the east of the country resulting from the return to arms of all parties – and in particular the CNDP's offensive – and by its humanitarian consequences, with access to displaced people remaining very difficult in certain areas of North Kivu. The Council calls on all parties involved in the Goma and Nairobi processes to respect the ceasefire, ensure the safety of humanitarian staff and allow unconditional access to the civilian population.
2. The Council is deeply concerned at the continuing serious violations of human rights, and in particular the summary executions, systematic sexual violence and recruitment and use of child soldiers by the armed groups, already pointed out by the Human Rights Council at its special session on 28 November and 1 December. The Council condemns these acts and urges all parties concerned to stop them. In particular, it calls on the government of the RDC to put an end to the behaviour of some members of the Congolese armed forces who have been attacking the persons and property they are supposed to protect. The Council calls on all parties to take all necessary measures to stop violations of human rights and to arrest and punish those responsible for them.
3. The Council welcomes the efforts of the European Commission and the Member States to help the civilian victims of the conflict and contribute to finding a political solution to the crisis by providing a further EUR 45,6 million in humanitarian aid and making many ministerial trips to the DRC and the rest of the region. The Council encourages the Commission and the Member States to continue these efforts in close cooperation with the United Nations, the African Union and the countries in the region, whose involvement it commends.

4. The Council reiterates the need for further efforts to bring to an end the activity of foreign armed groups, in particular the FDLR, in the east of the DRC. It reaffirms the EU's commitment to facilitating the settlement of that problem by relaunching the Goma and Nairobi peace processes. It urges the DRC and other governments in the region to take the necessary steps to this end. It calls on the countries in the region to respect the sovereignty of the DRC.
5. The Council commends the region's involvement within the framework of the Goma and Nairobi peace processes. In this respect, it welcomes the renewed dialogue between the governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and encourages them to intensify their cooperation with a view to normalising their relations and contributing to stabilising the situation in the long term. It commends the efforts made by former President Olusegun Obasanjo, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to find a political solution to the conflict. It reaffirms the EU's commitment under the International Facilitation.
6. The Council emphasises the need to pursue cooperation with the Congolese authorities in order to enhance their capacities, in particular as regards security, with a view in particular to strengthening stability in the east and fighting impunity and the illegal exploitation of natural resources, the persistence of which is fuelling the crisis. The Council reaffirms the EU's willingness to step up its efforts to that end, including through its EUSEC and EUPOL RD Congo missions and the Commission, in collaboration with the Congolese authorities.
7. The Council reiterates its support for MONUC's action on the ground and encourages it to continue reinforcing its deployment in North Kivu. The Council welcomes the Security Council's unanimous adoption, on 20 November, of resolution 1843 authorising an increase in MONUC's personnel, which is intended to assist in improving the protection of the civilian population and accompanying the mission's ongoing redeployment. Beyond the urgent strengthening of personnel, the Council is closely monitoring the current discussions within the Security Council on renewing MONUC's mandate with a view to increasing its effectiveness. The Council took note of the letter from the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Secretary-General/High Representative and asked the latter, and the Commission, rapidly to outline technical, humanitarian and political responses in the light of the comments made.
8. The Council will continue to keep a close eye on the humanitarian, political and security situation in the east of the DRC."

MIDDLE EAST/MEDITERRANEAN – Council conclusions**Middle East Peace Process**

Over lunch the Ministers had an exchange of views on the Middle East Peace Process. They will return to this matter on 11 December 2008 in the margins of the European Council.

The Council then adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council reiterates its support for the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating process under way since the Annapolis Conference.

Even if this negotiating process has not yet realised its full potential in terms of results, the political momentum it has set in motion is irreversible. The European Union reaffirms its commitment to the role of the Quartet in the process. It supports the commitment of the parties to pursue vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations in order to reach a peace agreement providing for the creation of a Palestinian State, comprising the West Bank and Gaza, that is viable, independent, democratic and sovereign, living in peace and security alongside Israel within secure and recognised borders.

The Council reiterates its commitment to a comprehensive and regional approach to the resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict. It commends the indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria under the auspices of Turkey and encourages the two parties to open direct talks. It supports all the efforts deployed to achieve stability, peace and security in the region.

2. The European Union calls for a major change in the situation on the ground, in accordance with the undertakings given in the context of the roadmap, in order to build mutual trust. The political momentum has contributed to real progress in terms of security, governance and rule of law. The results achieved by the Palestinian Authority, in particular in Jenin, Nablus and Hebron, should be commended in this connection and its efforts continued.
3. The European Union condemns all forms of violence, especially in Gaza, as well as the firing of rockets at the civilian population, which must stop completely; the fight against terrorism must continue unabated. Corporal Gilad Shalit must be unconditionally released.

4. The EU continues to be deeply concerned by the recent acceleration in settlement expansion. Settlement activity, including natural growth and settlements in East Jerusalem, must end as a matter of urgency. It is contrary to international law and compromises the creation of a viable Palestinian State. Obstacles to movement to and within the Occupied Palestinian Territories must be lifted, in particular to support economic development. The humanitarian situation in Gaza must urgently be alleviated by continuing the truce, reopening crossing points and supplying goods and services to the population. The ability of relief agencies, particularly UNRWA, to supply aid must be safeguarded. Palestinian prisoners should be released in greater numbers, with priority being given to minors.
5. The European Union supports Egypt's mediation efforts for inter-Palestinian reconciliation. The EU is prepared to support any government which respects the PLO's commitments, resolutely supports the peace negotiations with Israel, and pursues policies and measures that reflect the Quartet's principles.
6. The EU is determined to work towards a stronger monitoring role for the Quartet on the ground, jointly with the United States and the other members of the Quartet. In order to foster a lasting settlement, the European Union, while neither intervening in the negotiations nor prejudging their outcome, reiterates its willingness to assist in the implementation of a final peace agreement, when the time comes. The Council takes note of the discussions under way at the General Secretariat of Council and the Commission in this respect.
7. The European Union is convinced that any lasting peace must be comprehensive, and reiterates its support for resolution of all aspects of the Israel-Arab conflict, in accordance with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, in particular land for peace, and with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the Quartet's roadmap. The EU reiterates the importance of the Arab partners' sustained, broad and constructive commitment. In this respect, it considers that the Arab Peace Initiative offers a solid and appropriate basis for peace in the Middle East to which all parties should give their consideration."

Bilateral relations with the Mediterranean partners

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Mediterranean region is of crucial strategic importance to the European Union. Further to the February 2008 conclusions on **strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)**, significant progress has been made on reinforcing bilateral cooperation with all Mediterranean countries on the basis of the key principles underpinning the **ENP**, namely partnership, joint ownership, differentiation and tailor-made assistance, in full compliance with its single, inclusive, balanced and coherent policy framework.
2. The Council thus welcomes the completion, at the Association Council meeting on 13 October, of discussions on **Morocco's** advanced status with respect to the European Union, which reflects the common willingness of the Kingdom of Morocco and the European Union to establish an increasingly close and mutually beneficial partnership, covering all aspects and at all levels, in order inter alia to consolidate the reform and economic and social modernisation process in that country. The Council intends to give practical expression to the guidelines identified on that occasion.
3. The Council welcomes the prospects for reinforced EU relations with **Tunisia** and **Jordan** further to the interest expressed by these countries for a stronger partnership with the European Union. It confirms its willingness to work actively with these countries towards that goal in 2009.
4. The Council also welcomes the willingness expressed by **Algeria** to fully implement the EU-Algeria Association Agreement, as demonstrated with the organisation of the first Association Committee meeting in Algiers on 16 September 2008.
5. The Council welcomes the start of negotiations with **Libya** aiming to achieve the rapid conclusion of a Framework Agreement providing for dialogue on foreign and security policy and cooperation in key areas of common interest (free trade agreement, energy, transport, migration, justice and home affairs, environment, education, health, etc.).

6. The Council welcomes **Egypt's** requests to strengthen its relations with the EU and has started a thorough examination of future measures, in compliance with full implementation of the Action Plan.
7. The Council welcomes the forthcoming initialling of the Association Agreement with **Syria**.
8. The Council welcomes the deepening of relations between the EU and the Palestinian Authority, the recent political dialogue held at ministerial level between **the EU and the Palestinian Authority**, and the setting-up of four specialised subcommittees tasked with following up the bilateral Action Plan.

These developments demonstrate both parties' commitment to exploring various avenues towards achieving deeper and broader bilateral relations in the light of the joint efforts aiming to create a Palestinian State. That stronger partnership will provide a framework for deepening relations, taking into account the full range of resources and instruments of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and in particular more frequent meetings and exchanges at all levels, including the possibility of organising a summit.

With this in mind, the EU will work on the practical implementation of the Interim Association Agreement concluded with the PLO, pending the conclusion of a full Association Agreement.

9. In accordance with the political commitment made on 16 June 2008 at the 8th Association Council meeting between the European Union and Israel, the Council reaffirms its determination to upgrade the level and intensity of its bilateral relations with Israel within the context of the adoption of the new instrument which will replace the current Action Plan from April 2009. That building-up must be based on the shared values of both parties, and particularly on democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, good governance and international humanitarian law.

The building-up should also be conceived and viewed in the context of the full range of our common interests and objectives. These include, inter alia, the resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict through implementation of the solution based on the coexistence of two States, the promotion of peace, prosperity and stability in the Middle East and the search for joint answers to challenges which could threaten these goals. With this in mind, the EU will encourage Israel to contribute to developing economic, financial and cultural relations at regional level. Israel will also be invited, for its part, to improve the daily life of the Palestinian population in accordance with the roadmap, facilitate the practical implementation of the association agreements concluded by the EU with the other countries in the region, in particular the Interim Association Agreement concluded on 17 February 1997 between the European Community and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, and continue its active participation in the three-way dialogue started with the EU and the Palestinian Authority.

The building-up will itself contribute to expanding the range of interests and objectives common to the two parties, and will impart to relations between the EU and Israel a degree of trust and proximity similar to that which the Member States and Israel already enjoy in their respective bilateral relations. It will also contribute to reinforcing the EU's involvement in promoting peace in the Middle East.

It therefore complements the cooperation framework established by the 1995 Association Agreement between the EU and Israel, and builds on the experience acquired by both parties during the implementation of the first Joint Action Plan established under the European Neighbourhood Policy.

With a view to practical implementation of the political dimension of this building-up, and in the light of these conclusions as a whole, the Council adopted the guidelines set out in the Annex to [16897/08](#).

The Council also welcomes the joint examination by the European Commission and Israel of the usefulness and modalities of closer involvement by Israel in the Community's main measures and programmes."

PAKISTAN – Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions concerning the situation in Pakistan.

- "1. The EU welcomes the recent significant political changes in Pakistan, resulting in the consolidation of democratic civilian rule. The Council acknowledges the complex and urgent challenges Pakistan is facing, especially regarding the overall security situation and economic crisis. The European Union stands ready to strengthen bilateral relations with Pakistan and to look for possible ways of increasing its financial assistance to the country.
2. The Council underlines the importance of improving relations between Pakistan and its neighbours, notably India and Afghanistan, and welcomes the constructive comments made by the President of Pakistan in this respect. The EU continues to fully endorse bilateral and international initiatives aimed at strengthening regional cooperation.
3. The Council stresses the Government of Pakistan's commitment to the fight against terrorism and extremism. The EU urges Pakistan to step up its efforts to counter this menace and fulfil its stated commitments. The EU will continue to offer its support in this regard. The EU recognises the sacrifices made by the Pakistani people in its struggle against terrorism and extremism. Given the increase of terrorist attacks throughout the region, the EU underlines the necessity to enhance regional cooperation, considering this an essential element in the field of counter-terrorism.
4. The Council recalls its conclusions on Pakistan of 29 April 2008. To accelerate progress in areas of mutual interest and in light of recent political changes, the Council commits to intensify its political dialogue and deepen its relations with Pakistan in 2009, in full respect of international law and UNSC Resolutions. In this context, the Council announces the following steps.
5. Following the February 2008 general elections in the presence of an EU Election Observation Mission (EOM), the Council underlines its continued support for democratisation, good governance and the rule of law in Pakistan. The Council considers that the recommendations of the EOM provide a basis for further political reform. The European Union stands ready to support the Government of Pakistan in the implementation of these recommendations to assist reform to strengthen Pakistan's democratic institutions.

6. The EU will look into suitable ways to further develop and intensify the political dialogue with Pakistan through the forthcoming visit to Islamabad of an EU Foreign Ministers troika. The EU will jointly explore with the Government of Pakistan how to intensify dialogue in the areas of trade and development, intercultural exchange, non-proliferation, human rights, migration, counter-terrorism and radicalisation and education. Some of these areas should also be addressed at the Joint Commission. The EU will also seek to take forward this intensive political dialogue at an ad hoc summit if possible during the Czech Presidency.
7. The EU welcomes the agreement on an IMF programme for Pakistan and believes this is the best solution to avoid a balance of payments crisis and encourages Pakistan to pursue economic reforms as agreed with the IMF.
8. The Council underlines the importance of economic and commercial development for further long-term progress in Pakistan and of significantly enhancing the EU trade relationship with Pakistan. In this context, the Council takes note of the Pakistani request to the EU to initiate the process for an EU-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement. The EU is examining all options aimed at enhancing its trade relations with Pakistan. The EU will continue to support efforts aimed at promoting trade liberalisation in South Asia and will encourage Pakistan to work with its partners in SAARC towards full implementation of SAFTA and lifting rules that limit intraregional trade, in particular with India and Afghanistan.
9. The Council welcomes the Friends of Democratic Pakistan as a key forum for international support and assistance to contribute to Pakistan's prosperity, development, security, stability and governance. The EU will fully cooperate as a partner in this forum."

REPORT ON THE EUROPEAN SECURITY STRATEGY

Over lunch, the High Representative Javier Solana presented to the Ministers his "Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy – Providing Security in a Changing World".

The High Representative's report aims to reinforce the European Security Strategy adopted in 2003, without replacing it. It gives an opportunity to examine how the strategy works in practice, and what can be done to improve its implementation.

During his presentation Mr Solana said "the European Security Strategy identified a range of threats and challenges to our security interests. Five years on, these have not gone away: some have become more significant, and all more complex. Moreover, globalisation is accelerating shifts in power and is exposing differences in values."

He also stressed that "Europe will rise to these new challenges, as we have done in the past. The EU has made substantial progress over the last five years. We are recognised as an important contributor to a better world. Over the last decade, the European Security and Defence Policy, as an integral part of our Common Foreign and Security Policy, has grown in experience and capability, with over 20 missions deployed in response to crises, ranging from post-tsunami peace building in Aceh to protecting refugees in Chad.

But, despite all that has been achieved, implementation of the ESS remains work in progress. For our full potential to be realised we need to be still more capable, more coherent and more active."

The discussion showed there was broad support for the report, which will now be sent to the European Council.

The European Council adopted the European Security Strategy in December 2003. For the first time, it established principles and set clear objectives for advancing the EU's security interests on the basis of the Union's core values. The strategy is comprehensive in its approach and remains fully relevant.

DRAFT DECLARATION ON STRENGTHENING CAPABILITIES

The Council approved a declaration on strengthening capabilities. The declaration notes that almost ten years after the founding of the European security and defence policy (ESDP) – the operational component of the common foreign and security policy – the European Union is a recognised and sought-after player in the international arena.

The purpose of the declaration, which is to be presented to the European Council, is to put the Union, with all the resources at its disposal, in a position to enhance its contribution to international peace and security and to develop its capacity to tackle the risks and threats to its security as identified in the European Security Strategy and the document updating it. Strengthening available capabilities in Europe will therefore be the principal challenge faced in the years ahead. In a tough budgetary environment, such a goal can only be achieved through a joint, sustained and shared effort which meets operational needs.

That means that Europe should be capable, in the coming years, of planning and conducting simultaneously a series of operations and missions, of varying scope, be they major stabilisation and reconstruction operations, rapid-response operations of limited duration, emergency operations for the evacuation of European nationals, maritime or air surveillance/interdiction missions, civilian-military humanitarian assistance operations or civilian missions (inter alia police, rule-of-law, civilian administration, civil protection, security sector reform, and observation missions).

The declaration identifies the priority civilian capability objectives and a series of military capability initiatives (air transport, space surveillance, protection of forces, interoperability and the ability of European personnel to work together).

The declaration reiterates the ministers' full support for the European Defence Agency (EDA). It also deals with pooling of efforts, specialisation and sharing of costs. It identifies ways of reinforcing the European defence technological and industrial base.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE – DOHA PROGRAMME NEGOTIATIONS

The Council was briefed by Commissioners Catherine Ashton and Mariann Fischer Boel on the latest developments at the World Trade Organisation concerning the trade negotiations of the Doha Development Agenda, with a view to a possible ministerial meeting in Geneva this month.

It held an exchange of views.

Ministerial meetings last July ended in deadlock because of disagreement over the formulation of a special safeguard mechanism which would operate in favour of a developing country in the event of an upsurge of agricultural imports. At their summit on the financial crisis in Washington on 15 November, the members of the G20 emphasised the importance of establishing the modalities for an agreement by the end of the year.

EVENTS IN PARALLEL WITH THE COUNCIL MEETING

- 5th meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ([17005/08](#))
- 9th meeting of the EU-Armenia Cooperation Council ([17026/08](#))
- 9th meeting of the EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council ([17028/08](#))
- 9th meeting of the EU-Georgia Cooperation Council ([17030/08](#))

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED
