



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



10939/09 (Presse 174)

## **PRESS RELEASE**

2951st Council meeting

### **General Affairs and External Relations**

### **External Relations**

Luxembourg, 15 and 16 June 2009

President      **Mr Jan KOHOUT**  
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of  
the Czech Republic

\* Some external relations items were adopted without debate at the 2950th meeting on General Affairs (10938/09).

# **P R E S S**

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10939/09 (Presse 174)

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**EN**

## **Main results of the Council**

*The Council, in its discussion on the **Middle East**, welcomed in particular the initial step, following the Israeli policy review, announced by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of commitment to a peace that would include a Palestinian state. It urged both parties to take immediate steps to resume peace negotiations, respecting previous agreements and understandings.*

*The Council also congratulated the people of **Lebanon** on the successful holding of parliamentary elections, which are an important step in the democratic development of the country.*

*In the context of the annual review of its 1996 common position, the Council welcomed the resumption of the political dialogue with **Cuba** which allowed both sides to discuss openly issues of mutual interest including respect for and promotion of human rights. The political dialogue should be pursued and deepened on a comprehensive, equal and result-oriented basis.*

*As regards visa liberalisation for the **Western Balkans** region, the Council underlined the importance of all the countries concerned achieving a visa-free regime by their own merits. The Council welcomed the progress achieved so far and called for the countries in the region to further accelerate and implement reforms to fulfill the necessary benchmarks in the near future.*

*The Council noted concerns regarding the conduct of the **Iranian Presidential elections** expressed by several candidates. It also expressed serious concern about the violence on the streets and the use of force against peaceful demonstrators.*

*Without discussion, the Council adopted a Joint Statement of the EU and the US on the closure of the **Guantanamo** Bay detention facility and future counterterrorism cooperation. The statement, endorsed by the EU and the US, sets the framework for cooperation with the US on the closure of Guantanamo and paves the way for strengthening cooperation on counter-terrorism in the future.*

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**OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

*none*

<sup>1</sup> 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:

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Mr Javier SOLANA

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**ITEMS DEBATED****MIDDLE EAST - Council conclusions**

At a time when the international community is intensifying its efforts to re-launch the peace process, the Council held a comprehensive discussion on the Middle East, including Lebanon and Syria.

EU High Representative Javier Solana, who had travelled to Israel, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon and Egypt on 10-14 June, briefed the Council on his visit to the region.

After the discussion, the Council adopted the following conclusions:

**MIDDLE EAST**

- "1. The European Union remains committed to a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, on the basis of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid conference, including land for peace, the Roadmap, the agreements previously reached by the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative. The Council reiterates its commitment to the two-state solution with an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state, comprising the West Bank and Gaza, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. The Council confirms its view that this constitutes a fundamental European interest. It is an indispensable and urgent step towards a more stable and peaceful Middle East.
2. The Council welcomes the US Administration's commitment to vigorously pursue a two-state solution and a comprehensive peace in the Middle East and confirms the Union's readiness to work actively with the United States and other Quartet members to achieve this goal, including through coordinated monitoring of actions by all parties to the conflict and of developments on the ground. The EU is also ready to contribute substantially to post-conflict arrangements aimed at ensuring the sustainability of peace agreements, addressing also the regional economic and security dimensions.

3. The European Union calls on the government of Israel to commit unequivocally to the two-state solution and welcomes the initial step, following the Israeli policy review, announced by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of commitment to a peace that would include a Palestinian state. It urges both parties to take immediate steps to resume peace negotiations, respecting previous agreements and understandings. To that effect, the Council also calls on both parties to implement their obligations under the Roadmap.
4. The Council remains deeply concerned by settlement activities, house demolitions and evictions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including in East Jerusalem. The Council urges the government of Israel to immediately end settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem and including natural growth, and to dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001. It reiterates that settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. The Council also urges the Palestinian Authority to continue to make every effort to improve law and order. All parties must stop incitement and violence against civilians and respect for international humanitarian law must be ensured. The EU will continue to follow closely investigations into alleged violations of international humanitarian law.
5. The Council reiterates the urgency of a durable solution to the Gaza crisis through the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1860. The European Union calls for the immediate and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza without which the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid, reconstruction and economic recovery will not be possible. The Council also calls for a complete stop to all violence, including a sustained halt of rocket attacks at Israel and an effective mechanism to prevent arms and ammunition smuggling into the Gaza strip. It calls on those holding the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to release him without delay.
6. The Council expresses continued encouragement for inter-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas and support for the mediation efforts by Egypt and the Arab League. Overcoming divisions among Palestinians would help prevent a deeper separation between the West Bank and Gaza and preserve the chances of restoring the unity of a future Palestinian state. The Council calls on all Palestinians to find common ground, based on non-violence, in order to facilitate reconstruction in Gaza and the organisation of elections.

7. The EU stands ready to further develop and enhance its bilateral relations with the Palestinian Authority in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. It will promote Palestinian state-building and intensify work in partnership with the PA towards further implementation of the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan. This will involve a broad range of areas including health, education, governance, customs, public financial management and the rule of law. The EU welcomes the PA's efforts to develop an effective and reformed security sector and will cooperate towards additional improvement in restoring law and order, countering terrorism, the implementation of a more comprehensive security strategy, developing an effective and reformed security sector and criminal justice system. Civil police and justice will continue to be a focus of EU support, through the assistance provided by EUPOL COPPS, the European Commission and Member States, and in close coordination with the US and other partners.
8. The Council welcomes the declared readiness of the government of Israel to promote Palestinian economic development, stressing that this can only be achieved within the framework of the broader perspective of the two-state solution. The EU is ready to work closely with Israel, the Palestinian government and international donors in order to achieve sustainable economic development on the basis of the full implementation of the Agreement on Access and Movement of 2005. Such a step would not only improve living conditions and the situation on the ground but also reinforce support among Palestinians for a peaceful political process.
9. The Council calls on all partners to contribute actively to the achievement of a comprehensive settlement. The EU urges Arab countries and other partners to be forthcoming, both politically and financially, in assisting the Palestinian Authority, in accordance with Roadmap provisions. Underlining the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, the EU invites Israel and all Arab countries to take confidence building measures in order to overcome mutual mistrust and to create an atmosphere conducive to conflict resolution. Solutions to the various conflicts including a lasting settlement for the conflicts between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon must be pursued in parallel, creating mutually reinforcing processes. In this regard the EU expects that Syria and Israel resume peace negotiations.

10. A comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict requires a regional approach, covering the political, security and economic dimensions. Encouraged by enhanced US engagement and convinced that tangible benefits regarding economic development and security would facilitate achieving agreement on the various political tracks, the EU stands ready to use all instruments at its disposal such as the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean. Through numerous agreements with partners in the region, the EU is uniquely placed to work with the parties on key issues of regional development. In light of further developments at the political level and on the ground, the EU will carefully assess how its policies and programmes can promote concrete and early results on the path of a comprehensive settlement of the conflict."

## LEBANON

- "1. The Council congratulates the people of Lebanon on the successful holding of parliamentary elections, which are an important step in the democratic development of the country.
2. The Council commends all Lebanese institutions and political forces for the conduct of the electoral campaign, and the orderly and transparent voting process, as noted by the EU and other election observation missions. The significant increase in voter turn-out confirmed the Lebanese people's commitment to democracy.
3. The Council hopes that all parties will cooperate with President Sleimane, whose role is to safeguard the Constitution and Lebanon's independence, unity and territorial integrity, with a view to the timely formation of a government, in accordance with the Constitution. The Council also encourages all the parties to further engage in dialogue in the spirit of consensus and compromise which prevailed before and during the electoral campaign in order to launch a comprehensive reform programme in the interest of stability and unity of Lebanon as a whole.
4. The European Union reiterates its full support for the Lebanese people and institutions and remains determined to reinforce Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, unity and stability. The Council recalls its commitment to the full implementation of UNSC Resolutions 1559, 1680, 1701 and 1757. The EU reaffirms its full support to the Special Tribunal."

**CUBA - Council conclusions**

The Council assessed its relations with Cuba, in the context of the annual review of its 1996 common position on Cuba.

After the discussion, the Council adopted the following conclusions:

- “1. The Council welcomes the resumption of the political dialogue with Cuba that allowed both sides to discuss openly issues of mutual interest including the respect and promotion of human rights. The Council believes that the political dialogue with Cuba should be pursued and deepened on a comprehensive, equal and result-oriented basis. Within the framework of this dialogue, the EU will give high priority to the principles of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Council confirms its renewed commitment to and relevance of the Common Position of 1996.
2. The Council takes positive note of the renewal of development cooperation with Cuba as a tool for improving the lives of the Cuban people. The Council considers focused development cooperation in accordance with the objectives and principles of the EC development policy to be an important part of the relations between the EU and Cuba.
3. The Council reaffirms its determination to pursue a result-oriented comprehensive dialogue with the Cuban authorities as well as with representatives of civil society and peaceful pro-democracy opposition in accordance with EU policies. The EU reiterates the right of the Cuban citizens to decide independently about their future.

The Council reaffirms that its policy for EU contacts with the peaceful pro-democracy opposition remains valid. During high-level visits, human rights issues should always be addressed; when appropriate, meetings with the peaceful pro-democracy opposition will be part of high level visits. In this context the Council calls upon the Cuban government to allow for unimpeded contacts with civil society in the margin of high level visits.

4. The Council remains seriously concerned about the lack of progress in the situation of human rights in Cuba, in particular in the field of civil and political rights, and political reforms. This issue is one of the EU's key priorities. The Council reaffirms that the EU will further continue to offer support to all sectors of society in order to promote respect for human rights and real progress towards pluralist democracy in Cuba. The Council urges the Cuban Government to release unconditionally all political prisoners, including those who were detained and sentenced in 2003. For humanitarian reasons, the Council expresses its particular concern for prisoners with serious health conditions. The Council calls upon the Cuban authorities to facilitate immediate access of international humanitarian organizations to Cuban prisons.
5. The Council also underlines the importance of structural economic and social reforms in order to improve living conditions of the Cuban people and encourages the Cuban Government to take necessary steps. The EU stands ready to support Cuba in these efforts.
6. The Council welcomes the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the invitation of UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and looks forward to the fixing of an early date for a visit by UN Special Rapporteur. The Council calls upon Cuban authorities to ratify and implement the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
7. The Council reiterates its call on the Cuban Government to grant freedom of information and expression including access to the Internet to the Cuban people.
8. The Council adopts this evaluation of the Common Position on Cuba. The Council will decide in June 2010 on the annual review of the Common Position including an assessment of the future of the political dialogue, taking into account progress as to the elements of these Council conclusions, in particular in the field of human rights.
9. In this context, the EU notes that Cuba rejoined the Rio Group in November 2008 and also notes the decision taken by the General Assembly of the OAS on June 3rd 2009 to terminate the resolution of 1962 which excluded the Government of Cuba from its participation in the Inter-American system."

The Council also adopted the following declaration: "Head of Missions (HOMS) will be requested to report before the end of 2009, evaluating the situation and possible progress in Cuba".

**WESTERN BALKANS - Council conclusions**

The Council discussed a series of issues regarding the Western Balkans and adopted the following conclusions:

**"VISA LIBERALISATION**

The Council restates its support for the dialogue on visa liberalisation with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, based on the roadmaps containing clear and realistic benchmarks and on a country-by-country assessment. The Council recalls that the countries concerned should continue to focus on full implementation of these benchmarks.

In this regard, the Council welcomes the updated assessment reports presented by the European Commission on the progress in the visa liberalisation dialogues with these countries. The reports reflect the clear progress made by these countries in meeting the benchmarks set out in the visa liberalisation roadmaps. In this context, the Council encourages the European Commission to present as soon as possible a legislative proposal amending Regulation 539/2001, as it applies to the Member States, in order to achieve a visa free regime ideally by the end of 2009 with those countries that will have met all the benchmarks.

Acknowledging the significance of visa liberalisation for the Western Balkans region, the Council underlines the importance of all the countries concerned achieving a visa free regime by their own merits. Therefore, the Council welcomes the progress achieved so far and calls for the countries in the region to further accelerate and implement reforms to fulfil soon the necessary benchmarks.

**REGIONAL COOPERATION**

The EU remains committed to supporting regional co-operation in South East Europe. Reinforced cooperation among the countries of the region will contribute to consolidating stability, enhancing good neighbourly relations, promoting reforms and addressing economic and social needs through accelerated development, as well as to strengthening the rule of law, promoting reconciliation, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.

In this context, the Council welcomed the successful start of the RCC and its goal to become a platform for effective co-operation of all regional stakeholders. The Council also appreciated the RCC Secretariat's efforts to promote regional co-operation, in line with the RCC's priority areas and the concept of regional ownership and under the political umbrella of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), as was confirmed in the last RCC Annual meeting and SEECP Summit in Chisinau on 4/5 June 2009.

The Council encouraged the countries in the region to further enhance the cooperation and to focus on targeted and result-oriented activities, including streamlining of the various initiatives, in line with agreed priorities and the principle of regional ownership. It reaffirmed the key role of the RCC in this endeavour. The Council strongly encourages all concerned parties in the region to adopt a pragmatic and constructive attitude in order to ensure the inclusive character of regional co-operation.

Regional co-operation remains important for the European perspective of the Western Balkans.

### **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

The Council welcomed the recent joint visit of SG/HR Solana and US Vice President Biden to Bosnia and Herzegovina and fully supported the common political message delivered at this occasion. The Council expressed its continuing full support for HR/EUSR Valentin Inzko, took note of his report to the United Nations Security Council, and welcomed his continued efforts to facilitate progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina, both on the Stabilisation and Association Process and on the five objectives and two conditions.

The Council exchanged views on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the light of the upcoming PIC Steering Board meeting on 29 and 30 June 2009. The Council remained fully committed to the transition from the OHR to a reinforced EU presence as soon as the fulfillment of the five objectives and two conditions set by the Peace Implementation Council is complete and stressed that the transition could be within reach in the months ahead. It urged the BiH authorities to achieve concrete results before the June PIC Steering Board meeting.

The Council reconfirmed its full support for the European perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina and stressed that increased willingness to reform and readiness to compromise are of pivotal importance on Bosnia and Herzegovina's way towards the European Union.

The Council reiterated its full support for the Prud/Odžak process and called upon the relevant political leaders to continue their endeavour and expand the process.

The Council expressed concern at the unconstructive political atmosphere and the recent actions challenging the Dayton Peace Agreement. The Council called upon all the political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to refrain from nationalist rhetoric, and genuinely focus on bringing forward the necessary reform agenda in the general interest of the country and its citizens.

The Council welcomed the adoption of the Brčko constitutional amendment on 26 March as an encouraging sign that substantial further progress should be possible if all political parties showed readiness to compromise."

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Over lunch, ministers had an exchange of views with the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Serge Brammertz, following his recent report to the UN Security Council on cooperation by Serbia and other countries with ICTY.

**BURMA/MYANMAR**

The Council discussed its policy on Burma/Myanmar in the light of developments in the country, in particular as regards political prisoners and ethnic minorities, respect for human rights and progress towards the establishment of an inclusive democratisation process in the run-up to planned elections.

The discussion focused on the ongoing trial of Aung San Suu Kyi. The Council agreed to issue a statement on the occasion of her birthday on 19 June and to further work on the EU's possible next steps vis-à-vis Burma/Myanmar.

**IRAN - Council conclusions**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council discussed the recent events regarding the Iranian Presidential election. It noted the result as announced by the Iranian Electoral Commission and also the concerns regarding the conduct of the elections expressed by several candidates. This is a matter that the Iranian authorities must address and investigate.

The Council expressed serious concern about the violence on the streets and the use of force against peaceful demonstrators. It is essential that the aspirations of the Iranian people are achieved through peaceful means and that freedom of expression is respected.

The Council will continue to follow developments. It remains a priority for the EU that Iran engages with the concerns of the world community, above all on the issue of Iran's nuclear programme. The Council wishes to engage with the Islamic Republic of Iran on the basis of mutual respect but it requires Iran to recognise and act urgently on its responsibilities and obligations."

**OTHER ITEMS**

- Sudan

The Council had an exchange of views on the current political and humanitarian situation in Sudan. It expressed concern about the negative consequences that the expulsion of humanitarian NGOs had on the population although it recognised that there had been some improvement recently with some NGOs having returned to Sudan. The Council agreed to return to the issue in due course for an in-depth discussion.

- ASEAN-EU meetings

The Council discussed the level of EU participation at the ASEAN-EU and ASEM Ministerial meetings.

**IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL**

- EU-Israel association council;
- EU-Algeria association council;
- EU- Ukraine Cooperation Council (*11051/09*);
- EU-ECOWAS Ministerial Troika.

**OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

See press release *10938/09*.

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