



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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2719th Council Meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

External Relations

Brussels, 20 March 2006

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

* Some external relations items were adopted without debate at the 2718th meeting on General Affairs (7033/06).

P R E S S

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Main Results of the Council

*The Council discussed the presidential election held on 19 March in **Belarus**. The Presidency noted that ministers agreed with the preliminary conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission assessment that the elections in were severely flawed due to arbitrary use of state power and other shortcomings. The Council would start discussion on taking restrictive measures against those responsible for these acts.*

*The Council further discussed the EU's response to the UN request for possible EU support to MONUC during the upcoming electoral period in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**. The Presidency, noting that there was general agreement on the principle of giving a positive answer to the UN's request, indicated that it would ensure that the competent Council bodies would prepare formal decisions of the Council to that effect.*

*The Council also approved a mandate for the Commission to negotiate a trade and cooperation agreement with **Iraq**.*

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- The documents whose references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site <http://ue.eu.int>.
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the abovementioned Council Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

PARTICIPANTS

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

Belgium:

Mr Karel DE GUCHT Minister for Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Cyril SVOBODA Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Vladimír MÜLLER Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs with responsibility for EU issues

Denmark:

Mr Michael ZILMER-JOHNS State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

Mr Frank-Walter STEINMEIER Minister for Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET Minister for Foreign Affairs

Greece:

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

Spain:

Mr Alberto NAVARRO GONZÁLES State Secretary for the European Union

France:

Mr Philippe DOUSTE-BLAZY Minister for Foreign Affairs
Ms Catherine COLONNA Minister with responsibility for European Affairs

Ireland:

Mr Noel TRAECEY Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs (with special responsibility for European Affairs)

Italy:

Mr Roberto ANTONIONE State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

Mr George IACOVOU Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Eduards STIPRAIS Permanent Representative

Lithuania:

Mr Antanas VALIONIS Minister for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg:

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

Hungary:

Mr Ferenc SOMOGYI Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Etele BARÁTH Minister without portfolio responsible for European Affairs

Malta:

Mr Richard CACHIA CARUANA Permanent Representative

Netherlands:

Mr Bernard BOT Minister for Foreign Affairs

Austria:

Ms Ursula PLASSNIK Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Hans WINKLER State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Poland:

Mr Stanisław KOMOROWSKI Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Portugal:

Mr Diogo FREITAS DO AMARAL
Mr Fernando DE OLIVEIRA NEVES

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary for European Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Dimitrij RUPEL

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Eduard KUKAN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Erkki TUOMIOJA
Ms Paula LEHTOMÄKI

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Foreign Trade and Development

Sweden:

Ms Laila FREIVALDS
Mr Lars DANIELSSON

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary to the Prime Minister

United Kingdom:

Mr Jack STRAW
Mr Douglas ALEXANDER

Minister of State for Europe
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Commission:

Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER
Mr Peter MANDELSON
Mr Olli REHN

Member
Member
Member

General Secretariat of the Council:

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

The Governments of the Acceding States were represented as follows:

Bulgaria:

Mr Ivailo KALFIN
Ms Meglena KUNEVA

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister for European Affairs

Romania:

Mr Anton NICULESCU

State Secretary, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

ITEMS DEBATED

WORLD TRADE – DOHA DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The Council was briefed by the Commission on recent developments and the prospects for further progress in the current round of trade negotiations under the World Trade Organisation's Doha Development Agenda, following ministerial meetings held by a number of WTO members in London on 12-13 March.

It took note of a commitment by the Commission and the presidency to continued full transparency on any further developments in the negotiations.

RELATIONS WITH THE WESTERN BALKANS - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council welcomed the fruitful deliberations at the informal EU-Western Balkans Foreign Ministers meeting in Salzburg on 11 March 2006 as reflected in the Joint Press Statement.
2. The Council underlined its determination to fully implement the commitments given in the Thessaloniki agenda in order to master the challenges the region faces in 2006 and beyond.
3. It welcomed the Commission's Communication "The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidating stability and raising prosperity" and expressed its intention to take forward its implementation.
4. The EU will continue to assist the Western Balkan countries on their way towards the EU through practical measures to make the European perspective more tangible. In this context, the Council encouraged regional cooperation, notably the creation of a regional free trade area based on CEFTA and is looking forward to the results of the high level meeting on 6 April in Bucharest. It also looks forward to the Commission's proposals on fostering people to people contacts, including through visa facilitation in line with the common approach, as well as on adequate financial assistance.
5. The Council welcomed the decision of the European Commission to prolong the European Charter for Small Enterprises for the Western Balkans. The Council also invited other Council formations to take work forward in the fields set out in the Communication.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

1. The Council welcomed the political agreement reached on 18 March 2006 on constitutional reform. The agreement constitutes a significant step forward towards making Bosnia and Herzegovina's state institutions more functional and better able to meet European standards. The Council urged Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure that the necessary legislative steps are taken in time for the agreement to take effect for the October 2006 elections.

2. The Council welcomed the progress made on the negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina since the opening of negotiations in November 2005. It encouraged the relevant authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the newly formed government of Republika Srpska, to ensure that the country is in a position to make swift progress in the negotiations. In this context, the Council recalled that the pace and conclusion of negotiations would depend in particular on Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress in developing its legislative framework and administrative capacity, in implementing police reform in compliance with the Agreement on Police Restructuring of October 2005, in adopting and implementing all necessary Public Broadcasting legislation, and in achieving full co-operation with the ICTY.

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

1. The Council expressed its strong support for the Serbian people in their quest to come to terms with the legacy of the Milosevic regime. This will help them in moving forward towards the family of European nations, where they belong.
2. The Council recalled its conclusions of 27 February 2006 that full cooperation with the ICTY must be achieved to ensure that the SAA negotiations are not disrupted, and reiterated the urgent need for Serbia and Montenegro to take decisive action to ensure that all remaining fugitive ICTY indictees, notably Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, are brought to justice. Full cooperation with the ICTY is necessary to achieve lasting reconciliation in the region as well as an international legal obligation and a requirement to move closer toward the European Union. "

IRAQ

The Council discussed the situation in Iraq after the inaugural session of the Council of Representatives on 16 March and against the background of continued efforts to form a government of national unity.

The Council adopted a mandate authorising the Commission to negotiate a trade and co-operation agreement with Iraq.

IRAN - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"On 4 February the IAEA Board of Governors decided by an overwhelming majority that the issue of Iran's nuclear programme should be reported to the UN Security Council. The EU expresses its deep concern at Iran's continuing failure to cooperate fully with the IAEA and to take the steps necessary to re-establish international confidence in the peaceful purpose of its nuclear programme, as recorded in the Director General's report of 27 February.

The EU continues to be committed to a diplomatic solution. The Council deeply regrets that Iran has failed to implement in full the measures deemed necessary by the IAEA Board. As a result, the UN Security Council is currently considering appropriate steps. The Council believes that the Security Council should act to reinforce the authority of the IAEA. The Council calls again upon Iran urgently to meet in full the requests set out in the IAEA Board of Governors' resolution of 4 February. The Council underlines that this should include a full suspension of all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities.

The nuclear issue will remain a central and pressing concern. The Council however also underlines the necessity that Iran addresses effectively all the EU's areas of concern which include terrorism, Iran's approach to the Middle East peace process, regional issues as well as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Council welcomes the release of Akbar Ganji on 17 March. It condemns his detention and treatment while in prison and calls on the Iranian authorities to release all other prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally. The Council deplores the deterioration of the human rights situation in Iran and condemns the violence used against peaceful protesters on International Women's Day. The Council reaffirms that full respect for human rights in Iran is essential, also for progress in EU/Iran relations. The Council affirms that the EU will continue to register its human rights concerns, raising in particular the plight of Iran's persecuted human rights defenders, the situation of minorities and capital punishment.

The EU will keep all its diplomatic options under close review and will calibrate its approach in the light of Iranian declarations and actions."

BELARUS

The Council discussed the presidential election held on 19 March. After the discussion, the Presidency noted that ministers:

- had just received the preliminary conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission and agreed with its assessment that the presidential elections in Belarus were severely flawed due to arbitrary use of state power, obviously designed to protect the incumbent president, that went far beyond acceptable practice, and other shortcomings.
- had, over the last months, repeatedly called on the Belarusian authorities to abide by international standards and Belarus' commitments in the OSCE and the UN to assure a free and fair electoral process and firmly condemned the serious violation of candidates' campaigning rights, including acts of harassment, detention and violence against candidates and campaign workers.
- clearly wanted to stress once more that the EU does not want to target the Belarusian population, with which it wishes to stay engaged, and regrets the policy of self-isolation of the Belarus authorities.
- would start discussion on taking restrictive measures against those responsible for these acts, in line with the Council Conclusions of 7 November 2005 and 30 January 2006.
- had also witnessed, in the course of this election campaign, the emergence of pluralistic forces and the consolidation of a genuine Belarusian opposition as well as a politically active civil society. In very difficult circumstances and at great personal risk, opposition candidates and their supporters had managed to offer the Belarusian population a democratic alternative. Their efforts deserved the EU's recognition and support.
- urged the Belarusian authorities to allow the people of Belarus to exercise their right of assembly and freedom of expression in line with their OSCE commitments and cautioned the government not to threaten or detain those exercising their political rights in the coming days and beyond.

MIDDLE EAST

Over lunch, ministers discussed the situation in the Middle East. The Presidency informed ministers about recent meetings with Egyptian President Mubarak and Palestinian President Abbas in Vienna. High representative Javier Solana briefed ministers on his assessment of the situation taking into account the meeting of Quartet envoys in Brussels on 16 March. The President noted that ministers would return to the issue of the Middle East at their next meeting in the margins of the European Council.

The Council also met with the Prime Minister of Lebanon and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council welcomes the important and timely discussions with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. The Council welcomes the launching of the national dialogue and its initial agreements in respect of the relevant UNSC resolutions. The Council encourages the continuation of the dialogue and hopes it will contribute to political stability in the country by addressing critical issues of national concern. It reiterates its support for Lebanon's unity, stability and independence, and reminds its neighbours of their obligations to respect Lebanon's sovereignty. The EU condemns the past violent attacks on Lebanese citizens, journalists and political leaders and the ensuing loss of lives. The EU is deeply concerned about the continued intimidation and about attacks against the right to freedom of expression.
2. The Council reaffirms its full support for the UN International Investigation Commission, under Serge Brammertz, into the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, as mandated by UNSCR 1595 and 1644, and welcomes the report by Mr. Brammertz. The EU urges all parties to cooperate unconditionally with the UNIIC and hopes that light will be shed on this and other assassinations.
3. The Council reaffirms its full support for the Government of Lebanon and encourages it to urgently set up and launch the economic and political reforms programme initiated during the Core Group meeting held in New York in September 2005. The EU stands ready to support credible and effective plans for political and economic reform. The EU looks forward to the convening of the first Association Council with Lebanon. It expresses its satisfaction that the negotiations of the ENP Action Plan will start soon. The implementation of this action plan will support the reform process in the country.
4. The Council underlines the importance it attaches to the full implementation of UNSCR 1559, including disbanding and disarming of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. It encourages the Government of Lebanon to extend its authority throughout the country."

SUDAN - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council reaffirmed its support for a peaceful, democratic and prosperous Sudan based on the successful implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), and on a political solution to the conflict in Darfur.
2. The Council strongly encouraged the parties to the CPA to sustain effective and timely implementation of this landmark agreement. In doing so, the parties will be able to count on continued EU support.
3. In this context, the Council expressed its concern about the tensions that have arisen in the East of Sudan. It underscored the need for a genuine, single, transparent, comprehensive and inclusive dialogue to address the tense security situation as well as the socio-economic and political marginalisation of eastern Sudan. It called upon the Government of Sudan and the Eastern Front to rapidly reach an agreement on the modalities of such a dialogue, which should include regional stakeholders.
4. The Council reiterated its deep concern about the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in Darfur, as well as the situation of human rights. The EU and its Member States will continue to provide financial resources for humanitarian assistance. The Council strongly condemned the continuing attacks on civilians as well as the recurrent attacks on AMIS and the looting of humanitarian assets.
5. The Council welcomed the decision of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU) of 10 March and urged the parties to the conflict to implement it without delay. The Council commended the AU for having shown leadership in engaging the parties to the conflict to expedite the peace negotiations in Abuja with a view to concluding a peace agreement by the end of April 2006. In this context, it also welcomed the proposal to establish a Committee of Heads of State and Government.
6. The Council further welcomed the AU decision to extend the mandate of AMIS until 30 September 2006 and to set a framework for a transition from AMIS to a UN operation in Darfur. The AU decision will allow all stakeholders, including the EU, to assist both the AU and the UN in a successful transition.

7. The Council reaffirmed continued EU support for AMIS, together with other international partners, including through additional funding from the African Peace Facility and a donors' conference to be organised in cooperation with the AU and the UN. It welcomed Canada's intention to associate a number of Canadian police officers, deployed in support of AU mission, to the work of the EU Police Team working with AMIS.
8. The Council further welcomed the intention of the AU to strengthen AMIS in the transition period by exploiting all possibilities contained in its mandate and by implementing the recommendations made by the AU-led Assessment Mission in December 2005.
9. Recalling the constructive talks on Darfur held in Brussels on 8 March, the Council concurred with the AU that every effort had to be made to speed up the Abuja peace process and underlined its readiness to step up EU assistance in this regard. It welcomed the proposal for an enhanced ceasefire recently put forward by the AU Chief Negotiator Salim Ahmed Salim as part of a comprehensive set of compromise proposals to be tabled by the AU. It underlined the need to establish a roadmap for implementation with agreed timetables for action.
10. The Council recalled its support for sanctions against those blocking the peace process, committing human rights violations, or violating the cease-fire and the arms embargo. In this context, it will closely follow progress made in the peace negotiations in Abuja and steps taken by the parties to improve the security situation on the ground, including the cessation of hostile military flights in and over the Darfur region. The Council expressed its support for the ongoing investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC) of human rights abuses in Darfur and urged the Government of Sudan to fully cooperate with the ICC investigators."

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The Council heard a report from High Representative Solana on his visit to Kinshasa on 19 March and further discussed the EU's response to the UN request for possible EU support to MONUC during the upcoming electoral period in the DRC.

The Presidency, noting that there was general agreement on the principle of giving a positive answer to the UN's request, indicated that it would ensure that the competent Council bodies would prepare formal decisions of the Council to that effect.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

See General Affairs press release (7033/06 Presse 68).
