



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



6344/06 (Presse 46)

**PROVISIONAL VERSION**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Subject:**

**PRESS RELEASE**

2712nd Council Meeting

**General Affairs and External Relations**

**External Relations**

Brussels, 27 February 2006

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

\* Some external relations items were adopted without debate at the 2711st meeting on General Affairs (6343/06 Presse 45).

**P R E S S**

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6344/06 (Presse 46)

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**EN**

## **Main Results of the Council**

*On the **Western Balkans**, the Council noted with concern recent comments by the ICTY Chief Prosecutor about Serbia and Montenegro's unsatisfactory cooperation with ICTY. It strongly supported the recent messages delivered by the Commission in Belgrade and Sarajevo that full cooperation with the ICTY must be achieved to ensure that the Stabilisation and Association Agreement negotiations are not disrupted. It urged both Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina to take decisive action to ensure that all remaining fugitive indictees, notably Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, are finally brought to justice without delay.*

*The Council expressed deep concern at the events that followed the publication of **cartoons** in a number of European and other media. It acknowledged and regretted that these cartoons were considered offensive and distressing by Muslims across the world. It noted that the EU and its Member States would actively promote dialogue, mutual understanding and respect through a number of existing mechanisms and initiatives.*

*Ministers endorsed, against the background of the **Quartet's** appeal for measures to facilitate the work of the **interim Palestinian government**, the Commission's intention to provide additional emergency assistance as well as to authorize the (partial) release of resources from the World Bank Trust Fund.*

*The Council urged **Iran** to reinstate a full suspension of all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, called on Iran to meet in full all of the IAEA Board's requests in good time before the next Board meeting on 6 March and welcomed Russia's efforts to seek a way forward involving the offer to Iran of a financial stake in an enrichment joint venture on the territory of the Russian Federation, conditional on Iran's resumption of the moratorium on all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities.*

*In its "General Affairs" session (see press release 6343/06), the Council decided to extend the **Aceh Monitoring Mission** by a further three months until 15 June and expressed its readiness to support the African Union (AU) and the UN in a smooth transition to a UN operation in **Sudan/Darfur**, should this be agreed by the AU.*

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<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.
- 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  
Mr Didier DONFUT

Minister for Foreign Affairs  
State Secretary for European Affairs, attached to the  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Czech Republic:**

Mr Cyril SVOBODA  
Mr Vladimír MÜLLER

Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs with responsibility for  
EU issues

**Denmark:**

Mr Per Stig MØLLER

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Germany:**

Mr Frank-Walter STEINMEIER

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Estonia:**

Mr Urmas PAET

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Greece:**

Ms Dora BAKOYANNIS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Spain:**

Mr Miguel Ángel MORATINOS CUYAUBÉ

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

**France:**

Mr Philippe DOUSTE-BLAZY  
Ms Catherine COLONNA

Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Minister with responsibility for European Affairs

**Ireland:**

Mr Dermot AHERN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Italy:**

Mr Rocco Antonio CANGELOSI

Permanent Representative

**Cyprus:**

Mr George IACOVOU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Latvia:**

Mr Artis PABRIKS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Lithuania:**

Mr Oskaras JUSYS

Undersecretary, Ministry of 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

**Malta:**

Mr Richard CACHIA CARUANA

Permanent Representative

**Netherlands:**

Mr Bernard BOT  
Mr Atzo NICOLAÏ

Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Minister for European Affairs

**Austria:**

Ms Ursula PLASSNIK  
Mr Hans WINKLER

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs  
State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Poland:**

Mr Stanisław KOMOROWSKI

Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Portugal:**

Mr Fernando DE OLIVEIRA NEVES

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

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ms Mari KIVINIEMI

Minister for Foreign Trade and Development

**Sweden:**

Mr Bosse RINGHOLM

Deputy Prime Minister, with responsibility for  
Coordination and Sport

Ms Laila FREIVALDS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**United Kingdom:**

Mr Jack STRAW

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

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**Commission:**

Mr Olli REHN

Member

Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER

Member

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**General Secretariat of the Council:**

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

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The Governments of the Acceding States were represented as follows:

**Bulgaria:**

Ms Meglena KUNEVA

Minister for European Affairs

**Romania:**

Mr Anton NICULESCU

State Secretary for Public Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign  
Affairs

**ITEMS DEBATED**

**WESTERN BALKANS - Council conclusions**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

**"Western Balkans**

1. The Council took note of the report on President Barroso's and Commissioner Rehn's recent visit to the Western Balkan countries.

**Serbia and Montenegro/Montenegro**

2. The Council welcomed progress made so far by the government and the opposition in defining the modalities for the proposed referendum in Montenegro. It called on both parties to reach a rapid agreement on the remaining open issues (majority requirement, the date and the question of the referendum), thus providing the process with the necessary legitimacy. In this respect, the Council fully supported the efforts and initiatives of the HR Personal Representative, Ambassador Miroslav Lajcak.

**Serbia and Montenegro/Kosovo**

3. The Council welcomed the meeting between Belgrade and Pristina on decentralisation, held on 20-21 February in Vienna under the auspices of the UN Special Envoy, as a demonstration of the preparedness of both sides to engage constructively in the Kosovo Status process. Recalling the statement issued at the Contact Group Ministerial Meeting on 31 January 2006 the Council expressed its continued support for UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari and urged all parties to continue their engagement in this process and to maintain the spirit and the momentum of negotiations aiming to reach sustainable and practical solutions acceptable to all parties concerned on all outstanding issues such as decentralisation. The Council also reaffirmed the importance of continued and effective Standards implementation. It urged the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government to intensify their efforts to achieve in parallel with the Status process concrete and rapid progress on Standards implementation, particularly regarding the protection of minority communities.

**Cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)**

4. The Council noted with concern recent comments by ICTY Chief Prosecutor Carla del Ponte about Serbia and Montenegro's unsatisfactory cooperation with ICTY. The Council strongly supported the recent messages delivered by the Commission in Belgrade and Sarajevo that full cooperation with the ICTY must be achieved to ensure that the SAA negotiations are not disrupted. Recalling its conclusions of 3 October 2005 and of 30 January 2006, the Council urged both Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina to take decisive action to ensure that all remaining fugitive indictees, notably Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, are finally brought to justice without delay. The Council asked the Presidency and the Commission to remain in close contact with the Chief Prosecutor and to continue to keep the Council fully informed."

**VISA FEES**

The Council examined the external policy aspects of a draft decision aimed at increasing the fees charged for the administrative costs of processing visa applications.

A number of delegations expressed concerns about the potential impact of the decision and requested that the possibility of derogations be examined in specific circumstances.

The EU's legislation under the Schengen arrangements requires visa fees to correspond to the administrative cost of processing visa applications and to be revised regularly. The proposal stems from the fact that introducing biometric identifiers and the establishment of a visa information system will increase the cost of processing visa applications.

Views expressed by delegations will be taken into account in further work on the proposal with a view to enabling a decision to be taken at the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting on 27 and 28 April.

**IRAQ - *Council conclusions***

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council condemns the criminal bombing of the Holy Shrine of Ali Al-Hadi and Hassan Al-Askari in Samarra aimed at provoking sectarian strife. It condemns the subsequent retaliatory acts, including attacks on religious sites. The Council deeply regrets the resulting loss of life. The Council condemns all acts undermining the political process.

The European Union strongly supports calls by Iraqi political and religious leaders for restraint and non-retaliation and urges Iraq to come together in a spirit of dialogue and mutual respect. The Council expresses its full support for the efforts of the UN in promoting inter-communal dialogue and national dialogue. It welcomes the initiative by the League of Arab States to hold a second conference on national reconciliation with participation of all Iraqi communities.

The Council underlines that recent developments in Iraq highlight the urgent need for the formation of a government of national unity and urges all political leaders in the country to match the courage of the Iraqi people, who voted for them in impressive numbers at the elections on 15 December 2005. This display of trust by the Iraqi people in a democratic system deserves to be met by the formation of a government of national unity which will work for the political and economic reconstruction of Iraq in a spirit of reconciliation."

**REACTIONS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD TO PUBLICATIONS IN EUROPEAN AND OTHER MEDIA** - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council expresses its deep concern at the events that followed the publication of cartoons in a number of European and other media. The Council acknowledges and regrets that these cartoons were considered offensive and distressing by Muslims across the world.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right and an essential element of a democratic discourse, with an independent judiciary as a safeguard mechanism. Free media are indispensable to a free and open society and to accountable systems of government. Freedoms, however, come with responsibilities. Freedom of expression should be exercised in a spirit of respect for religious and other beliefs and convictions. Mutual tolerance and respect are universal values we should all uphold.

The Council strongly condemns all violent acts and threats against citizens and property of the European Union, of its Member States as well as of other countries. These actions cannot be justified under any circumstances. The Council welcomes the statements by those prominent Muslim scholars and religious and political leaders who have called for moderation and have spoken out against the violent actions of a minority.

The Council expresses its full solidarity with all those countries whose citizens, diplomatic or consular missions have come under attack. It recalls the special duty of states under the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic and Consular Relations to protect diplomatic agents and the premises of diplomatic and consular missions. The Council calls upon the governments that have not provided adequate protection to give a positive response to this end and to the demands for compensation made by the countries affected. The Council underlines that boycotts against individual Member States are unacceptable.

The Council welcomes the recent visit to countries in the Middle East and the Gulf by the EU High Representative and the contacts which have taken place in Vienna between the Presidency, the Foreign Minister of Denmark and Islamic leaders. These contacts, including the call for renewed dialogue in the Joint Statement by the Secretary General of the United Nations, the Secretary General of the OIC and the EU High Representative of February 7, 2006, have demonstrated how much common ground exists in this direction.

The EU and its Member States will actively promote dialogue, mutual understanding and respect through all existing mechanisms, including the Barcelona process and the Anna Lindh Foundation as well as the ASEM process. It underlines the specific need for initiatives aimed at representatives of the media as well as young people. The Council also expresses its strong support for the Alliance of Civilizations initiative launched under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey and welcomes the call for dialogue and mutual respect made at the meeting chaired by the UN Secretary-General in Doha on February 25, 2006. The Council welcomes the holding of a conference of European Imams by the Islamic Community of Austria in cooperation with the European Commission and the Presidency in Vienna on April 7, 2006.

The EU and its Member States will play an active role in the debate on these issues within the UN, the OSCE and other multilateral fora. The Council welcomes the OSCE Human Dimension meeting in Kazakhstan in June 2006 on Inter-cultural, Inter-religious and Inter-ethnic Understanding. It invites the Presidency, assisted by the HR/SG, and the Commission to continue to look into ways of working with partners and other international actors in the Muslim world, including the OIC and the Arab League, to foster tolerance as well as respect for religious and other beliefs and convictions. Particular emphasis should be given to the role that free media and NGOs can play in this regard."

**MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS**

Ministers assessed, over lunch, the situation in the Middle East. High Representative Javier Solana briefed Ministers on his visit to Israel and the West Bank. Ministers endorsed, against the background of the Quartet's appeal for measures to facilitate the work of the interim Palestinian government, the Commission's intention to provide additional emergency assistance as well as to authorize the (partial) release of resources from the World Bank Trust Fund. The President noted that Ministers would return to the issue of the Middle East at their informal meeting in March in Salzburg.

**IRAN - Council conclusions**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council welcomed the resolution adopted by the IAEA Board of Governors on 4 February with the overwhelming support of Board members. It supported the Board's decision to involve the United Nations Security Council. The Council believed that if Iran continues to fail to heed the repeated requests made in successive IAEA Board resolutions, the Security Council should now put its weight behind the Board's requests and the IAEA's efforts to resolve outstanding questions.
2. The Council regretted Iran's decision to withhold voluntary co-operation with the IAEA, contrary to the Board's requests and to Iran's earlier decision to implement the provisions of its Additional Protocol. Iran's decision to limit co-operation further increases international concerns and suspicions about Iranian intentions and makes it more difficult for the IAEA to resolve outstanding issues.
3. The European Union deplored Iran's resumption of enrichment-related activities, including enrichment at Natanz. Iran's introduction of nuclear material into centrifuges on 13 February in defiance of repeated calls by the IAEA Board of Governors and the international community is also a step in the wrong direction. The IAEA Board has repeatedly called for Iran to suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities as an essential confidence-building measure. The restoration of international confidence requires full transparency and cooperation from Iran.
4. The Council reaffirmed the EU's continued support for a diplomatic solution. It urged Iran to reinstate a full suspension of all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities. The Council called on Iran to meet in full all of the Board's requests in good time before the next Board meeting on 6 March. The Council welcomed Russia's efforts to seek a way forward involving the offer to Iran of a financial stake in an enrichment joint venture on the territory of the Russian Federation, conditional on Iran's resumption of the moratorium on all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities.
5. The EU does not question the right of Iran to the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in conformity with its obligations under the NPT, a right which the EU has consistently reaffirmed. If international concerns about Iran's programme are fully addressed, the EU would be prepared, as already stated in its August 2005 proposal, to support the development of a safe, sustainable and proliferation-proof Iranian civilian nuclear programme.

6. Recalling the European Council conclusions of 16 December 2005, which agreed on the need to keep the EU's diplomatic options under close review and continue to calibrate the EU's approach in light of Iranian declarations and actions, the Council agreed that Iran's resumption of enrichment activities is a negative development. It is time for Iran to reconsider its position on these activities and other areas of concern in order to avoid further deterioration of its relationship with the EU.
7. The recent attacks on European missions in Tehran were unjustifiable and totally unacceptable. The Council calls on Iran to protect diplomatic missions, including through proper policing, in accordance with its obligations under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.
8. The Council calls on Iran to lift all discriminatory restrictions against individual EU Member States."

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO - *Council conclusions***

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council recalls the importance of completing the transition process in the Democratic Republic of Congo which is also essential for fostering peace and stability throughout the Great Lakes region. The successful referendum of 18-19 December 2005 has demonstrated the importance the Congolese people attach to the democratic process. The forthcoming electoral process will be a key step to that effect. The Council welcomes the promulgation of the new Constitution and the adoption of the electoral law. The Council encourages the Transitional National Government, the political parties, their leaders and the civil society to work together to ensure peaceful, fair and transparent elections according to international standards which should contribute significantly to securing DRC's future as a democratic and stable country. The Council underlines that the agreed timetable of the transition, including the elections before the end of June 2006, should be respected.

The Council recalls the EU's engagement in the DRC, notably by its sustained and continued support to the transition, including the electoral process, provided through the EDF and the EC, and ESDP missions EUSEC RD Congo and EUPOL Kinshasa as well as through bilateral support by Member States.

The Council recalls its conclusions of 12 December 2005 on the importance of a stable and secure environment for the elections. This is first and foremost the responsibility of the transition government, supported by MONUC. In that context, following a request by the UN, the Council is considering how best to provide support to the UN in this endeavour. To this end, contacts with the UN and the DRC authorities are being pursued, as well as with the AU."

**OTHER BUSINESS**

– *EU-Mercosur relations*

The Council heard a presentation by the Spanish Foreign Minister on his recent visit to Latin America in connection with the forthcoming EU-LAC Summit scheduled to take place in Vienna in May. The Minister, supported by several other speakers, called in particular for progress in negotiations on an EU-Mercosur Association Agreement.<sup>1</sup>

– *Children and Armed Conflict*

The French Foreign Minister briefed colleagues on his recent visit to Uganda and Burundi together with Unicef concerning the question of child soldiers. He called in particular for urgent work to be carried out on the key issue of sustainable reintegration, for which, in line with the EU's guidelines on Children in Armed Conflict adopted in 2003, a number of EU instruments were relevant. France would host a conference on reintegration in November. The Presidency noted that work was at hand on the follow-up to the assessment of the implementation of the EU guidelines.

– *UN - Human Rights Council*

The Council briefly discussed the draft resolution on the establishment of a Human Rights Council put forward by the President of the UN General Assembly.

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<sup>1</sup> (Note: see also Council conclusions on the Commission communication on Latin America, "General Affairs" press release 6343/06).

IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL

– *EU Troika-Serbia and Montenegro ministerial meeting*

A meeting of the EU Troika with Serbia and Montenegro was held today in the margins of the Council.

**OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

**See General Affairs press release (6343/06 Presse 45).**

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