

5519/04 (Presse 26)

2559th Council meeting

- EXTERNAL RELATIONS -

Brussels, 26 January 2004

President : **Mr Brian COWEN**
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland

- * The 2558th meeting on General Affairs is the subject of a separate press release
(5518/04 Presse 25)

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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 above mentioned 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 Louis MICHEL

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark :

Mr Friis Arne PETERSEN

Permanent Secretary

Germany :

Mr Joschka FISCHER

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Federal Chancellor

Greece :

Mr Giorgos PAPANDREOU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Spain :

Ms Ana PALACIO

Minister for Foreign Affairs

France :

Mr Dominique de VILLEPIN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ireland :

Mr Brian COWEN

Mr Dick ROCHE

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and at the Department of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for European Affairs

Italy :

Mr Roberto ANTONIONE

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg :

Mr Nicolas SCHMIT

Permanent Representative

Netherlands :

Mr Bernard BOT

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Austria :

Mr Gregor WOSCHNAGG

Permanent Representative

Portugal :

Ms Teresa GOUVEIA

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Portuguese Communities Abroad

Finland :

Mr Eikka KOSONEN

Permanent Representative

Sweden :

Ms Laila FREIVALDS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

United Kingdom :

Mr Jack STRAW

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

* * *

Commission :

Mr Christopher PATTEN

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:

Czech Republic :

Mr Cyril SVOBODA

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Estonia :

Ms Kristiina OJULAND

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus :

Mr George IACOVOU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia :

Ms Sandra KALNIETE

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania :

Mr Rytis MARTIKONIS

Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for EU Affairs

Hungary :

Mr László KOVÁCS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr Joe BORG

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Poland :

Mr Włodzimierz CIMOSZEWICZ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovakia :

Mr Eduard KUKAN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovenia :

Mr Dimitrij RUPEL

Minister for Foreign Affairs

ITEMS DEBATED

NOTE: The acceding countries: (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia) align themselves on the conclusions on the Middle East, Georgia, the Western Balkans, Afghanistan and Colombia.

EFFECTIVENESS OF EXTERNAL ACTIONS – *Council conclusions*

The Council held its fourth annual policy debate on the effectiveness of the European Union's external action. It agreed that work should continue at working party level on the impact of the reform of external assistance as a follow-up to its discussion. The Council adopted the following conclusions:

“The Council held its fourth annual debate on improving the effectiveness and coherence of EU external action, based on an orientations paper from the Presidency and a progress report from the Commission on the reform of the management of external assistance.

A key theme was that, if coherence is to be achieved, aid deployment must form part of a mutually reinforcing mix of policies supporting the external objectives of the Union. The need for consistency and balance across the range of external policies must condition the Union's approach.

The three specific issues addressed by the Council were (i) EU leadership in progressing development issues multilaterally (ii) maximising effectiveness of EU external assistance and (iii) meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

Effective multilateralism : EU leadership

The EU will take a number of steps over the coming months to give substance to its commitment to effective multilateralism. It intends to strengthen its leadership role, with well thought through initiatives, strong internal co-ordination aimed at developing common positions, improved communications strategy, and genuine dialogue with partners in the developing and developed world. Enlargement will act as a catalyst for a stronger EU presence and profile.

In the development perspective, the Council agrees that:

- > the EU and its Member States will advocate that UN reform include efforts to ensure that the UN Economic and Social Council fulfils its role more effectively, particularly in the co-ordinated follow-up to the implementation of the outcome of major global conferences.

- > the EU will prepare for a strong leadership role in major upcoming international conferences, including in the current year UNCTAD XI and Barbados Plus 10 (Small Island Developing States).
- > In the international architecture, the EU will promote more coherence in trade and development policies between the UN, the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions. The EU and its Member States will also seek to ensure fully that the governance structures of the Bretton Woods institutions are capable of reflecting the concerns of developing countries.
- > Following the outcome in Cancun, the EU will continue its efforts to get the Doha process back on track and encourage WTO partners to show leadership, commitment and flexibility in pursuit of a balanced outcome. Priority should be given to the achievement of real benefits for the poorest countries, especially the least developed countries, through rapid progress on issues of importance to them. The EU should continue to urge states which have not yet joined the WTO to accede.

Maximising effectiveness of EU external assistance

To be effective, aid deployment must form part of a coherent policy mix and must also be managed to the highest standards of efficiency and accountability. The Council

- > welcomes the progress made in the reform of the management of EU external assistance and underlines the need for further progress.
- > invites the Commission, in the light of experience and best international practice, to present proposals on extending the use of standard, objective and transparent resource allocation criteria based on need and performance to all EC external assistance. The particular difficulties faced by countries in crisis or in conflict must be borne in mind.
- > notes that the Commission has made proposals for the integration of the European Development Fund (EDF) into the overall EU budget; and will discuss the matter at the February GAERC.
- > agrees that the orientation debate will in future take place in October, beginning with effect from the Netherlands Presidency in October 2004, as part of a transition to a new annual cycle to allow for better integration of budgetary planning, programming, execution and reporting processes in respect of EC external assistance.

Towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals is a key objective for the European Union and the wider international community. The commitments made by EU Member States at the Monterrey Conference reflect the Union's leadership role in international efforts to achieve the MDGs. Progress in this regard will be reviewed at the April GAERC. The Council

- > agrees that a major effort will have to be sustained during 2004 to ensure that the commitments on increasing ODA levels made by Member States at the Monterrey Conference are met.
- > recalls the commitments made at its meeting in Barcelona in advance of the Monterrey Conference, relating to the co-ordination of policies and harmonisation of procedures, and will discuss these issues at the April GAERC.
- > will ensure that the EU is well positioned to provide leadership in the international stocktaking of the MDGs in 2005, and will consider at the April GAERC inviting the Commission to take on a role in this regard similar to that which it is undertaking on the follow-up to Monterrey.
- > believes that the EU's commitment to the achievement of the MDGs should be reflected across the range of EU policies and in its decisions on financial allocations."

CHINA - Follow-up to the conclusions of the European Council

The Council noted the instruction by the European Council of 12 December 2003 to the General Affairs and External Relations Council to re-examine the question of the embargo on the sale of arms to China. It had a first discussion on the question and invited the Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) and the Political and Security Committee (PSC) to look into the matter. The Council will return to the issue.

IRAN

The Council had an exchange of views on recent developments in Iran following a briefing by High Representative Solana on his visit to the country on 12 and 13 January. HR Solana visited Iran at the Council's request in order to discuss the modalities for taking forward the EU's dialogue with Iran in all areas. Ministers stressed the importance the EU attaches to its relations with Iran. They deeply regretted the tragic earthquake in Bam and expressed their solidarity.

On confidence-building in the nuclear area, Ministers welcomed steps taken by Iran and particularly the signature and implementation of the Additional Protocol to the IAEA Safeguards Agreement and underlined the need for Iran fully to comply with the IAEA Board of Governors' November resolution. It was noted that the EU followed the political situation in Iran with great attention, and hope was expressed that this situation would be solved soon, thus allowing for free and fair elections. Finally it was noted that the Council would continue closely to follow these issues and awaited in particular the next report on Iran's nuclear programme by the IAEA Director-General, which is expected by mid-February.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS – *Council conclusions*

Ministers had an in-depth discussion on the situation in the Middle East, notably on the basis of a report by the Presidency on its recent talks in Israel and Egypt. In particular, they discussed possible ways forward to overcome the current deadlock in the Middle East Peace Process.

The Council also adopted the following conclusions on the Israel-Hizbollah Prisoner Exchange:

“The Council welcomed the announcement of an agreement on the exchange of prisoners between Israel and Hizbollah. The good offices of the German Government in promoting the exchange were commended. The Council expressed the hope that this exchange will clear the way for the resolution of all remaining issues between Israel and Lebanon concerning prisoners and the remains of prisoners on all sides.”

GEORGIA - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

“Following the inauguration yesterday in Tbilisi of President Mikheil Saakashvili, at which the European Union was represented by Mr Brian Cowen TD, President of the Council, and by Mr Heikki Talvitie, EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus, the Council agreed on the need for early action by the international community in support of Georgia. In this context, the EU expressed its readiness to contribute actively to this early action, and reaffirmed its willingness to work with the new administration in Georgia.

The EU remains committed to assisting the reform process in Georgia through the range of EU instruments and policies, in close co-operation with relevant international organisations. The Council will consider how best to do this and invites the Commission, in consultation with other donors, to examine ways of enhancing donor co-ordination. Tangible progress in combating corruption and upholding the rule of law will facilitate increased international support and engagement in Georgia's development. The EU will follow closely the outcome of the IMF and IBRD missions to Tbilisi.

The EU supports the territorial integrity and national unity of Georgia. It encourages all parties to accelerate their efforts to reach negotiated settlements to the internal conflicts of Georgia.

The EU urges the Georgian authorities to continue their efforts in preparation for the parliamentary elections due to be held on 28 March, acting upon the recommendations made by the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) which observed the presidential elections on 4 January. To this end, full use should be made of the EU and other international assistance for the elections. Member States and Commission will contribute election observers to the IEOM covering the March parliamentary elections.

The Council welcomed the very productive visit to Tbilisi of the High Representative, Javier Solana, and the continuing efforts of the EU Special Representative for the region, Heikki Talvitie. The Council agreed to keep the situation in Georgia under close review.

The Council invites the Commission, in consultation with the High Representative, and taking account of the EUSR's proposals, to bring forward a recommendation on the relationship of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Council looks forward to considering this recommendation before the end of the Irish Presidency.”

WESTERN BALKANS - *Council conclusions*

The Council examined the situation in the Western Balkans, in particular the situation in Serbia following the parliamentary elections on 28 December, and adopted the following conclusions:

“SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO / SERBIA

The Council noted the results of the Serbian parliamentary elections of 28 December 2003, which were conducted in a peaceful, free and fair manner. It urged all the democratic parties to work together to ensure the early formation of a government committed to the reform agenda and to further progress towards the EU. The Council emphasised that the EU will give its full support to the efforts of a new democratic government on this basis.

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

The Council decided to adopt a Common Position in order to restrict travel into or through the EU by individuals who actively promote or take part in violent extremist activities challenging the Ohrid Framework Agreement's basic principles of stability, territorial integrity and the unitary and multi-ethnic character of the State. The restriction would also apply to individuals who deliberately, repeatedly and illegitimately undermine and obstruct the concrete implementation of the Framework Agreement by actions outside the democratic process.

The Council reaffirmed the importance it attached to the full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement as an essential requirement for further progress towards integration into European structures. In this context, it welcomed the proposal by the Government for the adoption of key draft laws on the decentralisation process.

The Council expressed its thanks to the outgoing EU Special Representative, Ambassador Alexis Brouhns, for his vital contribution to the consolidation of peace and stability in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It expressed its full support for his successor, Mr. Soren Jessen-Petersen, who will take up the position of EUSR on 1 February 2004.

EUROPEAN UNION POLICE MISSION (EUPOL PROXIMA)

The Council welcomed the successful launch of the European Union Police Mission in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (EUPOL PROXIMA) on 15 December 2003, its second civilian policing mission and the fourth operation under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Through monitoring, mentoring and advising, EUPOL PROXIMA will support the further development of an efficient and professional police service and promote European standards of policing.

The Council welcomed the strong commitment made by the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (fYROM) to work closely with EUPOL PROXIMA in achieving a successful outcome of the mission. In this regard it also welcomed the close co-operation between EUPOL PROXIMA and international organisations present in fYROM, in particular the OSCE.

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EU POLICE MISSION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Having been informed by the Secretary-General/High Representative, the Council expressed its profound sadness at the news of the sudden death today, in Sarajevo, of Commissioner Sven FREDERIKSEN, the Head of the European Union Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUPM). Commissioner FREDERIKSEN was the commander of the first-ever ESDP operation. His leadership was key to ensuring a successful first year of operations of EUPM. The Council expressed its condolences to his family and to his colleagues in EUPM at this tragic time.”

AFGHANISTAN - *Council conclusions*

The Council examined political developments and proposals for an international conference on Afghanistan, and was briefed by High Representative Javier Solana on his visit to Kabul on 14 January. It adopted the following conclusions:

“The Council welcomed the approval of a new constitution for Afghanistan by the Loya Jirga. This represents a fundamental step in the peace process established by the Bonn Agreement and provides a foundation for a future of peace and prosperity for the Afghan people. The Council reconfirmed the European Union’s full commitment to the Bonn process and to Afghanistan’s longer-term reconstruction and development goals in the context of nation building.

The Council expressed the European Union’s firm expectation that the new momentum in the Bonn process would be used to move forward on restoring security throughout the country and on the process of demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of former combatants. Improved security will facilitate the holding of elections in 2004, as well as reconstruction and drug control efforts.

The Council supported the idea of a new international conference on Afghanistan as agreed by the Presidency in its reply to President Karzai's letter and as proposed by UNSG Annan in his latest report on Afghanistan to the Security Council, and welcomed Germany's readiness to host such a conference.

The Council commended Mr Vendrell, the EU Special Representative in Afghanistan, for his tireless efforts and agreed to return to the situation in Afghanistan in the light of the forthcoming EU Ministerial Troika mission to Kabul in mid-February.”

OTHER BUSINESS

– *Liberia*

At the request of Sweden, the Council had a brief discussion on the upcoming donors' conference for the post-conflict reconstruction of Liberia to be hosted by the UN and the World Bank in New York on 5 and 6 February 2004 and took note of Sweden's plea for generous pledges at the conference as well as continued support for the peace process.

– *Colombia – Council conclusions*

The Council heard a briefing by Commissioner Patten on his recent visit to Colombia, ahead of President Uribe's visit to Europe (8-13 February 2004).

The Council adopted the following conclusions on Colombia:

“Recalling the terms of the London Declaration of July 2003, agreed by the Colombian Government and the representatives of other Governments and international organisations present at the London Meeting on International Support for Colombia, the Council expressed its full support for the Colombian Government in its ongoing efforts to reform Colombia's institutions and to develop a fully functioning democratic state throughout the territory of Colombia, consistent with the rule of law, respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, and the welfare and safety of the citizens of Colombia. The Council noted that significant progress had been made in expanding the presence of the State in the national territory, and expressed the hope that all the institutions of the democratic State would soon be fully functional in all areas.

The Council noted progress so far on economic and political reforms designed to address existing inequalities within the country and promote sustainable development, and expressed its support for the continuation and acceleration of this process. The Council also expressed its full support for the

Colombian Government in its fight against terrorism and illegal drug production and trafficking, underlining the need in so doing to respect the rule of law, international humanitarian law, and international human rights instruments to which Colombia has subscribed.

The Council welcomed the reduction in the overall numbers of murders and kidnappings in Colombia as indicated by the recently released statistics, and hoped that this downward trend would continue.

The Council reiterated its full support for President Uribe's commitment to seek a negotiated solution to the internal armed conflict, including through direct engagement with those illegal armed groups who may be prepared to negotiate a peace agreement. The Council insisted that the illegal armed groups cease all hostilities and engage in constructive and meaningful dialogue. In particular, while acknowledging the recent release of some hostages, the Council underlined the importance of a rapid release of all remaining hostages and kidnapped persons. Such an act of humanitarian character by the illegal armed groups could be undertaken in the framework of a humanitarian agreement, and would give a positive signal of their intention to take the path of peace.

The Council reiterated the readiness of the EU to assist in reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict, within the framework of a comprehensive peace strategy. The Council also underlined the importance of the role of the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Colombia.

The Council stressed the importance of taking early and effective action against impunity and collusion, especially with paramilitary groups. The Council underlined the need for demobilisation and re-insertion into society of members of illegal armed groups to be undertaken in line with relevant international law and jurisprudence and in a manner that respects the right of the victims of the conflict to truth, justice and reparation. In this context, the Council underlined the particular importance of further amendments to the proposed amnesty law in order to ensure full consistency with Colombia's obligations under international instruments regarding human rights and international humanitarian law.

The Council expressed its deep concern regarding the still grave human rights and international humanitarian law situation in Colombia, and urged the Government urgently to address this situation, in particular by implementing without delay the specific recommendations of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), including the recommendation to publish a plan of action on human rights with a timetable for implementation. The Council recalled in particular the UNHCHR's recommendation concerning the question of the granting of judicial powers to the security forces, and hoped that further discussions by the Congress on the law which allows this could be undertaken.

Noting with deep concern the plight of internally displaced persons and inhabitants of closed-off communities, the Council confirmed the EU's willingness to work with the Colombian Government and the UN in order to ensure a focussed and co-ordinated effort to address this crisis.

The Council highlighted the perilous security conditions under which local and international NGOs and civil society organisations, including trade unions and human rights defenders, currently find themselves obliged to carry out their work in Colombia; and called on the Government to co-operate closely with all such groups to ensure their protection. The Council underlined the importance of regular constructive dialogue between the Government and civil society in the search for a peaceful solution to Colombia's problems, and welcomed recent contacts of this kind in the context of follow-up to the July 2003 London Meeting on International Support for Colombia.

Finally, the Council emphasised the importance of achieving full implementation of the London Declaration. It welcomed the work of the Group of 24 countries (London Group), which is maintaining constructive dialogue with the Colombian Government, civil society and other interested parties to this end. In line with commitments made in London, the Council exhorted the Member States and the Commission to further develop their co-operation programmes, with particular emphasis on the democratic strengthening of state institutions, the alleviation of the humanitarian crisis, the protection of human rights, the promotion of environmental activities and the development of viable alternatives to illegal drug production. In this respect, the Council expressed its satisfaction regarding the recent extension of the EU Generalised System of Preferences, including the drugs regime, as well as the launch of the second EU Peace Laboratory, both of which it expects will make a useful contribution to the achievement of that objective."
