

15536/03 (Presse 357)

2553th Council meeting

- EXTERNAL RELATIONS *-

Brussels, 9 December 2003

President : **Mr Franco FRATTINI**
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Italian
Republic

* The 2552nd meeting on General Affairs is the subject of a separate press release
(15535/03 Presse 356)

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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:

<u>Belgium</u> :			
Mr Jan DE BOCK			Ambassador, Permanent Representative
<u>Denmark</u> :			
Mr Claus GRUBE			Ambassador, Permanent Representative
<u>Germany</u> :			
Mr Wilhelm SCHÖNFELDER			Ambassador, Permanent Representative
<u>Greece</u> :			
Mr Tassos GIANNITSIS			Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs
<u>Spain</u> :			
Mr Ramon DE MIGUEL			State Secretary for European Affairs
<u>France</u> :			
Mr Pierre SELLAL			Ambassador, Permanent Representative
<u>Ireland</u> :			
Mr Brian COWEN			Minister for Foreign Affairs
<u>Italy</u> :			
Mr Franco FRATTINI			Minister for Foreign Affairs
<u>Luxembourg</u> :			
Mr Nicolas SCHMIT			Ambassador, Permanent Representative
<u>Netherlands</u> :			
Mr Bernard BOT			Minister for Foreign Affairs
<u>Austria</u> :			
Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER			Minister for Foreign Affairs
<u>Portugal</u> :			
Mr Carlos COSTA NEVES			Secretary of State for European Affairs
<u>Finland</u> :			
Ms Paula LEHTOMÄKI			Minister of Foreign Trade and Development
<u>Sweden</u> :			
Mr Sven-Olof PETERSSON			Ambassador, Permanent Representative
<u>United Kingdom</u> :			
Dr Denis MACSHANE			Minister for Europe
	*	*	*
<u>Commission</u> :			
Mr Christopher PATTEN			Member
	*	*	*
<u>General Secretariat of the Council</u> :			
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 Kriistina OJULAND

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus :

Mr George IACOVOU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia :

Mr Andris KESTERIS

Ambassador, Permanent Representative

Lithuania :

Mr Oskaras JUSYS

Ambassador, Permanent Representative

Hungary :

Mr László KOVÁCS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr Joe BORG

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Poland :

Mr Jan TRUSZCZYŃSKI

Under Secretary of State, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Slovakia :

Mr Eduard KUKAN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovenia :

Mr Dimitrij RUPEL

Minister for Foreign Affairs

ITEMS DEBATED

NOTE 1: 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 Western Balkans, Iran, Iraq, weapons of mass destruction and on Georgia and the South Caucasus.

NOTE 2: Other items (conclusions, decisions) related to external relations and the European Security and Defence Policy were adopted without debate at the "General Affairs" meeting of the Council, which is the subject of a separate press release (15535/03 - Presse 356).

WESTERN BALKANS - *Council Conclusions*

The Council reviewed the latest developments in the Western Balkans and adopted the following conclusions:

"BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Council welcomed the Commission's report on the preparedness of Bosnia and Herzegovina to negotiate a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU. It endorsed the Commission's assessment that BiH had made important progress in stabilisation, but still suffered from significant weaknesses.

The Council called upon the government of BiH to make significant progress by summer 2004 in the areas identified by the Commission as priorities for action. Any possible decision in the latter part of 2004 towards the opening of SAA negotiations will depend on BiH's own efforts and the progress achieved.

The Council confirmed its readiness to continue to support the ongoing reforms. It therefore agreed to reinvigorate the Consultative Task Force process with BiH. Other new instruments identified at the Thessaloniki EU-Western Balkans Summit will be employed as well.

CROATIA

The Council welcomed the fact that the Croatian parliamentary elections on 23 November 2003 were conducted in an orderly fashion and generally in line with international standards. In view of the presentation by the Commission of its Opinion on Croatia's application for EU membership, it called upon the new Croatian government, once formed, to make all efforts towards compliance with the Copenhagen criteria and SAP conditionality. Key in this respect are, in particular, full co-operation with the ICTY, the return of refugees and minority rights. The Council also recalled its conclusions of 13 October 2003 concerning regional co-operation. Recalling its determination to fully support the European perspective of Croatia, it noted that the speed of the country's movement towards the EU lies in the hands of Croatia.

ALBANIA

The Council recalled that a constructive political climate and a sustainable policy of reforms remain key factors for progress in the SAA negotiations and for further movement towards the EU.

The Council expressed concern about the slow pace of reforms. It called upon the Albanian government to intensify its efforts, particularly in the fight against organised crime and corruption, the functioning of democratic institutions and of the administration, and the proper implementation of legislation.

As regards the shortcomings in the local elections of 12 October and 16 November 2003, the Council recalled that the orderly conduct of fair local elections is part of the process of bringing Albania closer to the EU.

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO/SERBIA

The Council recalled its engagement in support of democratic institutions and of the reform process in Serbia. The parliamentary republican elections on 28 December 2003 will give the Serbian people a chance to demonstrate their willingness to move irreversibly on the path towards the EU. It is up to them to seize this opportunity.

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO/KOSOVO

The Council underlined the importance of structural economic reforms in Kosovo, of which privatisation is a key element. It called upon the PISG to exercise their responsibilities constructively to allow the privatisation process to resume as soon as possible.

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

The Council took note of the census results in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It welcomed the fact that they were established in accordance with international and European standards, as confirmed by the International Census Observer Mission which has closely monitored the entire process. The Census is an important part of the implementation of the Framework Agreement.

EU-WESTERN BALKANS FORUM

The Council took note of the preparations for the first meeting of Foreign Ministers of the EU-Western Balkans Forum, established by the Thessaloniki Summit, which will take place on 9 December 2003. It welcomed the results of the meeting of Ministers responsible for Justice and Home Affairs, held on 28 November 2003, within the same framework. It stressed the important role of the Forum in order to discuss issues of common concern, review progress of the countries of the region on their road to Europe, and exchange views on major developments in the EU.

STABILITY PACT FOR SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

The Council reiterated the political importance of the Stability Pact in promoting regional co-operation and thus supporting South East Europe on its path towards further European integration. It considered the new EC legal framework for financial support to the Stability Pact as a positive signal in that regard, in particular as it will provide the Pact with greater planning security. It invited the Stability Pact to continue its important role in complementing the regional co-operation element of the SAP in accordance with the Thessaloniki Agenda. "

After the Council meeting, Ministers met with their counterparts from the Western Balkans for the first Foreign Ministers meeting in the framework of the EU-Western Balkans Forum. The joint conclusions adopted on that occasion feature in doc. 15904/03.

IRAN - Council Conclusions

Over lunch, Ministers discussed developments related to the Iranian nuclear programme and EU-Iran relations. The Council subsequently adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council discussed the EU's relations with Iran in the light of the November IAEA Board of Governors meeting. It fully supported the AIEA resolution of November 26 and welcomed Iran's commitment to fully and promptly comply with its requirements, including immediate implementation pending the entry into force of an Additional Protocol to its safeguard arrangements and the suspension of all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities.

The Council reiterated the EU's readiness to explore ways to develop wider political and economic cooperation with Iran. This can only be achieved through full international confidence in Iran's adherence to non proliferation and, in particular, in the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme, as well as improvements in the areas of human rights, fight against terrorism, and Iran's position on the Middle East Peace Process.

The Council requested the High Representative to visit Teheran early in 2004 to discuss the modalities of taking forward the EU's dialogue with Iran in all areas.

The Council agreed that it would review progress in all areas of concern in the light of J. Solana's visit and the next report of the Director General of the IAEA."

IRAQ - Council Conclusions

The Council reviewed the situation in Iraq and adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council reiterates its strong condemnation of all terrorist attacks and expresses its deep solidarity with Spain for the brutal killing of seven officials and with the other countries whose nationals have been killed in recent days in Iraq. It expresses its sincere condolences to the families of the victims."

MIDDLE EAST

The Council discussed the situation in the Middle East in the light of ongoing developments, including continued work in the framework of the Quartet and initiatives from civil society, and ahead of the forthcoming donors' meeting (ad hoc Liaison Committee) in Rome on 10 December.

EUROPEAN SECURITY STRATEGY

The Council endorsed the European Security Strategy contained in the paper "A Secure Europe in a Better World". It forwarded the strategy to the European Council for adoption.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION – *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council endorsed the draft EU strategy against proliferation weapons of mass destruction and decided to recommend its adoption by the European Council. The strategy constitutes an elaboration of an element of the European Security Strategy "A Secure Europe in a Better World". It incorporates and bases itself on the Declaration as well as the Basic Principles adopted by the European Council at Thessaloniki.

The third chapter of the WMD strategy contains a list of specific measures for its implementation, which reproduces those elements of the Action Plan which are still under way, as well as complementing measures. This chapter will be subjected to regular revision and updating."

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

– *Presidency report on ESDP*

The Council endorsed the Presidency Report on ESDP and forwarded it to the European Council. The Report covers the broad range of developments in ESDP over the last six months and sets out a mandate for the incoming Presidency for further progress in this field.

OTHER BUSINESS***– Georgia and the South Caucasus – Council conclusions***

Over lunch, Ministers discussed the situation in Georgia following recent events. The Council adopted the following conclusions on Georgia and the South Caucasus:

“The European Union underlines its support for the interim political leadership in Georgia. It calls on all parties in Georgia to ensure continued calm, particularly in the run-up to coming elections and beyond. The EU expects that developments in Georgia will take place within the Constitution, and reiterates its call for Georgia's elections to be free and fair. Conscious of what is at stake in these elections for Georgia, the EU will provide significant support for preparation of the elections by the OSCE and observation of the elections by the ODIHR.

The EU reaffirms its support for the territorial integrity and national unity of Georgia, and underlines the paramount importance of maintaining stability in Georgia and the South Caucasus.

The EU is willing, together with the rest of the international community, to help Georgia in its present difficult situation through the range of EU instruments. A high level EU delegation, led by the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, will visit Georgia in the shortest possible time to give expression to EU support for the interim political leadership, and to assess how the EU may best assist the country during the current transitional period and beyond.

The EU stresses the need to redouble efforts to tackle corruption, to reform state structures, and to implement other urgently needed reforms.

EU relations with Georgia, as well as those with Armenia and Azerbaijan, are solidly based on a long-term commitment to partnership and cooperation. The EU looks forward to helping Georgia and the other countries of the South Caucasus to strengthen their relations with the European Union.”

– Sri Lanka

Over lunch, Commissioner Patten briefed Ministers on his recent visit to Sri Lanka (25-26 November).