

6294/04 (Presse 49)

2563rd Council meeting

- EXTERNAL RELATIONS -

Brussels, 23 February 2004

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

- * The 2562nd meeting on General Affairs is the subject of a separate press release
(6291/04 Presse 48)

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6294/04 (Presse 49)

CONTENTS¹

PARTICIPANTS.....	2
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ITEMS DEBATED

IRAN - <i>Council conclusions</i>	4
RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA - <i>Council conclusions</i>	5
EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY	7
MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS	8
TROIKA VISITS TO INDIA, AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN - <i>Council conclusions</i>	9
WESTERN BALKANS - <i>Council conclusions</i>	10
OTHER BUSINESS	11
– Haiti	11
– Uganda - <i>Council conclusions</i>	11
EVENTS IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL	12
– Council commemorates former Swedish Minister Anna Lindh	12
– Meeting between the EU and OSCE Troika at Ministerial level	12

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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.
- A number of External Relations items adopted without debate are reported in the press release of the 2562nd meeting (General Affairs), doc. 6291/04.

PARTICIPANTS

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

Belgium :

Ms Frédérique RIES

State Secretary for European Affairs and Foreign Affairs, deputy to the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark :

Mr Per Stig MØLLER

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Germany :

Mr Joschka FISCHER

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Federal Chancellor

Greece :

Mr Anastasios GIANNITSIS

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

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Italy :

Mr Franco FRATTINI

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg :

Ms Lydie POLFER

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Minister for the Civil Service and Administrative Reform

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 Erkki TUOMIOJA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Sweden :

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 Christopher PATTEN

Member

Mr Günter VERHEUGEN

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 Antanas VALIONIS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Hungary :

Mr Peter BALAZS

Permanent Representative

Malta:

Mr Joe BORG

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Poland :

Mr Włodzimierz CIMOSZEWICZ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovenia :

Mr Dimitrij RUPEL

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovakia :

Mr Eduard KUKAN

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 Russia, Iran, the Western Balkans and the Troika visits to India, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

IRAN - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council discussed the Iranian parliamentary elections on 20 February.
2. The Council recalled that over the last ten years Iran had made progress towards greater political freedom and that in the parliamentary elections in February 2000 the Iranian people clearly showed their desire for further reform.
3. Against that background, the Council expressed its deep regret and disappointment that large numbers of candidates were prevented from standing in this year's parliamentary elections, including many sitting members of the Majlis, thus making a genuine democratic choice by the Iranian people impossible. This interference was a setback for the democratic process in Iran. The Council expressed the hope that Iran will return to the path of reform and democratisation."

On developments in the field of Iran's nuclear programme, the Council will continue its discussion in the light of IAEA Director-General EL-BARADEI's upcoming report and of the meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors.

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"Following the conclusions of the European Council in December 2003, the Council had a thorough discussion and assessed all aspects of EU-Russia bilateral relations.

The Council reaffirms the European Union's determination to build a genuine strategic partnership with Russia based on equal rights and obligations, mutual trust and an open and frank dialogue. This partnership will encourage the respect for common values and the balanced and reciprocal promotion of interests within the framework of the PCA, including as this is enhanced by the development of the four common spaces.

The EU has a strong and genuine interest in an open, stable and democratic Russia, continuing reforms, implementing mutual and international commitments, and committed to resolving differences and building common understandings. The impending and historic enlargement of the European Union will bring the EU and Russia closer together, increase opportunities for cooperation, and strengthen our joint responsibility for promoting a European continent that is stable, democratic, prosperous and free.

The Council confirms that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) remains the essential cornerstone of the European Union's relations with Russia. It emphasises that the PCA has to be applied to the EU-25 without pre-condition or distinction by 1 May 2004. To do so would avoid a serious impact on EU-Russia relations in general. The timely extension of the PCA will allow Russia to benefit from the many advantages accruing to it from EU enlargement, including in the trade field. The EU is open to discussing any of Russia's legitimate concerns over the impact of enlargement, but this shall remain entirely separate from PCA extension.

As a further priority, the Council emphasises the importance of making the Permanent Partnership Council (PPC) operational, as decided at the St. Petersburg Summit. It looks forward to the first meeting of the PPC in Foreign Affairs Ministers' formation in April. The launching of the PPC, at which the Council has decided that the EU shall be represented in the troika format, should provide renewed impetus to the development of the strategic partnership. The PPC format will also allow ministers in other fields such as justice and home affairs, environment, energy, research, education and transport to identify their respective priorities and opportunities for cooperation, and ensure balanced and result-oriented EU-Russia cooperation. The Council underlined that full use should be made of the potential of the existing PCA structures, including at working level.

The Council agreed on the need further to develop cooperation with Russia in the security sphere, in particular to combat new common threats.

The Council expresses its determination to make EU relations with Russia more effective and mutually beneficial. In this regard, the EU will clearly identify and present its interests, objectives and priorities. It will promote increased coherence across all areas of cooperation through the adoption, when appropriate, of common positions.

Work on preparation for the EU-Russia Summit in May should now begin, in particular on the identification of concrete EU objectives and priorities. The EU and Russia have already agreed ambitious political objectives. The development, within the framework of the PCA, of the Four Common Spaces agreed with Russia in St. Petersburg should gradually reinforce and expand the partnership on a reciprocal and equal basis. The Council therefore decided that internal work on all four Common Spaces should now begin in a coherent manner with a view to reaching agreement on the main lines by the Summit in May.

The Council adopted an assessment report on EU-Russia relations and recommendations to strengthen the partnership."

EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

The Council heard a progress report from the Commission on the implementation of the Wider Europe / New Neighbourhood Policy following Council conclusions of 16 June and 13 October 2003. It noted the progress made by the Commission in preparing proposals for the first draft Action Plans that will be submitted to the Council by June. It emphasised the importance of ensuring coherence and coordination with Council policies and consistency with other foreign policy developments and requested the Permanent Representatives Committee to examine in detail a number of aspects in relation to the New Neighbourhood Policy in order to ensure that the Council is able to give the necessary guidance to further work.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

Over lunch, Ministers reviewed the latest developments in the Middle East, in the light of recent political level contacts with actors in the region, including the visit of Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei to EU institutions and various European capitals. They discussed ways to revive the peace process and to build confidence between the parties and encouraged both sides to work together towards an early meeting of Prime Ministers.

Ministers also discussed the Israeli PM's proposals to dismantle settlements in the Gaza strip and their implications. Several elements were noted in this regard: this plan should take place in the context of the road map; it should be a step towards a two-State solution; it should not involve a transfer of settlement activity to the West Bank; there should be an organised and negotiated handover of responsibility to the Palestinian Authority; and Israel should facilitate rehabilitation and reconstruction in Gaza. Ministers underlined the need for actively pursuing work in the Quartet.

Ministers also discussed recent ideas in relation to the Wider Middle East and noted that advancing the Middle East Peace Process should be central to any strategy for the wider region. It was also recalled that the Barcelona process was the cornerstone of the EU's relations with the region.

TROIKA VISITS TO INDIA, AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council welcomed the recent Troika visit to India, Afghanistan and Pakistan. It discussed the development in relations between India and Pakistan following the successful start of political talks between the two countries.

The Council welcomed the start of talks between Pakistan and India and the agreement of a timetable for the Composite Dialogue with a view to reaching a peaceful settlement between the two sides on a range of issues including Kashmir. The Council reiterated its welcome for the steps already taken by India and Pakistan to ease tensions, including the introduction of a number of confidence building measures, and called on both sides to build on the progress already achieved. The European Union is ready, at the request of the parties, to assist in any way that may be appropriate. The Council also reaffirmed its support for efforts to promote regional cooperation within the framework of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), in particular the agreement on the establishment of a South Asia Free Trade Area by 2006, and is ready to provide assistance to SAARC members and the SAARC Secretariat in this regard.

The Council noted that the forthcoming Berlin Conference on Afghanistan (31 March - 1 April) would enable the international community to reaffirm its commitment to Afghanistan's stability and development. It underlined the commitment of the EU to a common approach to the Conference and to tackling the serious issues at stake: elections, security, counter-narcotics and reconstruction as well as Human Rights, including women's rights."

WESTERN BALKANS - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO / SERBIA

The Council expressed concern at political developments in Serbia following the parliamentary elections of 28 December 2003. It emphasised the interest of the European Union in a Serbia committed to political and economic reform, the fulfilment of international obligations including full cooperation with ICTY, the fight against organised crime, and continued reconciliation and cooperation with neighbouring countries. Real progress in this direction is essential for further advances towards European integration with the full support of the European Union. The Council recalls its commitment in favour of a stable and viable state of Serbia and Montenegro.

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO / KOSOVO

The Council reiterated its full support for the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (UNSRSG), Mr Harri Holkeri, in his work to implement Security Council Resolution 1244. It looked forward to the early presentation of the standards implementation work plan.

The Council welcomed the report prepared by the High Representative, in close coordination with the Commission and in consultation with the UNSRSG, on ways and means of further enhancing the EU's contribution to these efforts. It invited the competent bodies to examine these proposals with a view to early decisions. The Council underlined that the UN-led policy of implementing standards and the EU's efforts to promote the European perspective of Kosovo are mutually reinforcing and represent parallel tracks of the same process.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Council thanked the SG/HR for his "Report on a possible EU deployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina" following SFOR. The Council invited the SG/HR, in close consultation with the Presidency, to ensure expeditious follow-up with a view to the development of a General Concept for early consideration by the PSC. The Council underlined the importance of a comprehensive and coherent EU approach to BiH. It stressed the importance of agreement between the EU and NATO on respective responsibilities in BiH. Preparatory work should be put in hand immediately in close consultation with NATO, while keeping the BiH authorities fully involved."

OTHER BUSINESS

– *Haiti*

At France's request, Ministers discussed the latest developments in Haiti.

– *Uganda - Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council condemned the vicious massacre of 192 civilians on 21 February in Barlonya, northern Uganda, carried out by the "Lord's Resistance Army". The use of artillery, assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades on a camp of displaced civilians was an outrage. The Council has requested EU Heads of Mission in Kampala to report on the situation."

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EVENTS IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL

– *Council commemorates former Swedish Minister Anna Lindh*

A plaque was unveiled during the Council's session to commemorate Anna Lindh (1957–2003), who was Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1998 to 2003.

The plaque, placed in one of the Council's main meeting rooms in the Justus Lipsius building, which will now be known as the Anna Lindh room, was unveiled by the President of the Council Brian COWEN (*see press release 6676/04*).

– *Meeting between the EU and OSCE Troika at Ministerial level*

In the margins of the Council on 23 February 2004, the EU Troika (the Irish Foreign Minister Brian COWEN, High Representative Javier SOLANA, Foreign Minister Ben BOT of the Netherlands, and Commissioner Chris PATTEN) met with the OSCE Troika (Chairman-in-Office Foreign Minister Salomon PASSY of Bulgaria, previous CiO - the Netherlands, incoming CiO-Slovenia, and the OSCE Secretary-General Ambassador Jan KUBIS) for the regular meeting between the EU and the OSCE that takes place once each EU Presidency at Ministerial level. The EU and the OSCE discussed issues of shared interest: South Caucasus, Belarus, Moldova, and Western Balkans including ESDP operations.

The importance of close EU-OSCE cooperation was stressed in particular in conflict resolution and conflict prevention. On Belarus and Moldova, both sides exchanged views on the current situation and on future steps. The European Union and the OSCE discussed the latest developments in Georgia and considered how to enhance their respective initiatives in the South Caucasus region.

The European Union informed the OSCE about the two ongoing EU Police Missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and expressed appreciation for the strong cooperation in the field.