



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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PRESS RELEASE

2971st Council meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

External Relations

Brussels, 27 October 2009

President

Mr Carl BILDT

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

P R E S S

Main results of the Council

*The Council discussed the situation in **Afghanistan and Pakistan**, in particular how the EU should further engage in the region. Following the debate, it adopted conclusions and an action plan which prioritise EU policies and describe how to implement them.*

*As regards **Guinea**, the Council adopted measures targeting the members of the NCDD (National Council for Democracy and Development) and individuals associated with them, who are responsible for the violent crackdown or the political stalemate in the country. The Council also decided to impose an arms embargo.*

*Furthermore, the Council decided not to renew the remaining restrictive measures with regard to **Uzbekistan** set out in common position 2008/843/CFSP with a view to encouraging the Uzbek authorities to take further substantive steps to improve the rule of law and the human rights situation on the ground.*

CONTENTS¹

PARTICIPANTS.....	5
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ITEMS DEBATED

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN - <i>Council conclusions</i>	7
WESTERN BALKANS	8
MIDDLE EAST	9
SRI LANKA - <i>Council conclusions</i>	10
OTHER ITEMS	13
IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL.....	13

¹

- 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.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- 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 Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED*EXTERNAL RELATIONS*

–	Guinea - <i>Council conclusions</i>	14
–	Uzbekistan - <i>Council conclusions</i>	15
–	Great Lakes - <i>Council conclusions</i>	16
–	Yemen - <i>Council conclusions</i>	18
–	EU-Indonesia partnership and cooperation agreement	20
–	Human rights dialogue with Indonesia - <i>Council conclusions</i>	21
–	Sahel - <i>Council conclusions</i>	21
–	Temporary reception of certain Palestinians	22
–	Relations with Ukraine - Association agenda	22
–	EU-Syria association agreement	22
–	EU-Iraq cooperation agreement	23

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

–	Consultations with Niger	23
–	European development fund for 2009	24

APPOINTMENTS

–	Committee of the Regions	24
–	European Economic and Social Committee	24

PARTICIPANTS

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

Belgium:

Mr Yves LETERME
Mr Olivier CHASTEL

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary for European Affairs

Bulgaria:

Ms Rumiana JELEVA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Jan KOHOUT
Mr Štefan FÜLE

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

Denmark:

Mr Per Stig MØLLER

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

Mr Frank-Walter STEINMEIER
Mr Günter GLOSER

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

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ireland:

Micheál MARTIN
Mr Dick ROCHE

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

Greece:

Mr Dimitris DROUTSAS

Alternate Minister for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr Miguel Ángel MORATINOS
Mr Diego LÓPEZ GARRIDO

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
State Secretary for the European Union

France:

Mr Bernard KOUCHNER
Mr Pierre LELLOUCHE

Minister for Foreign and European Affairs
State Secretary with responsibility for European affairs

Italy:

Mr Franco FRATTINI

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

Mr Marcos KYPRIANOU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Māris RIEKSTIŅŠ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Vygaudas UŠACKAS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg:

Mr Jean ASSELBORN

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and
Immigration

Hungary:

Mr Péter BALÁZS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr Tonio BORG

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Netherlands:

Mr Maxime VERHAGEN
Mr Frans TIMMERMANS

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for European Affairs

Austria:

Mr Michael SPINDELEGGER

Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Poland:

Ms Grazyna BERNATOWICZ

Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Portugal:

Mr Luis AMADO

State Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Romania:

Mr Bogdan MAZURU

State Secretary for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Samuel ŽBOGAR

Mr Mitja GASPARI

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Minister without Portfolio, responsible for Growth and European Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Miroslav LAJČÁK

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Alexander STUBB

Ms Astrid THORS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Minister for Migration and European Affairs

Sweden:

Mr Carl BILDT

Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖM

Mr Frank BELFRAGE

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Minister for European Affairs

State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

United Kingdom:

Mr David MILIBAND

Mr Chris BRYANT

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Minister of State for Europe and Parliamentary Under-

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Commission:

Mr Olli REHN

Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER

Mr Paweł SAMECKI

Member

Member

Member

General Secretariat of the Council:

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP]

ITEMS DEBATED**AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN - Council conclusions**

The Council discussed the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the future of EU engagement in the region.

Following the debate, the Council adopted conclusions ([14576/09](#)) and an action plan for strengthening the EU's engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan ([14064/09](#)).

The plan is intended to rationalise the EU's approach, prioritise policies and describe how to implement policies in the region. It will prepare the EU for co-operation with the incoming Afghan government and with Pakistan.

[Council conclusions and Action plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan.](#)

WESTERN BALKANS

Over dinner Ministers held an exchange of views on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including in the light of meetings held in Camp Butmir on 8-9 and 20-21 October with seven political party leaders and under joint EU-US chairmanship.

The Council invited the leadership of BiH to seize this opportunity, the momentum created by the talks and to continue with the dialogue.

It called on the leaders to take greater responsibility, reminding them that compromises are needed to secure BiH's future in the EU and NATO. The Council stressed the continued commitment of the EU to help and work with local political leaders to move BiH forward towards the EU.

MIDDLE EAST

Following a briefing by High Representative Javier Solana on his recent visit to the region, the Council held an exchange of views on the situation in the Middle East.

The Council focused its discussion on the political situation, the situation on the ground and a possible EU contribution to implementation of a future peace agreement in the Middle East.

SRI LANKA - Council conclusions

The Council examined the situation in Sri Lanka, especially as regards the humanitarian crisis and internally displaced persons still detained in camps.

It adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The EU has continued to keep the situation in Sri Lanka under close attention and, as stated before, wishes to engage with the Government of Sri Lanka in a meaningful dialogue towards a new relationship in which both sides seek to cooperate to resolve progressively the principal issues of concern. These include ensuring that the internally displaced persons (IDP), of whom there are believed to be more than a quarter of a million detained in closed camps have freedom of movement, are able to return to their homes without delay, that conditions inside the camps should fully comply with international standards, and that the Government of Sri Lanka and all communities in Sri Lanka make concrete efforts to overcome the divisions of the past and to move on to genuine reconciliation. Without such reconciliation, there can be no return to long-term security or prosperity.
2. The EU is particularly concerned by the continuing humanitarian crisis and the unacceptable situation for the IDPs still detained in closed camps. Indiscriminate detention of IDPs in Sri Lanka is a clear violation of international law. There is an urgent need for all IDPs remaining in the camps to be granted freedom of movement as well as full and unimpeded access to them by humanitarian actors, including for registration purposes, in order to provide humanitarian aid and protection. The IDP camps must be transferred to civilian authority. The EU urges the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure that conditions in the camps in all respects are in accordance with internationally accepted standards. Overcrowding and lack of possibility to ensure the health and safety of the IDPs continues to be a source of serious concern. The monsoon season lends particular urgency to the situation.

3. The EU stresses the right to voluntary, safe and dignified return for all IDPs. It is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that the human rights and other constitutional rights of the IDPs are fully respected. All IDPs should be able to leave the camps when they wish and it should be possible for those who are able to find refuge with families and friends, or who are able to return to their homes in areas where demining is not required, to do so immediately. It is particularly important to ensure that people, and especially children, in the camps are reunited with their families. It is not acceptable that a proportion of those IDPs who have been able to return have not in fact been allowed to go back to their homes but have been placed in new camps which are also closed. The EU supports the call of the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator for the government to present an overall plan for the IDP return process, which should be transparent and coherent, and based on the above fundamental humanitarian principles. The EU welcomes reports of a recent increased rate of return of IDPs and hopes this will continue.
4. The EU welcomes the recent high level visits of the UN to Sri Lanka. It expresses its support for strengthened UN involvement in Sri Lanka, including as regards its coordination, protection and advocacy role.
5. As part of a dialogue, the EU stands ready to support projects for the return of IDPs. However, for such projects to be successful, it is important that they be carried out under certain conditions. These include freedom of movement for returnees, close cooperation with civilian local authorities to ensure that the returnees have sustainable livelihoods, and government support for those organisations who are implementing the projects, including the delivery of visas and unimpeded access. The EU underlines that support for reconstruction and development in the East and the North shall be based on progress in fulfilment of the above.

6. It is essential to put an end to impunity and to all human rights violations. The EU remains seriously concerned with continuing reports of abductions, disappearances and extra-judicial killings. The EU is also gravely concerned about reports on severe harassment of journalists, restrictions on freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Sri Lanka. The EU urges the government to move as soon as possible towards lifting the Emergency Regulations and limiting the special powers conferred by the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Likewise, the EU repeats its call for possible violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law by all actors to be subject to independent and credible inquiry. The EU believes that accountability is integral to the process of reconciliation.

The Council notes that the Commission recently completed its report into whether Sri Lanka has implemented three UN human rights conventions, which is required in the context of GSP+, and concluded that they have not been effectively implemented. The EU will decide what further steps to take in accordance with the GSP+ regulation. In parallel, the EU will maintain a dialogue with Sri Lanka on the steps necessary to address the problems highlighted by the Commission's investigation, in order to effectively implement the conventions.

7. Genuine reconciliation requires an inclusive political process which addresses the legitimate concerns of all communities in Sri Lanka. In this respect, the EU stands ready to support the Government and all other actors in Sri Lanka in their efforts to move forward with such a process immediately. "

OTHER ITEMS

The Council discussed the situation in the **Republic of Moldova**, following a briefing by the presidency on a EU troika visit to the country on 16 October.

It expressed commitment to supporting the Republic of Moldova's reform efforts and reiterated the EU's readiness to start negotiations on a new EU-Moldova agreement, replacing and going beyond the current partnership and cooperation agreement. The negotiating mandate was adopted in June, and the Commission is preparing to launch negotiations shortly.

At the request of the Italian delegation, the Council discussed **freedom of religion**.

IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL

- Cooperation Council Georgia - European Union (15021/09),
- Cooperation Council Azerbaijan - European Union (15022/09),
- Cooperation Council Armenia - European Union (15023/09),
- 29th Quadripartite meeting between the Council of Europe and the European Union (15129/09).

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Guinea - Council conclusions

The Council adopted a common position imposing restrictive measures against the Republic of Guinea, following the violent crackdown by security forces on political demonstrators on 28 September and the subsequent violation of human rights ([14697/09](#)).

The restrictive measures are composed of an arms embargo and a visa ban aimed at preventing the entry into EU territory of members of the National Council for Democracy and Development (NCDD) and individuals associated with them who are responsible for the violent repression or the political stalemate in the country.

The Council will keep the restrictive measures under constant review. The common position will be published in the Official Journal on 28 October.

The EU has urged all relevant actors in the Republic of Guinea to take immediate action to restore the rule of law and put the country back on the path towards constitutional rule and democracy.

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- “1. The Council strongly condemns the violent crackdown on unarmed civilians on 28 September in Conakry, which resulted in gross violations of human rights, including many deaths, injuries and rape. The Council remains seriously concerned about the situation in Guinea and calls on the CNDD authorities to refrain from further violence. It welcomes the decision by the UN Secretary-General to establish an international commission of inquiry to investigate the incidents of 28 September. The EU looks forward to, and will take account of, the results of the commission.
2. The Council commends the strong and coordinated international efforts taken by ECOWAS and the AU to restore rule of law in Guinea and reiterates its support for the facilitator, President Blaise Compaoré, and the work of the International Contact Group on Guinea. The Council also welcomes the outcome of the ECOWAS Summit on 17 October, its call for a new transitional authority and its decision to impose an arms embargo on Guinea as well as its intention to work with the AU on a regime of targeted sanctions against individuals.

3. The Council has decided to adopt measures targeting the members of the CNDD and individuals associated with them, responsible for the violent crackdown or the political stalemate in the country. The Council has also decided to impose an arms embargo on Guinea.
4. The Council underlines the need for a continued coordinated response from the international community.”

Uzbekistan - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- “1. The Council notes that since the adoption of the EU Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia in May 2007, the dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Uzbekistan have acquired a new scope and quality. The EU reiterates its readiness to continue to engage comprehensively with Uzbekistan and recalls its position to that effect as set out in previous Council Conclusions. At the same time, the EU remains seriously concerned about the human rights situation in Uzbekistan, and encourages the Uzbek authorities to implement fully its international obligations in this area.
2. The Council recalls that restrictive measures were originally imposed on Uzbekistan following the Andijan events of May 2005. Bearing in mind its Conclusions of 13 October 2008, the Council urges Uzbekistan to release all imprisoned human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience, to allow unimpeded operation of non-governmental organisations in the country, including Human Rights Watch, to cooperate fully with all relevant UN Special Rapporteurs, to guarantee freedom of speech and of the media, to proceed with the implementation of conventions against child labour, and to fully align its election processes with OSCE commitments, ODIHR recommendations and other international standards for democratic elections, especially with a view to the Parliamentary elections in 23 December 2009.
3. The Council welcomes the commitment of Uzbekistan to work with the EU on a range of questions relating to human rights and the rule of law, and notes the positive steps taken in Uzbekistan over the last years. These include the release of some human rights defenders, the resumption of ICRC prison visits, the abolition of the death penalty, efforts to improve detention conditions, the introduction of *habeas corpus*, the ratification of conventions against child labour, progress in the implementation of certain OSCE commitments as well as as Uzbekistan’s stated willingness to work more closely with that organization, continuation of judicial reform, the active participation of Uzbekistan in the EU Rule of Law Initiative for Central Asia and the consolidation of the dialogue on human rights between the EU and Uzbekistan.

4. The Council encourages Uzbekistan to continue its reforms in the fields of human rights, democratisation and the rule of law, and remains ready to assist the Uzbek authorities in their efforts through cooperation programmes and dialogue, in particular in the framework of the Cooperation Council, the dialogue on human rights and the Rule of Law Initiative.
5. With a view to encourage the Uzbek authorities to take further substantive steps to improve the rule of law and the human rights situation on the ground, and taking into account their commitments, the Council decides not to renew the remaining restrictive measures set out in the Common Position 2008/843/CFSP.
6. The Council will closely and continuously observe the human rights situation in Uzbekistan. Within a year, the External Relations Council will discuss and assess progress made by the Uzbek authorities and the effectiveness of EU-Uzbek cooperation. While reaffirming the EU's readiness to strengthen its relations with Uzbekistan, the Council notes that the depth and quality of the dialogue and cooperation will depend on Uzbek reforms and progress in the areas mentioned above."

Great Lakes - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council welcomes progress made in the African Great Lakes Region by significantly improved bilateral diplomatic relations between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda. It underlines the importance of a consolidation of peace and stability in Eastern DRC and calls again upon the DRC and Rwanda to fully implement the Nairobi and Goma peace agreements as well as the Ihusi agreement of 23 March 2009.
2. The Council remains deeply concerned by the severe humanitarian situation in Eastern DRC, caused by attacks and atrocities carried out by the FDLR and the LRA, but in many cases also by the Congolese army, FARDC, against the local population during Kimia II and Rudia II operations. The Council condemns in particular the ongoing recruitment of child soldiers and the wide spread sexual violence. It urges all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and human rights, including the protection of civilians. The Council reiterates its support for MONUC.
3. The Council calls on the Government of the DRC to ensure without exception that those responsible for violations of international law, including human rights and international humanitarian law, are held accountable. Timely vetting of FARDC commanders and soldiers is of crucial importance in this respect. The Council reiterates its full support for the International Criminal Court activities in the region and calls on the Government of the DRC to cooperate with the Court, particularly with regard to the arrest and surrender of Bosco Ntanganda to the ICC.

4. The Council welcomes President Kabila's 'zero tolerance campaign' against sexual violence, as an important step to address the issue of impunity. The EU is prepared to support the Congolese authorities and other international organizations in a comprehensive approach to fight sexual and gender based violence.
5. The Council is strongly committed to the full implementation of UNSCR 1804 and 1857, and has accordingly adopted restrictive measures on the DRC against FDLR, their leaders in Europe and other armed groups. Furthermore, other concrete measures are being considered within the EU inter alia to tackle FDLR.
6. The Council is concerned by the continuing involvement of the FDLR and other armed groups, but in many cases also by the FARDC, in the illegal trade of minerals and other natural resources in Eastern DRC. It encourages the Task Force on illegal exploitation of natural resources to make concrete proposals for action by the international community. The Council stresses the need for increased cooperation between national and local authorities to tackle cross border criminal activities.
7. The Council states that security sector reform will remain a key priority for the EU in the DRC, including through the work carried out by the two EU security sector reform missions in the DRC and by the European Commission. The Council underlines the importance of coordination and collaboration with MONUC, other relevant actors and a firm ownership by the Congolese Government in this regard. The Council stresses the importance of disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration, repatriation and resettlement and welcomes the progress made so far as part of the comprehensive effort against armed groups, including the FDLR.
8. The Council urges the Congolese authorities to fulfill their commitment to organise and ensure financing for the planned local elections. The EU stands ready to continue supporting the electoral process. Governance problems, lack of transparency and violations of civil and political rights constitute serious obstacles to the democratization process and have to be addressed by Congolese authorities.
9. The Council calls on the LRA to honour its commitment to sign the final peace agreement. It insists on the necessity of a comprehensive approach for a solution to LRA related problems, including the protection of civilians, in close cooperation with UN peacekeeping missions in the region and other international partners. The Council underlines the importance of the Government of Uganda implementing all applicable provisions of the Juba Peace Agreements.

10. The Council expresses its concern over September's riots in Kampala and urges the Ugandan Government to resolve any political disputes through peaceful dialogue and democratic institutions. The Council also urges the Government to do its utmost to assure that there will be a level playing field in the run up to the general elections of 2011 and that these elections will be free, fair and transparent.
11. The Council welcomes significant progress in the Burundian peace process and the creation of the Partnership for Peace in Burundi. The Council urges the Burundian Government to do its utmost to organise general elections in 2010 that are free, fair and transparent, and guarantee the independence of the National Electoral Commission (CENI) and the necessary space for political parties. The EU will continue to play a key role in the Political Directorate.
12. The Council recognises the role played by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries for contributing to peace and bringing about socio-economic development in the region.
13. The Council will continue to follow closely the developments in the Great Lakes region and calls upon all actors to adhere to the ongoing peace processes.”

Yemen - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- “1. The European Union reaffirms its support for a unified, stable, democratic and prosperous Yemen and recognises the political efforts made by the Government of Yemen in this regard. The stability of Yemen is crucial for the people of Yemen and for the region as a whole. In this context, the Council is deeply concerned by the deteriorating security, political and economic situation across the country. It underlines the importance of a comprehensive approach to address the security, political and economic challenges and reiterates its readiness to support the Government of Yemen.
2. The Council stresses that the Government of Yemen is responsible for protecting the peace and security of all its citizens within its territory. In this regard, the European Union is concerned by the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in northern Yemen, which has caused an increasing number of civilian casualties and of internally displaced people.

3. The European Union reiterates its call for an immediate ceasefire in Sa'dah. The EU considers that there is no military solution for the crisis in the area. The Council calls on the Government of Yemen to open a process of dialogue with all parties. In this respect, the Council insists on the obligation to respect human rights and international humanitarian law. It particularly recalls the necessity to take all measures necessary to protect civilians and to allow civilians wishing to escape from the conflict to reach places of safety, to facilitate access for the UN and NGOs to areas where internally displaced are gathered and to urgently allow emergency medical and humanitarian relief to reach those internally displaced. Everything possible must be done to ensure that humanitarian personnel, facilities and vehicles are spared the effects of the fighting.
4. The Council regrets that the ruling party and the opposition failed to reach consensus over the holding of elections in 2009 and underlines the importance to hold elections in 2011. The European Union encourages all political parties to implement their agreements setting out the measures required to improve the electoral system and deepen democracy through strengthening the role of the parliament and parliamentary groups. In this context, the European Union calls on all political parties to seriously consider the recommendations, in particular those related to the electoral law, by the EU Elections Observation Mission following the democratic 2006 presidential and local elections. The EU reiterates its willingness to support the process of strengthening democracy in Yemen.
5. The Council calls upon the Government of Yemen to reinvigorate the national political and economic reform process, as set out after the 2006 international donor conference. The EU will continue to accompany Yemen on this difficult reform path and offer its support. In this regard, the Council welcomes the Gulf Co-operation Council's readiness to continue to develop its relations with the Government of Yemen.
6. The Council calls on the Government of Yemen to increase efforts to ease tensions by establishing a comprehensive political dialogue. The European Union urges the Government of Yemen to address longstanding grievances and their root causes through a negotiated, political settlement involving all regions and all elements of Yemeni society.
7. The European Union recalls the longstanding and continuing efforts of Member States and the European Community to address the dire humanitarian situation and to provide development assistance and to address through a focus on state building and key reforms, the most important development challenges. It will continue to work closely with other regional and international partners to provide targeted and co-ordinated assistance to the Government of Yemen and to maximise the impact of development work in the country under Yemeni leadership. In this context, the Council underlines the European Union's determination to strengthen donor co-ordination in order to promote aid effectiveness in line with agreed international principles.

8. The EU will consider stepping up its comprehensive assistance towards Yemen, especially on security-related matters including in the fields of counter-terrorism, territorial and border control and small arms and light weapons (SALW). The EU will explore possibilities as regards the external dimension of Yemen's challenges, including a dialogue with countries in the region on their assistance to Yemen in the fields of migration, counter-terrorism and piracy.
9. The Council will continue to monitor closely the situation and reiterates its readiness to support the Government of Yemen in addressing the challenges ahead."

EU-Indonesia partnership and cooperation agreement

The Council adopted a decision approving the signing of a framework agreement on partnership and cooperation with Indonesia ([14028/09](#) and [14032/09](#)).

Under the agreement, and with a view to strengthening bilateral relations, both sides undertake to hold a comprehensive dialogue and promote further cooperation in all sectors of mutual interest. Efforts will in particular be aimed at establishing cooperation:

- in all trade and investment-related areas of mutual interest;
- on migration issues, smuggling and trafficking in human beings;
- on human rights and legal affairs;
- in countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and
- in combating terrorism and transnational crimes.

Human rights dialogue with Indonesia - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

“The Council recalls the adoption in 2001 of the European Union Guidelines on human rights dialogues, revised in 2008.

The Council recognizes the importance of strengthening the existing relationship between the EU and Indonesia, with a view to enhancing cooperation, and welcomes the common will to consolidate, deepen and diversify their relations in the area of human rights.

The Council endorses the establishment of a human rights dialogue with Indonesia and looks forward to the forthcoming launch of the dialogue.”

Sahel - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- “1. The Council expresses its concern over the security situation in parts of the Sahel region, in particular in Mauritania, Mali and Niger. The Council recognizes the serious challenges that the governments of the region face and the need for: strengthening the presence of the State, fostering development and good governance, combating trafficking of arms, drugs and persons and addressing the impact of climate change. Recent events indicate that the region runs the risk of becoming a safe haven for terrorist networks and activities. This situation constitutes first and foremost a serious threat to the Sahel region and its population, but also to other regions, including Europe.
2. In close coordination with the governments of the region and in support of the Sahel States’ efforts to step up their engagement and cooperation to meet these challenges, the EU is developing a comprehensive, regional approach focusing on development, security, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. In this context, the EU encourages a strengthened intra-regional dialogue.
3. The Council stresses the need for urgent action, aimed at reinforcing the capacities of the Sahel States. The EU is exploring ways to engage further in the region with the view to making use of EU instruments in a strategic manner, as a first step examining options for action in Mali on the basis of the EU mission in July 2009.
4. The Council underlines that EU engagement will be accompanied by a thorough political dialogue with relevant Sahel States and other key actors.”

Temporary reception of certain Palestinians

The Council adopted a common position extending for one year the validity of national permits allowing Palestinians evacuated from Bethlehem following the siege of the Church of the Nativity by Israeli forces in 2002 to stay in the EU ([13984/09](#)).

This decision follows an assessment of implementation of common position 2002/400/CFSP.

For more information see press release [9017/02](#)

Relations with Ukraine - Association agenda

The Council adopted a decision with a view to approval by the EU-Ukraine Cooperation Council of a recommendation on implementation of the EU-Ukraine association agenda.

The association agenda serves the dual purpose of setting out steps in the preparation of an association agreement and providing a broader framework for achieving political association and greater economic integration of Ukraine with the EU.

A joint committee, to be set up by the Cooperation Council, will review progress in implementing the association agenda as well as future priorities and any necessary adjustments.

The EU and Ukraine are currently negotiating an association agreement, including a free-trade area.

EU-Syria association agreement

The Council adopted a decision approving the signing of a Euro-Mediterranean association agreement with Syria ([9921/09](#)).

The aims of the agreement are:

- to develop exchanges and foster balanced economic and social relations, in particular through dialogue and cooperation intended to enhance prosperity and economic and social development in Syria;

- to establish conditions for the progressive liberalisation of trade in goods, services and capital;
- to encourage cooperation both within a Euro-Mediterranean framework and at sub-regional level through integration between Syria and its regional partners;
- to provide an appropriate framework for political dialogue allowing the development of closer political relations;
- to promote cooperation in the economic, social, cultural and financial fields, as well as other areas which might be of mutual interest.

Pending its formal conclusion, certain provisions of the agreement will be applied on a provisional basis.

EU-Iraq cooperation agreement

The Council adopted a decision amending directives for the negotiation of a partnership and cooperation agreement with Iraq with a view to enhancing the status of the future agreement.

On 23 March 2006, the Council authorised the Commission to negotiate a trade and cooperation agreement with Iraq and issued negotiating directives in this regard.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Consultations with Niger

The Council agreed to invite the authorities of Niger for consultations under articles 9 and 96 of the ACP-EC partnership agreement (Cotonou agreement) ([14579/09](#)).

On 4 August 2009, the President of Niger, Mr Mamadou Tandja, disregarding the opinion of the constitutional court, held a referendum on a new constitution that would allow him to remain in office following the end of his second five-year term. The EU considered that this referendum and the process that led to it were violations of the constitution and a breach of the essential elements of the Cotonou agreement, to which Niger is a party.

The aim of the consultations is to give the Niger authorities an opportunity to present proposals for ending the crisis in their country, and to allow the EU to judge whether and how it could support initiatives favouring respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law.

The consultations are due to take place in Brussels, no later than 30 days after the invitation.

European development fund for 2009

The Council adopted a decision fixing the financial contributions to be paid by the member states contributing to the European development fund as regards the third instalment for 2009 ([14653/09](#)).

APPOINTMENTS

Committee of the Regions

The Council adopted a decision appointing Mr Bernard SOULAGE, vice-président du Conseil régional de Rhône-Alpes as a member of the Committee of the Regions for the remainder of the current term of office, which runs until 25 January 2010: .

European Economic and Social Committee

The Council adopted a decision appointing as members of the European Economic and Social Committee for the remainder of the current term of office, which runs until 20 September 2010:

- Mr Stefano PALMIERI, Responsabile dell'area di ricerca Sviluppo locale e Politica industriale dell'IRES CGIL - Istituto di Ricerche Economiche e Sociali Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (Group II - Employees Group, and
- Ms J.A. van den Bandt-Stel, permanent gedelegeerde VNO-NCW te Brussel (Group I - Employers' Group).
