



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



5463/07 (Presse 7)

## **PRESS RELEASE**

2776th Council meeting

### **General Affairs and External Relations**

## **EXTERNAL RELATIONS**

Brussels, 22 January 2007

President      **Mr Frank-Walter Steinmeier**  
Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany

\* Some external relations items were adopted without debate at the meeting on General Affairs (5462/07).

# **P R E S S**

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Rue de la Loi 175 B – 1048 BRUSSELS Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 8716 / 6319 Fax: +32 (0)2 281 8026  
[press.office@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:press.office@consilium.europa.eu) <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/Newsroom>

5463/07 (Presse 7)

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**EN**

## Main Results of the Council

*The Council adopted negotiating directives for a new enhanced agreement between the European Union and **Ukraine**. Negotiations are due to be launched at the EU Troika - Ukraine ministerial meeting on 6 February 2006 in Kiev.*

*The Council welcomed the peaceful and orderly conduct of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of **Serbia** on 21 January. It took note of the preliminary election results which indicate a clear majority for reform orientated political parties and called for the speedy formation of a government committed to Serbia's European course and prepared to tackle the challenges ahead in a spirit of constructive cooperation with the international community.*

*On **Iran**, the Council welcomed the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1737 of 23 December 2006 and called on all countries to implement it in full and without delay. To ensure effective implementation at EU level while remaining consistent with EU policy, and recalling the EU policy not to sell arms to Iran, ministers agreed that the EU should prevent the export to and import from Iran of the goods on the NSG and MTCR lists; ban transactions with and freeze the assets of individuals and entities covered by the criteria in the resolution; ban travel to the EU of the individuals covered by these criteria; and take measures to prevent Iranian nationals from studying proliferation sensitive subjects within the EU.*

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**OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

*See 5462/07.*

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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://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 abovementioned Council Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

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

### **Belgium:**

Mr Karel DE GUCHT  
Mr Didier DONFUT

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

### **Bulgaria:**

Mr Ivailo KALFIN

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

### **Czech Republic:**

Mr Karel SCHWARZENBERG

Minister for Foreign Affairs

### **Denmark:**

Mr Michael ZILMER-JOHNS

State Secretary, Ministry of 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:**

Mr Noel TREACY

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

### **Greece:**

Ms Dora BAKOYANNIS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

### **Spain:**

Mr Miguel Ángel MORATINOS

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

### **France:**

Mr Philippe DOUSTE-BLAZY  
Ms Catherine COLONNA

Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Minister with responsibility for European Affairs

### **Italy:**

Mr Massimo D'ALEMA

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs

### **Cyprus:**

Mr Yiorgos LILLIKAS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

### **Latvia:**

Mr Eduards STIPRAIS

Permanent Representative

### **Lithuania:**

Mr Petras VAITIEKŪNAS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

### **Luxembourg:**

Mr Jean ASSELBORN

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister with responsibility for  
Foreign Affairs and Immigration

Mr Nicolas SCHMIT

Minister with responsibility for Foreign Affairs and  
Immigration

### **Hungary:**

Ms Kinga GÖNCZ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

### **Malta:**

Mr Michael FRENDO

Minister for Foreign Affairs

### **Netherlands:**

Mr Bernard BOT

Minister for Foreign Affairs

### **Austria:**

Ms Ursula PLASSNIK

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Poland:**

Ms Anna Elżbieta FOTYGA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Portugal:**

Mr Manuel LOBO ANTUNES

State Secretary for European Affairs

**Romania:**

Mr Mihai-Răzvan UNGUREANU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Slovenia:**

Mr Dimitrij RUPEL

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Janez LENARČIČ

State Secretary at the Government Office for European Affairs

**Slovakia:**

Mr Ján KUBIŠ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Finland:**

Mr Erkki TUOMIOJA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Sweden:**

Mr Carl BILDT

Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖM

Minister for European Affairs

**United Kingdom:**

Ms Margaret BECKETT

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Mr Geoff HOON

Minister of State for Europe

**Commission:**

Mr Olli REHN

Member

Mr Louis MICHEL

Member

Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER

Member

Mr Peter MANDELSON

Member

**General Secretariat of the Council:**

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

**ITEMS DEBATED****RELATIONS WITH UKRAINE - Council conclusions**

The Council adopted negotiating directives for a new enhanced agreement between the European Union and Ukraine. Negotiations are due to be launched at the EU Troika - Ukraine ministerial meeting on 6 February 2006 in Kiev.

At the same time, the Council adopted the following conclusions :

- "1. The Council and the Commission recall that the European Union has acknowledged Ukraine's European aspirations and has welcomed Ukraine's European choice in the Council conclusions and in the EU-Ukraine Action Plan, both adopted on 21 February 2005. The EU recognises and welcomes the progress Ukraine has made in consolidating democracy.
2. The Council and the Commission declare that
  - the European Union maintains its strong commitment to supporting Ukraine's political and economic reforms, aimed at further strengthening democracy, stability and prosperity in the country, and wishes to reinforce this commitment through a new enhanced Agreement;
  - through this Agreement, the European Union aims to build an increasingly close relationship with Ukraine, aimed at gradual economic integration and deepening of political cooperation;
  - a new enhanced Agreement shall not prejudice any possible future developments in EU-Ukraine relations.
3. The Council and the Commission recall the conclusions of the European Council of 14-15 December 2006 reaffirming its resolve to strengthen the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in order to consolidate a ring of prosperity, stability and security based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the Union's neighbourhood."

## **EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY**

The Council held an exchange of views on a communication from the Commission on ideas for enhancing and strengthening the European neighbourhood policy.

The EU's European neighbourhood policy was launched with a view to strengthening relations with its neighbours to the east and south and promoting stability and prosperity, following its enlargement to 25 member states in May 2004 and to 27 on 1 January 2007. Action plans have so far been agreed with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia and Ukraine.

The Commission's ideas for strengthening the policy include: enhancing the economic and trade component, facilitating mobility and managing migration, promoting people-to-people exchanges, building a thematic dimension (to cover energy, transport, the environment, rural development, the information society, public health, etc) and strengthening political cooperation, regional cooperation and financial cooperation.

The Commission's communication will be examined in detail within the Council's preparatory bodies. The European Neighbourhood Policy will be one of the topics at the informal foreign ministers' meeting on 30 and 31 March. The presidency will report to the Council in June on progress made.

**SUDAN - Council conclusions**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council remains greatly concerned about the security, humanitarian and human rights situation in Darfur, which is clearly intolerable. It condemns the continuing ceasefire violations by the parties to the conflict and denounces in particular air strikes against civilian targets carried out by the Sudanese Air Force, such as the bombing of villages in North Darfur on 29 December and on 5 January. Stressing the urgent need for an immediate cessation of hostilities, the Council demands that all parties refrain from any form of violence against civilians and organisations providing humanitarian assistance. The Council expects the Sudanese authorities to fulfil its responsibility to provide effective protection to all the citizens and to put an end to impunity in Darfur.
2. An inclusive political process is a condition for sustainable peace in Darfur. To this end, the EU expresses its full support to the efforts of UN Special Envoy Jan Eliasson and AU Special Envoy Salim Salim to revive the political process. The Council urges the parties to the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) and the non-signatories to enter in good faith into negotiations. The Council reconfirms the EU's readiness to continue contributing to these efforts, as well as its support for the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC).
3. An effective and comprehensive cease-fire would inspire confidence in the political process. The Council urges that all parties respect their ceasefire commitments, recalling that UN Security Council Resolution 1591 (2005) determines that those impeding the peace process shall be held responsible and appropriate measures shall be taken accordingly. The Council also reiterates the importance of involving the non-signatories to the DPA in the effective monitoring of the ceasefire and welcomes the efforts by the AMIS Force Commander in this respect.
4. The Council welcomes as an encouraging step the letter of 23 December 2006 from the President of the Republic of Sudan to the United Nations Secretary-General. The EU expects the Government of Sudan, on the basis of an unequivocal acceptance of the full implementation of the UN support packages for the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) and in close cooperation with the AU and the UN in the framework of the tripartite mechanism, to work for an early implementation of the light and heavy support packages and finalisation of the preparations for the hybrid force. The Council expresses its readiness to consider further measures notably in the UN framework against any party which obstructs its implementation.

5. Similarly, the Council encourages the AU and the UN to finalise as soon as possible the necessary plans for the deployment of the hybrid force. In this respect, it looks forward to the appointment of the Joint Special Representative.
6. The EU reaffirms its commitment to continuing support for AMIS in the transition period leading to the agreed hybrid force in Darfur and confirms the extension of the EU civilian-military supporting action to AMIS for a period of up to six months, from 1 January 2007. The Council urges other countries and organisations to provide additional financial and material support for AMIS.
7. The EU welcomes the decision of the UN Human Rights Council to send an assessment mission to Darfur. It urges the President of the Human Rights Council to accelerate the selection and deployment of an independent and credible team. The EU expects the Government of Sudan to fully cooperate with the mission.
8. The destabilising effects of the Darfur conflict in the wider region, in particular in Chad and in the Central African Republic, are of continuing concern to the Council. All parties should stop all support for rebel movements active in the region. The EU notes that Central African and Chadian authorities have indicated agreement to a UN presence on their territory and is looking forward to further UN recommendations.
9. The Council notes the second anniversary of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which set an end to the armed conflict in Southern Sudan and reconfirmed its full support to the peace process. While important milestones of the CPA have been achieved, the Council observes with great concern that crucial provisions have not yet been implemented and calls on the parties to urgently restore confidence in the agreement by taking effective steps to speed up its implementation."

**SOMALIA - Council conclusions**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1 The EU believes that a window of opportunity exists for a sustainable solution to Somalia's difficulties. It considers that the current momentum should be seized by all parties in order to reach a durable political settlement that will enable Somalia to achieve lasting peace, development and prosperity.
2. The EU, however, remains concerned by the current situation of the reconciliation process and in particular the impact on it by recent events, including the vote of the Transitional Parliament under state of emergency to remove the Speaker of the Transitional Parliament. The EU urges the resumption of the full functioning of political institutions and civil society, as soon as possible.
3. The EU remains concerned about the humanitarian situation, and the difficulties faced by humanitarian organisations working in Somalia in recent years. Access for relief organizations must not be hampered. The EU urges neighbouring countries to do all they can to help in this regard. The EU will continue to provide humanitarian assistance. It urges all parties to end violence and to respect international law, including human rights and humanitarian law.
4. The Council welcomes past and ongoing efforts aiming at reducing tensions, including those of the African Union (AU), of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and its chair and of the League of Arab States.
5. The EU recalls its already substantial support for the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs), which are now gradually establishing their authority on the whole of Somalia. The EU calls on the TFIs to solve their internal differences and to reach out to all Somalis of good will, in a spirit of national reconciliation. It is of the utmost importance to ensure that all key stakeholders – including clan elders, Islamic leaders, representatives of the business community, civil society and women – are engaged in an inclusive political and institutional process on the basis of the Transitional Federal Charter. The EU calls for the establishment of conditions allowing the Parliament to resume political activities.

6. An inclusive broad based political process will offer the basis for further international support to stabilisation, already authorised in principle by UNSC Resolution 1725. International assistance could support the development and implementation of plans for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR). A stabilisation force would facilitate the functioning of inclusive institutions and the reconciliation process. The EU takes note of the decision of the Peace and Security Council of the AU of 19 January 2007 to authorize the deployment of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), for a period of six months, and welcomes the current efforts of the AU and member states to identify possible troop providers.
7. The EU stands ready to offer financial support for AMISOM within the framework of a concerted and global international effort stressing the importance of an all-inclusive political dialogue and genuine reconciliation as the basis for stability and the important role of the UN in facilitating longer-term stabilization in Somalia. To this end, the EU is ready to consider positively the scope to provide support through the 15 million EUR from the African Peace Facility for AMISOM as soon as the necessary requirements are met, including authorization by the UN. The EU invites the AU also to explore other possible sources of funding for the continued financing of the stabilisation force.
8. The EU, as Somalia's biggest aid donor, will continue to provide assistance for reconstruction in Somalia, and to strengthen TFIs capacity to implement the Transitional Federal Charter and engage in SSR and DDR activities on the basis of the National Security Stabilisation Plan. However, a genuine political process of reconciliation and sustainable all-inclusive institutions are essential for reconstruction efforts and the foreseen donor round table to be effective."

**IRAN - Council conclusions**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council discussed Iran's nuclear programme. The Council deplored Iran's failure to take the steps repeatedly required by the IAEA Board of Governors and the United Nations Security Council. It welcomed the unanimous adoption of Security Council Resolution 1737 on 23 December 2006. This decision represents a necessary and proportionate response to Iran's disregard for the concerns of the international community and for Security Council Resolution 1696.

The Council welcomed the measures in Resolution 1737, which are targeted against the most sensitive parts of the Iranian nuclear and missile programmes, and called on all countries to implement the measures in full and without delay.

To ensure effective implementation of measures in UNSCR 1737 while remaining consistent with EU policy, and recalling the EU policy not to sell arms to Iran, Ministers agreed that the EU should prevent the export to and import from Iran of the goods on the NSG and MTCR lists; ban transactions with and freeze the assets of individuals and entities covered by the criteria in UNSCR 1737; ban travel to the EU of the individuals covered by these criteria; and take measures to prevent Iranian nationals from studying proliferation sensitive subjects within the EU.

The Council welcomed the Security Council's decisions to request a report by the IAEA Director General within 60 days, and to review Iran's action in the light of that report; and that it shall suspend the implementation of measures if and for as long as Iran suspends all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development as verified by the IAEA, to allow for negotiations; and, in the absence of Iranian compliance, to adopt further measures under Article 41 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, in order to persuade Iran to fully comply with the Security Council's Resolutions and the requirements of the IAEA Board of Governors. The Council, in this context, underlined its continued commitment to an incremental and proportionate approach.

The Council reiterated at the same time its continuing support for efforts to find a negotiated long-term solution. It reaffirmed its support for the far-reaching proposals presented to Iran by the EU High Representative on 6 June 2006 which would open the way for a new relationship with Iran based on mutual respect and expanded cooperation, and called upon Iran to seize the opportunity of reaching a negotiated solution."

## **EXTERNAL RELATIONS IN ENERGY**

The Council held an exchange of views on the external relations aspects of a package of energy and climate change measures proposed by the Commission with a view to endorsement, by the European Council at its meeting on 8 and 9 March, of an "*energy policy for Europe*".

The Commission's communication sets out priorities for energy policy for the 2007-2009 period. A number of delegations indicated agreement with the Commission's approach, in particular the demand that energy be seen as a central part of all EU external relations.

Among the priorities to be defined for the three-year action plan, delegations underlined in particular:

- the diversification of energy supply (source and type, transport routes);
- the EU's energy partnership with Russia (in particular the chapter on energy in the successor agreement to the partnership and cooperation agreement, including principles laid down by the energy charter treaty);
- the strengthening of energy relations with the EU's neighbouring countries and regions;
- the deepening of energy relations with the major consumer countries, such as the United States, China and India, above all as regards climate protection, energy efficiency and renewable energies.

A number of delegations also welcomed in principle the proposal for an energy partnership with Africa. The presidency invited delegations to send further comments in writing.

**WESTERN BALKANS - Council conclusions**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

**" Montenegro**

The Council adopted a decision on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the European partnership with Montenegro. The Partnership identifies the short- and medium-term priorities for Montenegro in order to move closer to the European Union and will be the key tool guiding Montenegro's efforts in this regard. The Council called for a swift and effective implementation of the priorities and reaffirmed its readiness to fully support Montenegro in this endeavour.

The Council welcomed the holding of the first EU-Montenegro Troika meeting.

**Serbia**

The Council welcomed the peaceful and orderly conduct of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Serbia on 21 January and the preliminary assessment by the OSCE/ODHIR's Election Observation mission that the elections were conducted freely and fairly and were on the whole a compliment to the democratic standards that Serbia has reached. The Council took note of the preliminary election results which indicate a clear majority for reform orientated political parties. The Council called for the speedy formation of a government committed to Serbia's European course and prepared to tackle the challenges ahead in a spirit of constructive cooperation with the international community. The EU remains ready to support Serbia in its European perspective."

**MIDDLE EAST - Council conclusions**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

**" - Middle East Peace Process**

1. The Council expresses its full support for President Abbas and his continued efforts for national unity. It calls on all Palestinians to support these efforts and to end internal violence. The EU stands ready to work with a legitimate Palestinian government that adopts a platform reflecting the Quartet principles.
2. The Council welcomes the meeting between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas on 23 December 2006 and emphasises the need for prompt implementation of commitments made at this meeting. It takes note of the partial transfer by Israel of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues. It calls for the early resumption of the 2005 Sharm-el-Sheikh understandings. The Council expresses the hope that this meeting will be the first in a series of meetings in the framework of a renewed political process, which should lead to meaningful negotiations on the final status. The ultimate goal should be an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state, living side-by-side with Israel and its other neighbours in peace and security.
3. The Council calls on the parties to consolidate the cease-fire in Gaza and to extend it to the West Bank. It condemns the continued firing of rockets into Israeli territory and urges the Palestinian leadership to do everything in its power to put an end to such acts. While commending Israel for its present restraint concerning Gaza, it calls for an end to Israeli military interventions in the West Bank.
4. The EU calls for the immediate release of the abducted Israeli soldier and commends efforts, including by partners in the region, to that effect. It also calls for the immediate release of Palestinian ministers and legislators detained in Israel.
5. The EU stresses the importance of strengthening the Palestinian institutions. It will continue to pursue practical and visible measures, including on access and movement, governance, the security sector and a functioning administration. It welcomes the extension of the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM) for three months, which – in coordination with the Office of the President – is providing essential relief to a large part of the Palestinian population. It reiterates its call on Israel for the immediate transfer of all withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues. It encourages Israel to consider to do so through the TIM. The Council recalls the utmost importance of the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access and in this regard reiterates its continued commitment to the EU Border Assistance Mission in Rafah. It urges that Rafah and all other crossing points, notably Karni, be re-opened and remain open.

6. The EU is deeply concerned about the recent authorisation of settlement activities by the Israeli government, and the ongoing construction of the barrier on Palestinian land. These developments are contrary to international law and the Road Map. The Council calls on Israel to desist from any action that threatens the viability of an agreed two-state solution. Settlement activities in and around East-Jerusalem as well as in the Jordan valley are of particular concern. The EU will not recognise any changes to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed by both parties.
7. In this context, the EU emphasises its determination to play an active role in the framework of increased Quartet engagement, with a view to urgently put in place a political and diplomatic process offering a political perspective in the quest for a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict, in line with the Road Map and the relevant UNSC resolutions, and also taking into account the Arab League Beirut Declaration. The Council underlines the need to work closely with the parties and regional partners. In accordance with the Road Map, the Quartet, in consultation with the parties, should in due course convene an international conference to realise these goals. At this critical moment, the Council looks forward to an early meeting of Quartet principals.

#### **- Lebanon**

1. The Council welcomes the international conference in support of Lebanon and the Lebanese people due to take place in Paris on 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2007 and stands ready to support it notably through the European Neighbourhood Policy. The EU is actively contributing, in close coordination with the Lebanese government, to the full success of the Conference. The Council commends the ambitious Programme on Recovery, Reconstruction and Reform adopted by the government of Lebanon on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007. The EU also welcomes the decision by the Lebanese Government to adopt the ENP action plan; this opens the path to further intensify cooperation in support of Lebanese national priorities. The Council recognises the need for international assistance, financial and otherwise, to complement the efforts of the Lebanese government to lay a sound foundation for a sustainable and equitable economic and social development in Lebanon.
2. The EU stresses that a solution to the current political deadlock is of the utmost importance for the stability and development of Lebanon and in the interest of all Lebanese people. Such solution should be sought only through dialogue and with full respect for the democratic institutions of the country. In this respect, the Council expresses its appreciation for the mediation efforts by the Secretary General of the Arab League.
3. The Council reiterates its call for the immediate release of the two abducted Israeli soldiers.

4. The Council reaffirms its determination to reinforce Lebanon's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. It urges Israel to stop violation of Lebanese airspace by the Israeli Air Force. The Council calls on Syria and other countries in the region to refrain from interfering in the domestic affairs of Lebanon. They must actively engage in the stabilisation of Lebanon. The Council commends the assistance provided by UNIFIL to the Lebanese armed forces to extend control by the government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory, in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1701. It reconfirms its full support to the efforts of Prime Minister Siniora and the legitimate and democratically elected government, aimed at maintaining dialogue with all political actors in Lebanon and at tackling the important challenges it is facing, in particular fully implementing UNSC Resolution 1701 and the other relevant UNSC resolutions, establishing the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1664 and reconstructing the country."

**LIBYA - Council conclusions**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

" The Council of the European Union expresses its grave concern over the unacceptable verdict of the Criminal Court in Libya, on 19 December 2006, convicting and sentencing to death in a re-trial, five Bulgarian nurses and one Palestinian doctor who have already spent almost eight years in prison in connection with the HIV/AIDS case at the Benghazi hospital in 1999. First and foremost this verdict ignores strong evidence from world-renowned international experts as to the innocence of the defendants.

Furthermore, as a matter of principle, the Council reiterates its position that the EU opposes capital punishment under all circumstances.

The Council expects an urgent conclusion of the judicial process according to internationally accepted standards.

While recalling its conclusions of 11 October 2004, the Council expects the Libyan authorities to ensure that a positive, fair and prompt solution is brought to this case, leading expeditiously to the release of the medical workers. In this context, the relations between the European Union and Libya can further develop.

The European Union continues to demonstrate its compassion and solidarity with the plight of the HIV/AIDS infected children and their families in Benghazi. It recalls the success of the EU Action Plan for Benghazi, launched as a purely humanitarian measure, and the establishment of the Benghazi International Fund, which is ready to be activated."

## **THE DEATH PENALTY**

Ministers, over lunch, had an exchange of views on possible further initiatives by the European Union for a moratorium on the death penalty in international fora, including the United Nations.

The EU consistently promotes abolition of the death penalty under guidelines established in 1998. Last December, the EU presented a statement on the death penalty in the UN General Assembly, which was signed by 85 countries from all geographical groups. In February it will actively participate in the third world congress against the death penalty in Paris.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **- *Free trade negotiations with the Gulf countries***

The Council was briefed by commissioner Peter Mandelson on negotiations with the Gulf Cooperation Council on the establishment of an EU-GCC free trade area.

It confirmed the importance it attaches to a rapid and positive conclusion; the commissioner expressed his expectation that the negotiations should be completed following a final round of talks in Brussels at the end of February and before the EU-GCC ministerial meeting in May.

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## **IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL**

The following meetings were held in the margins of the Council:

- First troika meeting with Montenegro;
- Troika meeting with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

**OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

**See 5462/07.**

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