



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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PRESS RELEASE

2590th Council Meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

- GENERAL AFFAIRS -

Luxembourg, 14 June 2004

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

* The 2591st meeting on External Relations is the subject of a separate press release (10191/04).

P R E S S

Rue de la Loi 175 B – 1048 BRUSSELS Tel.: +32 (0)2 285 6083 / 6319 Fax: +32 (0)2 285 8026
press.office@consilium.eu.int <http://ue.eu.int/Newsroom>

10189/04 (Presse 195)

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Main Results of the Council

The Council focused on **preparations for the European Council** meeting on 17-18 June.

The Council also adopted a number of items without debate. In particular it:

- reaffirmed the validity of the EU Common Position on **Cuba**;
- expressed its commitment to support the election process in **Afghanistan**;
- addressed the situation in the African **Great Lakes region** and in **Sudan/Darfur**;
- adopted EU guidelines on the protection and support of **human rights defenders**.

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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.

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PARTICIPANTS

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

Belgium:

Mr Jan DE BOCK

Permanent Representative

Czech Republic:

Mr Cyril SVOBODA

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark:

Mr Claus GRUBE

Permanent Representative

Germany:

Mr Wilhelm SCHÖNFELDER

Permanent Representative

Estonia:

Mr Väino REINART

Permanent Representative

Greece:

Mr Petros MOLYVIATIS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr Miguel Angel MORATINOS

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

France:

Ms Claudie HAIGNERÉ

Minister with responsibility for European Affairs, attached to the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ireland:

Mr Brian COWEN

Mr Dick ROCHE

Minister for Foreign Affairs

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

Italy:

Mr Roberto ANTONIONE

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

Mr George IACOVOU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Rihards PĪKS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Antanas VALIONIS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg:

Mr Nicolas SCHMIT

Permanent Representative

Hungary:

Mr András BÁRSONY

Political State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr John DALLI

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Investment Promotion

Netherlands:

Mr Bernard BOT

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Austria:

Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

Poland:

Mr Jarosław PIETRAS

State Secretary, Office of the Committee for European Integration

Portugal:

Ms Teresa GOUVEIA

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Portuguese Communities Abroad

Slovenia:

Mr Dimitrij RUPEL

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Eduard KUKAN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

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

Commission:

Mr Chris PATTEN

Member

Other participants:

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

ITEMS DEBATED

PROGRESS OF WORK IN OTHER COUNCIL CONFIGURATIONS

The Council took note of a progress report from the Presidency on developments in the various Council configurations, covering meetings held since the last report on 17 May.

The Presidency's report highlights agreements reached on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications by the Competitiveness Council and on the "Europass" portfolio of qualifications and competences by the Education Youth and Culture Council.

In preparation for the European Council on 17 and 18 June, the 2004 update of the EU's Broad Economic Policy Guidelines was approved by the Economic and Financial Affairs Council and the 2004 Employment Guidelines by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council.

The report also draws attention to the agreement reached by the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on the establishment of Regional Advisory Councils to enable the participation of stakeholders in the EU's Common Fisheries Policy.

PREPARATION OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The Council worked towards the finalisation of the draft conclusions prepared by the Presidency for the European Council meeting in Brussels on 17 and 18 June.

The draft conclusions cover most of the items that the European Council is due to address, namely:

- EU area of freedom, security and justice; combating terrorism.
- EU enlargement: Bulgaria and Romania, Turkey, Croatia.
- EU financial perspective for the period 2007-13.
- Economic issues, employment and environment.
- External relations, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

Work on the text is likely to continue in the run-up to the European Council notably as regards external relations, CFSP and ESDP.

At the meeting, Heads of State and Government will also meet within the Intergovernmental Conference with a view to reaching agreement on the draft EU Constitutional Treaty. The European Council is further expected to:

- nominate the next President of the Commission;
- designate the next Secretary General of the Council/High Representative for the CFSP and the next Deputy Secretary-General of the Council.

MEETINGS IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL

The following meetings were held in the margins of the Council on 15 June:

- EU-Romania Association Council - see joint press release UE-RO 1804/04 (Presse 200)
- EU-Romania Accession Conference

On the occasion of this Conference, the eleventh with Romania at Ministerial level, substantive negotiations were held on four chapters of the Union *acquis*, and the results of the meetings at Deputy level on 12 February and 4 June were consolidated.

On the basis of the positions of the Parties, the Conference agreed that the chapters Agriculture, and Financial and Budgetary Provisions and the items European Development Fund, Research Fund for Coal and Steel, European Central Bank, Transition Facility and European Investment Bank under the chapter "Other" do not, at this stage, require further negotiation. The Conference, upon request, may return to these chapters at an appropriate moment.

Furthermore, the Conference agreed that it will have to return to the chapter Cooperation in the Fields of Justice and Home Affairs at an appropriate moment, in the light of additional information to be provided by Romania.

- EU-Bulgaria Accession Conference

On the occasion of this Conference, the eleventh with Bulgaria at Ministerial level, substantive negotiations were held on five chapters of the Union *acquis*, and the results of the meeting at Deputy level on 4 June were consolidated.

On the basis of the positions of the Parties, the Conference agreed that the chapters Competition Policy, Agriculture, Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments, Financial and Budgetary Provisions and "Other" do not, at this stage, require further negotiation. Thus, all of the chapters in the accession negotiations are now provisionally closed. The Conference also agreed that the finalisation of negotiations with Bulgaria will have to be confirmed by the European Council in the light of the Commission's Regular Report on Bulgaria in October.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

The Council approved several items without debate.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Afghanistan - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council re-affirmed its commitment to the vision of a secure, stable, free, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan. It reiterated the European Union's commitment, given at the Berlin Conference earlier this year, to assist the electoral authorities and the Afghan Transitional Authority so as to ensure that Presidential and Parliamentary elections can be held in accordance with the principles of the Bonn Agreement of December 2001.

In this regard, the Council endorsed plans by the European Commission to deploy a Democracy and Election Support Team as a good basis for supporting the election process in Afghanistan. It invited the Commission to continue to examine, in light of the evolving security situation, the scope to support the election process in Afghanistan including by expanding the Democracy and Election Support Team, and support for training of domestic election monitors. The deployment of this team together with other planned support measures will serve to enhance the assessment of the elections that will be undertaken by the office of the European Union's Special Representative to Afghanistan and will facilitate the provision of advice and support to the Afghan authorities in conducting the elections and during the process of democratisation after election day. The team will also work to co-ordinate election support activities with other donors and interested parties.

The Council expressed its grave concern over the recent deplorable murders and attacks against international humanitarian personnel and those working for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The Council will keep the security situation in Afghanistan under close review. In advance of the elections, the Council called for the swift, unconditional and comprehensive compliance by all concerned with the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration process.

The Council noted that these new measures are in addition to the financial support of over € 24 million in Community assistance already approved to support voter registration, voter education and to help the electoral authorities prepare for polling."

Mediterranean and the Middle East

The Council approved a report on the "*EU strategic partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East*" and recommended it to the European Council for endorsement (10246/04).

European Neighbourhood Policy - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council confirmed that the objective of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is to share the benefits of an enlarged EU with neighbouring countries in order to contribute to increased stability, security and prosperity of the European Union and its neighbours. The ENP offers the prospect of an increasingly close relationship, in the spirit of the Council's conclusions of 16 June 2003, involving a significant degree of economic integration and a deepening of political cooperation, with the aim of preventing the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours.
2. The Council welcomed the Communication on the ENP prepared by the Commission in close co-operation with the SG/HR. It endorsed the main orientations of the paper. It considered that it provides an excellent basis to carry forward work on the ENP and is in accordance with the goals of the European Security Strategy.
3. The Council recalled that Russia was a key partner for the EU. The EU and Russia had decided to develop their specific strategic partnership in the context of the four common spaces, as agreed at the St. Petersburg Summit in May 2003.
4. The Council confirmed that the privileged relationship with neighbours covered by the ENP will be based on joint ownership. It will build on commitments to common values, including democracy, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights, and to the principles of market economy, free trade and sustainable development, as well as poverty reduction. Consistent commitments will also be sought on certain essential concerns of the EU's external action including the fight against terrorism, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and efforts towards the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts as well as cooperation in justice and home affairs matters. The level of ambition of the relationship with each neighbour will depend on the degree of the partner's commitment to common values as well as its capacity to implement jointly agreed priorities. The pace of progress of the relationship with each neighbour will acknowledge fully its efforts and concrete achievements in meeting those commitments. The Council underlined that the ENP will bring added value, going beyond existing cooperation, both to partner countries and to the EU. To this end, it will be essential to maintain the coherence and unity of this policy, in its content, instruments and final goals.

5. The Council welcomed the Commission proposal to pursue the ENP through action plans to be agreed jointly with the neighbouring countries concerned. They should have a minimum duration of three years and be subject to renewal by mutual consent. Such action plans should be based on common principles but be differentiated, as appropriate, taking into account the specificities of each neighbour, its national reform processes and its relations with the EU. Action plans should be comprehensive but at the same time identify clearly a limited number of key priorities and offer real incentives for reform. Action plans should also contribute, where possible, to regional cooperation.
6. The Council welcomed the Commission's proposal to use the bodies under the Association Agreements and PCAs to advance and monitor implementation of action plans. The Council deemed that the structures under the relevant agreements, where appropriate, should be reviewed, to ensure that all priorities under the ENP are duly reflected.
7. The Council reiterated the importance of its continuing involvement in the development and implementation of the ENP. A first review of implementation of the action plans will be undertaken within two years of their adoption, taking as the basis assessment reports prepared by the Commission, in close co-operation with the SG/HR on issues related to political co-operation and the CFSP, and with the input of partner countries. On that basis, the Commission, with the contribution of the SG/HR on issues related to political co-operation and the CFSP, will present an overall report to the Council in order to assess globally progress in the implementation of the ENP.
8. The Council invited the Commission, in close co-operation with the Presidency, the SG/HR and, as appropriate, the EUSR for the Middle East Peace Process, on issues related to political co-operation and the CFSP, to finalise exploratory talks on the draft action plans with Jordan, Moldova, Morocco, Tunisia, Ukraine, Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The action plans should be consistent with and contribute to meeting the objectives of the EU's overall policies in relation to the partners concerned.
9. Upon completion of these talks, formal proposals for action plans should be submitted before the summer break 2004. Following the Council's approval, the respective Co-operation or Association Councils will be invited to endorse the action plans as soon as possible and to ensure their implementation and monitoring.
10. The Council invited the Commission, with the contribution of the SG/HR on issues related to political co-operation and the CFSP, to begin preparations for action plans with those Mediterranean countries whose Association Agreements with the EU have recently entered into force or which have ratified their Association Agreements. An action plan would be concluded once the respective agreement entered into force.

11. The Council noted that, for the EU's southern neighbours, the ENP should also contribute to achieving the objectives of the EU's Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East, including resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.
12. Concerning the Southern Caucasus, the Council recalled its conclusions of 16 June 2003 and of 26 January 2004 and its continuing interest in promoting stability, democracy and prosperity in this region. The Council noted the recommendations of the European Parliament, the Commission, SG/HR and the EU Special Representative for the Southern Caucasus and decided to include Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the ENP. This marks a significant step forward in the Union's engagement with this region. Each country will be given the same possibility to develop its links with the EU, including through action plans, and will be treated on its individual merits in line with the general policy of the ENP. The Council also invited the Commission, and the SG/HR for issues related to political co-operation and the CFSP, to report on progress made by each country with regard to political and economic reforms.
13. The Council recalled that the EU's goal is for Belarus to become a democratic, stable and prosperous partner. When Belarus has established a democratic form of government, following free and fair elections, the EU will be able to develop contractual links with that country. It will then be possible to extend the full benefits of the European Neighbourhood Policy to Belarus. Meanwhile, the Council underlined the need for free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections. The EU will further strengthen support for civil society, as well as examine possibilities for further supporting the needs of the Belarus population, including addressing the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe, health, education, environment, trans-border and regional co-operation, border management and independent media.
14. On the basis of acceptance of the Barcelona acquis, resolution of all outstanding bilateral issues, including the "La Belle" case and that of the Bulgarian medical workers, with EU Member States and negotiating candidate countries, and the subsequent development of contractual relations with the EU, Libya would be eligible to participate in the ENP.
15. The Council welcomed the suggestion that the implementation of the action plans will be supported through Meda, Tacis and the appropriate budgetary instruments that will succeed them, as well as through a new European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) that will also apply to them, focusing in particular on cross-border and trans-national cooperation. Without prejudice to the position of the Council on the Commission communication on Building our common future: policy challenges and budgetary means of the Enlarged Union 2007-2013 and its related legislative proposals, the Council looks forward to formal Commission proposals on the instruments, expected to be submitted to the Council in July 2004 for consideration. It invited the Commission to pay full attention and take necessary measures to guarantee the consistency and co-ordination between various instruments, which are to contribute to the ENP and the realisation of action plans.

16. The Council noted the Commission's proposal for new European neighbourhood agreements with the countries in the Union's neighbourhood. Consideration will be given in due time to the advisability of any such new contractual arrangements in the context of the ENP. In this regard, consideration could also be given to the level of progress to be achieved in the framework of existing agreements before any negotiations can be envisaged."

Moldova - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council reaffirms the importance the European Union attaches to the Republic of Moldova as a neighbour and partner. The EU wishes Moldova to develop into a strong and stable country with close links to the Union on the basis of common values of democracy, rule of law, human rights including freedom of the media, as well as common interests, as set out in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The Council notes that the upcoming parliamentary elections in February 2005 will be an important opportunity for the Moldovan government to demonstrate its commitment to these values and interests. The ENP, including the EU-Moldova Action Plan currently under negotiation, is a strong signal of the EU's determination to continue to step up its engagement with Moldova and to assist the country towards a significant degree of economic integration and a deepening of political co-operation. The Council wants the Action Plan to become a solid platform for moving ahead on this path to the benefit of both sides and in line with shared strategic priorities.
2. The Council notes that solving the conflict on Transnistria is key to making further progress towards building a strong and stable Moldova. Moreover, the EU cannot accept the continuation of trafficking of human beings and illegal goods and proliferation of weapons from and through Transnistria. It therefore remains deeply concerned about the current lack of progress in the settlement negotiations and the fact that the two parties are drifting further apart. The EU calls on both parties, in particular the Transnistrian leadership, to act constructively and in good faith towards reaching a settlement and urges the mediators to redouble their efforts to assist in the process. The EU recognises the territorial integrity of Moldova and wishes to see a settlement of the conflict leading to a viable state, based on democratic values and principles and backed up in a strong and balanced way by the international community.

3. The Council reaffirms the EU's continuing strong commitment to support the conflict settlement, drawing on the instruments at its disposal, and in close consultation with the OSCE. The Union declares its readiness to consider ways to strengthen further its engagement, and expects all mediators and the parties to the conflict to facilitate this.
4. The Council re-affirms the importance of outstanding border management issues on the entire Moldovan-Ukrainian border, in particular the Transnistrian section, being addressed by the parties concerned. The Council calls on Moldova and Ukraine to reinforce their co-operation in this regard. The EU remains ready to assist in this process.
5. The Council remains very concerned about the lack of progress in the withdrawal of Russian troops and ammunition and reiterates its expectation that the OSCE Istanbul Commitments will be fully honoured. The EU calls in this context also on the Transnistrian leadership to honour its stated pledge not to obstruct this process and to allow with immediate effect the OSCE to play its appropriate role by ensuring full and uninhibited access to all parts of the region.
6. The EU is looking forward to enhanced dialogue with all parties concerned, and in particular with Russia and Ukraine, considering their shared interest in having a stable, democratic and prosperous Moldova in their immediate neighbourhood."

Cuba - Evaluation of Common Position - *Council conclusions*

"The Council took note of the fourteenth evaluation of the EU Common Position on Cuba. The Council reiterated that the objectives of the European Union in its relations with Cuba remained the encouragement of a process of peaceful transition to pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as a sustainable economic recovery and an improvement in the living standards of the Cuban people.

The Council noted the disappointing lack of progress by the Cuban government towards the realisation of the aims of the Common Position since the previous evaluation in July 2003.

In particular, the Council expressed its serious concern at the ongoing large-scale violation of human rights in Cuba. It strongly condemned the trial and sentencing in April and May 2004 of a group of 16 human rights activists and journalists, and the continuing detention of a large number of prisoners of conscience, including those arrested during the crackdown by the Cuban authorities in March and April 2003. The Council called on Cuba to release immediately all those detained for political reasons.

The Council expressed regret at the imposition of new restrictions on private enterprise since the last evaluation, with negative consequences for many Cuban people. It repeated its view that the opening of the Cuban economy would benefit all its people, while expressing its rejection of all unilateral measures against Cuba which are contrary to commonly accepted rules of international trade. It has never been European Union policy to try to bring about change by coercive measures with the effect of increasing the economic hardship of the Cuban people.

The Council reaffirmed the validity of the Common Position of 1996 and reiterated that constructive engagement remained the basis of the European Union's policy towards Cuba. The Council noted that although all the aims of the Common Position had not been realised, isolation of Cuba would not contribute to this effort. The Council emphasised the importance which the Union attached to dialogue in order to produce tangible results in the political, economic and civil rights and cooperation spheres. The European Union remained open to resuming such dialogue.

The Council strongly condemned the unacceptable attitude of the Cuban Government towards EU delegations in Havana and called on Cuba to respect internationally acknowledged principles and practices. The Council also expressed regret at Cuba's refusal of EU cooperation and reiterated its continued preparedness to provide EU cooperation to Cuba, when conditions permit, in areas that promote the transition to pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as in areas that promote sustainable economic growth and an improvement in the living standards of the Cuban population. Since the mid 1990s the EU has become a major partner of Cuba in promoting trade, investment and tourism, in cooperation and in cultural and academic exchanges.

As a result of the lack of progress towards an improvement in the human rights situation, the Council reaffirmed that the measures adopted on 5 June 2003 would be maintained, including the invitation of members of the peaceful opposition and other members of civil society, alongside government representatives, to their national day celebrations, as elsewhere in the world. In the context of its policy of constructive engagement, the EU and its Member States would also continue to provide support for cultural events in Cuba and would urge the Cuban authorities to avoid obstructing this process."

Sudan/Darfur - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council welcomes the signing of the N'djamena cease-fire agreement of 8th April and of the agreement of 28th May, signed in Addis Ababa, on the modalities of establishing an observer mission to monitor this cease-fire. The consolidation of this cease-fire is essential in order to effectively end the fighting and the massive human rights violations in Darfur including indiscriminate attacks on civilians, rape and other forms of sexual violence, forced displacement and disappearances, as well as to avert a looming humanitarian catastrophe by enabling the delivery of assistance to up to two million people affected by the conflict and increasingly also their host communities. The Council expresses its hope that the consolidation of the cease-fire will also create a conducive atmosphere to address the underlying causes of the Darfur conflict, both at the local and national level, and to control the regional repercussions of this crisis.

The Council commends the African Union for assuming a leading role in this monitoring mission, and pledges its continued support to it, in political terms but also in the form of human resources, as well as technical, logistic and financial assistance, including from the Africa Peace Facility. The European Union has taken up the invitation by the African Union to be represented in the Joint Commission and to assume the position of Vice-chair of the Cease-fire Commission. In addition, cooperation is taking place within the European Union with the aim of sending six observers to the monitoring teams. The Council urges all parties to the conflict in Darfur to respect the cease-fire agreement, to fully comply with its implementation measures, and to extend their full co-operation to the monitoring mission and ensure its security on the ground. In particular, the Council emphasises the responsibility of the Government of Sudan to guarantee the protection of civilians, disarm the Janjaweed militias, and to ensure full and unimpeded access by humanitarian agencies including NGOs.

The Council expresses its strong commitment to work with the UN to address the crisis in Darfur, especially with the Security Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In this regard, the Council supports the recommendations made by Bertrand Ramcharan, Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Following the security incidents in Darfur during the first week of June, the Council remains concerned about the security situation on the ground. It recalls again the obligation of the parties to the conflict to ensure protection and security of civilians and humanitarian workers and to facilitate humanitarian access and the delivery of aid to the conflict-affected region, in line with commitments expressed at the High-Level Donor Alert Meeting on Darfur on 3 June in Geneva.

The Council commends the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army for the signing of the protocols on power sharing and the three contentious areas (Abyei, Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile) on 26th May at Naivasha (Kenya), which conclude the negotiations on the main political issues of this peace process conducted under IGAD auspices. The Council welcomes the Nairobi Declaration on the final Phase on Peace in Sudan. The Council encourages both parties to pursue their discussions on implementation modalities vigorously and in a spirit of compromise, and to aim at an early conclusion of a comprehensive peace agreement.

The Council expresses deep concern about the humanitarian and human rights situation in Shilluk Kingdom following attacks of militia groups in recent months. Some ten thousand civilians have been displaced as a result of the attacks. The Council calls on the Government of Sudan to stop supporting the aggressive actions of militia groups in Shilluk Kingdom and to bring to justice those who are responsible for the attacks. The Council calls on the Sudan People's Liberation Movement / Army to observe the Memorandum of Understanding on Cessation of Hostilities. The Council calls on the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement / Army to enable IDPs in the region to return safely to their villages."

African Great Lakes Region - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"Political Framework

1. The situation in the Great Lakes Region is a consequence of a complex and interconnected set of interacting and accumulated problems. The Council considers that lasting peace in the region can be achieved through urgent implementation of the peace agreements, respect for the territorial integrity, national sovereignty and guarantees for security as well as respect for democratic principles, international law, including human rights and international humanitarian law in all states of the region.
2. The policy objectives of the EU in the Great Lakes Region are advanced, inter alia, through the use of demarches, declarations and political dialogue with governments as well as through general development and cooperation programmes and specific projects in support of transition objectives and the implementation of necessary reforms. They are furthermore advanced through the deployment of an EU Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region (EUSR). The EU is also cooperating closely with the United Nations and the African Union and other relevant actors of the international community in efforts to stabilise the entire region.

3. The European Union (EU) supports action taken by the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) in support of the implementation of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (July 1999), the Pretoria Agreement between DRC and Rwanda (July 2002), the Luanda Agreement between DRC and Uganda (September 2002), the Pretoria Global and All-Inclusive Agreement on Transition in the DRC of 13 December 2002, further implemented by the Pretoria and Sun City Agreements of March and April 2003 in the context of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, and the Kinshasa Memorandum II on the distribution of military posts (June 2003), as well as the relevant Security Council Resolutions.
4. The EU has been actively involved in efforts to find a negotiated settlement to the conflict in the DRC since the outset. It was closely engaged in the negotiations for a political settlement and is now working with the transitional government on the implementation of the Lusaka Agreement and Global Accord. The EU was also responsible for the deployment during the Transition of Operation Artemis in Ituri (June to August 2003) which stopped a dangerous cycle of violence. Furthermore the EU is currently supporting the establishment of an Integrated Police Unit in Kinshasa.
5. The commitment to normalise relations and to observe the principles of non-interference and respect for each country's sovereignty and territorial integrity has been reflected in the Declaration of Good Neighbourliness, signed in New York on 25 September 2003, the bilateral agreement between DRC and Uganda signed in Luanda in September 2002, and the bilateral agreement between the DRC and Rwanda, concluded in Pretoria on 27 November 2003. The Council urges full implementation of these agreements and also calls on all parties to refrain from supporting any local groups opposed to these agreements or any of those listed in paragraph 3 above. The Council points out that there is an onus on all countries to redouble their efforts to improve bilateral relations throughout the Great Lakes Region and calls upon the governments of the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda to cooperate in bringing an end to the tension in the eastern part of the DRC.
6. The Council recognises the important role entrusted to the UN Mission in the DRC (MONUC) in supporting the transition process and facilitating the DDRRR (disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, reintegration, and resettlement) and the DDR (disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration) process and helping to establish a peaceful and secure environment throughout the entire DRC. The Council recalls the imperative for all persons and parties in the DRC to fully cooperate with MONUC in the implementation of its mandate. The EU also expresses its full support for the work of the "Comité International d'Accompagnement de la Transition" (CIAT).

7. The Council commends the role played by the Regional Initiative and by the AU mission in Burundi (AMIB) in progressing current peace efforts in Burundi. The Council will continue to support the Burundi peace process based on the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of August 2000, the success of which will contribute to peace and stability throughout the Great Lakes Region. The Council welcomes the substantial progress which has been made towards achieving the objectives set out in the Arusha Agreement, including the conclusion of the peace agreements between the Burundian government and the CNDD-FDD in November 2003 as well as the recent indications of willingness by the FNL, as the result of the meeting between the President of Burundi and the FNL in Oisterwijk, the Netherlands and its Congress organised with the facilitation of the Dutch Government, to call for a ceasefire and to consider the possibility of negotiating with the Government. While these signs of opening are still insufficient and need further confirmation, there is now an unprecedented opportunity to build a real and lasting peace in Burundi. For this to be achieved, a comprehensive ceasefire agreement must be concluded and the Council renews its call upon government forces and the FNL to negotiate and respect such a ceasefire agreement and for the FNL to renounce violence and start serious negotiations with the government.
8. The Council welcomes the deployment of the new UN peace-keeping mission (ONUB) in Burundi, which will greatly assist efforts to complete the transition successfully, including support to the election process and security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR).
9. The Council renews its commitment to the people of Rwanda and its support for Rwanda as it continues on the path of national recovery. The EU's relations with Rwanda will continue to be guided by support for the consolidation of democracy, promotion of human rights and national reconciliation, and support for the process of social and economic reconstruction. The Council encourages the Rwandan government to abstain from any kind of military or political interference in DRC. It urges all states to contribute actively to regional stability, through maintaining its support for regional peace processes and working to strengthen bilateral relations throughout the region.
10. The Council stresses the importance of protecting and promoting human rights, and in this regard refers to the relevant resolutions of the UN Commission on Human Rights. It supports the decision by the Commission to reappoint an independent expert on Human Rights in the DRC to continue the dialogue with the Transitional National Government on these issues. It welcomes the fact that, with one single exception, the six central UN conventions on human rights have been embraced by the countries in the region, and encourages the governments to pursue their respective dialogues with the UN treaty bodies with a view to further strengthening the implementation of these conventions.

11. The Council expresses its concern over the continued circulation of small arms in the region and reiterates its support for the arms embargo applied by UNSCR 1493 and the work of the Panel of Experts mandated by UNSCR 1533.

Economic Developments

12. In the DRC, the EU stresses the importance of working together with the International Financial Institutions, already allowing for a considerable improvement in the main economic indicators: economic growth, inflation and the exchange rate. As far as economic policy is concerned, priority should be given, not only to the control of public finances, but also to the identification of expenses and their re-orientation towards the objectives of poverty reduction.

The EU furthermore stresses the importance of an economic environment attractive for private investment and assuring foreign investors. In Rwanda, the EU welcomes economic progress as part of its national recovery and expresses the hope that these developments will gradually reach all parts of the country and all levels of Rwandan society. In Burundi, the EU recognises the importance of economic development as an essential part of consolidating peace and stability. It therefore encourages increased cooperation with the international financial institutions.

13. The Council condemns the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the DRC, which has contributed to the long conflict and the consequences of four years of war. This factor also fuels prolonged conflict if necessary measures are not taken. Therefore, the Council calls on all States to draw the appropriate consequences from the findings of the final UN report of the panel of experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth of the DRC, issued in October 2003, and it supports the action agreed in UNSCR 1457(2003), intended to bring an end to such exploitation.

Transition process and elections

14. In the DRC the Council continues to urge the signatory parties to implement in good faith the provisions of the Global and All-Inclusive Agreement on the Transition and all subsequent agreements and work together in the Transitional National Government (TNG) responsible for leading the DRC until the first democratic elections. The successful holding of national elections, provided for in the Sun City Accords and scheduled to take place in about one year time, represent a daunting challenge for the government and people of the DRC. The Council urges the government and people of the DRC to concentrate on this task and, for its part, stands ready to extend any assistance it can to ensure that the goal of a successful electoral process in the DRC is realised.

15. The Council notes with concern, however, that one year on from the launch of the transition process in the DRC, the political situation remains fragile and much remains to be done if the transition is to be successfully accomplished in a way that would assure the right environment for the holding of free and fair elections. The Council, therefore, strongly urges the Institutions of the Transition and the political leadership to remain within the spirit and the dynamic of the Transition, work together in cohesion and with a common vision towards its objectives and implement the necessary reforms. The Council furthermore urges accelerated action on the part of the Institutions of the Transition and all its components and groupings to ensure that the necessary legislative framework and other measures are now taken. Specifically, there must be
- progress made towards the establishment of an effective national administration and establishing the rule of law throughout the entire territory of the DRC;
 - the formation of restructured and integrated military and police forces;
 - the implementation of a national disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme;
 - the enactment of all the additional measures to provide for the holding of free and transparent elections in 2005 (the operationalisation of the “Commission Electorale Indépendante (CEI)”, voter registration, constitutional referendum and the determination of the number of and calendar for elections);
 - the transparent management of State finances for the benefit of all the people of the DRC.
 - completion of the DDRRR of all foreign armed groups operating in the DRC.

Unless progress is quickly made in these areas, the efforts to build a lasting peace may be put at risk.

16. The Council reaffirms its willingness to support progress towards a successful transition, in particular through assistance to the population, the strengthening of state structures, the economic reconstruction of the country and DDR projects. In this context, the Council underlines the importance of adhering to the agreements between the DRC and the international financial institutions.

17. In Burundi the Council believes that the pace of the transition process must be accelerated and that the necessary reforms, especially in the security sector, must be implemented, if the goal of fair and transparent elections by the end of October 2004 is to be met. The necessary legislative measures must be taken in order to ensure that the election timetable provided for under the Arusha Accords can be respected. The Council renews its commitment to help Burundi in its search for peace and to support actively reconstruction efforts in the country.

Judicial Reform and Reconciliation Process

18. Regarding the efforts to create a just and lasting peace based on democratic principles, fostering truth and reconciliation while achieving justice, the Council emphasises the importance of combating impunity and of bringing criminals to justice. The Council recalls that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is applicable to acts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed after the Statute's entry into force (1 July 2002). It calls on all governments in the region to ratify and implement the Statute and promote its objectives. The EU and its Member States are willing to provide appropriate technical assistance to countries that have not yet ratified the ICC Statute to enable them to undertake the necessary legislative measures for ratification and implementation of the Rome Statute.
19. The Council renews its call for an immediate end to armed conflict and violence in all parts of the DRC and condemns in the strongest terms the atrocities and human rights abuses committed in the eastern part of the country, in particular gender-based violence such as rape and other forms of sexual abuse. It urges the Transitional Institutions to take every possible measure to establish State authority over the entire country and to bring those who are responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity to justice. In this context the Council welcomes the first step taken by the Transitional National Government to invite the ICC to start investigations into the killings and violence committed in the DRC.
20. The Council looks forward to the recommendations to be submitted to the UN Security Council regarding establishment of an International Commission for Judicial Inquiry in Burundi, as provided for in the Arusha Agreement, and will consider possible EU support in light of consideration of these recommendations.
21. The Council continues supporting the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and urges all governments in the region to furnish full cooperation to its activities. It encourages all efforts made in the process of national reconciliation in Rwanda and supports the set up of the traditional system of “gacaca”, aimed at combining the end of the culture of impunity and the beginning of the culture of forgiveness.

22. The Council stresses the importance of forward-looking efforts to strengthen the ability of national justice systems in the region to uphold the rule of law and protect human rights. The EU reiterates its willingness to support such efforts and is already elaborating, with Member States, a strategy to strengthen the national justice system in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

***Demobilisation, Disarmament, Repatriation, Reintegration and Resettlement (DDRRR),
Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR)***

23. The Council strongly believes that the success of the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement of foreign armed groups, including Rwandan combatants (former FAR, Interahamwe and FDLR) and the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Congolese soldiers and combatants is closely linked to the political progress in the transition period and that its successful implementation will be an essential element for restoring peace in the whole region. In this context, the EU will pay particular attention to the needs of war affected children, in particular child soldiers, in line with EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict.
24. The DDR process in Burundi requires intensified efforts from all parties to begin implementing the programme to dismantle all armed groups, including militias, and the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme. All parties should work towards establishing a stable environment that is conducive to the running of free and fair elections. The Council offers full support to the DDRRR and DDR processes by appropriate measures, in particular through support for the multi-country demobilisation and reintegration programmes (MDRP) for the Great Lakes Region. The Council underlines the need to proceed swiftly with SSR, which is closely related to DDR, and welcomes the efforts undertaken by different states in Burundi with regard to Police and Army Reform (operation Espoir).

International Conference for Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the region

25. The Council is convinced that the resolution of the fundamental problems involving peace and security in the Great Lakes Region requires a regional approach. For this reason, the Council is strongly supportive of the proposed International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region, to be organised under the auspices of the United Nations and the African Union. The Council agrees further to elaborate a regional approach for the Great Lakes.

26. The Council believes that such a Conference, if well prepared and focusing on clear and realistic goals, based on concrete operational agreements and regional ownership, can provide the basis for a lasting peace and stability in the region. Considering the objectives of the conference and the structure of possible follow-up mechanisms, the Council highlights the need to look to synergies with existing structures in order to avoid overlap or duplication of processes and institutional structures. The EU, for its part, will continue its active engagement, through its Special Representative (EUSR), in supporting and actively contributing to the preparations of the Conference. It will further fully participate in the Group of Friends (GoF) of the Great Lakes Region supportive to the preparatory process of the conference.
27. The Council urges accelerated efforts on the part of all participants to expedite the preparations for the holding of the Conference and, in this regard, urges speedy agreement on the core membership of the Conference. Furthermore, the Council believes that enlargement of the core group, encompassing Angola and Congo Brazzaville, would serve the interests of the Region as a whole and would therefore deserve careful consideration by the members of the Conference.
28. The objectives of the conference will only be met if it is perceived and designed to launch a multifaceted approach to address the structural and the proximate sources of conflicts in the region. To this end some of the themes of the conference (good governance, democracy, economic development and regional integration as well as humanitarian and social issues) will be intrinsically linked to the overall objective of achieving lasting peace, security and stability.

Post-Conflict Reconstruction

29. The Council remains committed to supporting the post-conflict reconstruction of the countries in the Great Lakes Region, through an appropriate programme of development and humanitarian assistance. The Council will lend its support to the governments of the region for the reconstruction and development of their countries, ensuring that such support benefits all their people and the region as a whole. The Council furthermore recognises the important role played by civil society in peace-building efforts locally, nationally and regionally. The EU's assistance will contribute dynamically and proactively to the peace processes by promoting the reorganisation and restoration of the state, good governance, and an improvement in the economic situation and respect for human rights. In this regard, the Council underlines the need to involve women in post-conflict and peace-building efforts and to protect and advance the rights of women and children. Furthermore, it underlines the importance of truth and reconciliation mechanisms for enduring peace."

Relations with the United States - Preparation of summit

The Council took note of a progress report on preparation of the EU-US summit, to be held at Dromoland Castle (Ireland) on 25 and 26 June.

The summit agenda is likely to cover Iraq, the Middle East and terrorism; lunchtime discussion will be devoted to fostering economic growth.

Relations with Japan - Preparation of summit

The Council took note of a progress report on preparation of the 13th EU-Japan summit, to be held in Tokyo on 22 June.

The summit agenda is likely to cover EU-Japan relations, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, trade and environment issues, including climate change and sustainable development; dinnertime discussion is likely to be devoted to developments in the EU, the Middle East, Asia and Europe-Asia co-operation.

Relations with Russia - Report on common strategy

The Council endorsed a report to the European Council on implementation of the common strategy of the European Union in its relations with Russia (10293/04).

The report covers the following main issues:

- Political dialogue on regional and global issues of concern, including informal meetings on human rights as well as regular discussions on the EU and Russia's common neighbourhood, including on "frozen" conflicts.
- Extension before 1 May of the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement to include the EU's Acceding States. The agreement on the extension was signed in the margins of the first meeting of the EU-Russia Permanent Partnership Council (Foreign Ministers) in Luxembourg on 27 April. The EU called for its early and unconditional ratification by Russia.
- The 2003 St Petersburg Summit decided that development of EU–Russia relations should focus on four “Common Spaces”, namely a common economic space, a common space of freedom, security and justice, a space of co-operation in the field of external security, as well as a space of research and education.

- At the 21 May 2004 Moscow Summit, negotiations were concluded with the EU on Russia's accession to the WTO, which had continued apace during the previous year.
- Environmental issues remain a priority for the EU. While Russia's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol is still awaited, the EU considers that President Vladimir Putin's commitment to speed up the ratification process is to be welcomed and built on.

The common strategy on Russia, adopted in June 1999, is aimed at strengthening the EU's strategic partnership with Russia. When adopting the common strategy, the European Council decided that a report on its implementation should be submitted at least once a year.

Sanctions - Basic Principles

The Council agreed on basic principles as part of a policy framework for more effective use of sanctions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (10198/1/04).

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Battle Group Concept - progress report

The Council took note of a progress report on the Battle Group Concept.

A Battle Group Concept was proposed by certain Member States in February 2004 as a contribution to consideration on how the EU can further contribute to conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations in close co-operation with the UN. This proposal was welcomed by the Council in March 2004. In his April 2004 report on EU military rapid response, High Representative Solana proposed a methodology for developing the capabilities required as well as a calendar foreseeing the setting up of an initial operational capability by 2005 and full operational capability by 2007. These proposals were approved by the Council in May and integrated into the document "Headline Goal 2010", thereby providing the political guidance for the development of the battle group capability.

A military Battle Group concept was approved by the EU Military Committee in June 2004. It proposes a definition of the Battle Group and provides for related characteristics and requirements. It focuses particularly on the provision of Battle Groups and covers a number of relevant practical arrangements to ensure a well prepared and timely employment.

EU-UN co-operation in crisis management

The Council endorsed a report on EU-UN co-operation in the field of crisis management, following on the signature of a EU-UN Joint Declaration last September (9638/1/04).

ESDP - Civilian aspects

The Council endorsed an action plan for civilian aspects of the European Security and Defence Policy (10325/04).

Role of the EU within the OSCE - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council recalls that the OSCE is a valuable instrument for the promotion of security and co-operation, leading to peace and stability in its region, and underlines the EU's interest in enhancing its partnership with the OSCE in a comprehensive way in line with the Council Conclusions of November 2003 on EU-OSCE co-operation in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation.

Against that background, and as a contribution to the strengthening of CFSP/ESDP and the implementation of the European Union's Security Strategy, the Council invites the Presidency to prepare an assessment report on the EU's role within the OSCE, and to consider further practical steps to implement the November 2003 conclusions in a flexible and effective way.

The assessment report on the EU's role within the OSCE shall take full consideration of the comparative advantage of the OSCE vis-à-vis other regional bodies, and the need to avoid duplication and ensure value for money as well as the overall EU policy objectives as set out, inter alia, in our agreements with the countries concerned and the respective assistance strategies. In this context, the contribution of the Commission would be welcomed.

The Council further invites the PSC to consider at least once during each Presidency the priorities for EU-OSCE co-operation under the November 2003 Conclusions, based on advice from the relevant geographical and functional working groups."

Conflict prevention - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council welcomed the report submitted by the Presidency on EU activities in the framework of prevention, including implementation of the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts and forwarded it to the European Council. The Council underlined the ongoing need for constructive and comprehensive engagement by the EU on conflict prevention issues."

HUMAN RIGHTS

European Union guidelines on human rights defenders - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. The Council welcomes and adopts the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders (10056/1/04). The Guidelines will be an integral part of the process of further strengthening the European Union's human rights policy in external relations. The Council notes that the Guidelines will enhance the European Union's activities in the protection and support of human rights defenders.
2. The Council notes that support for human rights defenders is already a long established element of the European Union's human rights external relations policy. The purpose of the Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders is to provide practical suggestions for enhancing EU action in relation to this issue. The Guidelines can be used in contacts with third countries at all levels as well as in multilateral human rights fora, in order to support and strengthen ongoing efforts by the Union to promote and encourage respect for the right to defend human rights. The Guidelines also provide for interventions by the Union for human rights defenders at risk and suggest practical means to support and assist human rights defenders.
3. The Council noted that while the Guidelines address the specific issues of Human Rights Defenders they will contribute to reinforcing the EU's human rights policy in general."

DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Information Society - World Summit

The Council approved a strategy paper on the main procedural and organisational issues raised in preparations for the next World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Tunisia in November 2005 (10184/04).

The first preparatory meeting will take place in Tunisia on 24-26 June.

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Annual policy strategy

The Council took note of a report from the Presidency on dialogue with the Commission on its annual policy strategy for 2005 (9528/1/04).

The main priorities set by the Commission for 2005 are competitiveness and cohesion, security and European citizenship, as well as external responsibility (neighbourhood and partnership).

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Netherlands - Turnover taxes - Recyclable waste

The Council adopted Decisions extending the validity of authorisations granted to the Netherlands for special tax measures in the recyclable waste and clothing sectors, in derogation from the general rules on turnover taxes set by Directive 77/388/EEC (10034/04 + 10035/04).

The special measures are aimed at preventing fraud in sectors where collecting VAT is rendered awkward by the difficulty of identifying and supervising the activities of subcontractors.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Terrorism - Plan of action

The Council approved a report on implementation of its March declaration on combating terrorism, and agreed to submit it to the European Council, as well as an EU plan of action assembling a package of measures on combating terrorism (10009/3/04 and 10010/3/04).

SIS II functions - Council conclusions

The Council adopted conclusions on SIS II functions (10125/04).

INSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Information and communication strategy for the European Union - *Council conclusions*

"1. The Council

- welcomes the Commission communication of 20 April 2004 on implementing the information and communication strategy for the European Union (COM(2004) 196 final);
- recalls its Conclusions of 10 December 2002 and 10 December 2001 on the previous Commission communications in this field, namely COM(2001) 354 final and COM(2002) 350 final;
- confirms its support for the establishment of coordinated information and communication strategies on EU activities, and that in line with the guidelines given by the European Council;
- recalls the inaugural informal Ministerial Conference in April 2004 organised by the Irish Presidency to address the major challenge of “Communicating Europe” to its citizens and notes the synthesis document of the Conference as a good basis for further discussion;
- welcomes the forthcoming Dutch Presidency's intention to organise a follow-up informal Ministerial meeting in October 2004 to stimulate concrete communication efforts and actions of Member States and Institutions;
- stresses the crucial importance of addressing the communication challenge through a close partnership between Member States and institutions with a view to ensuring the cost-effective provision of information to the widest possible audience;
- recognises the need for targeted and timely EU information which is communicated to citizens in plain language and in an easily comprehensible, objective and relevant manner;
- calls on Member States and Institutions to explore how existing information provision services might be better communicated to citizens.

2. Regarding priority information topics (PRINCE) the Council

- agrees on the necessity to regularly update the selected information topics and the underpinning communication strategies in line with the information needs of citizens as identified, inter alia, in opinion polls and surveys;
- underlines, in the context of the “Future of Europe” priority topic, the need for Member States and Institutions to deploy major efforts to ensure that European citizens are well-informed about the future Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe; invites Member States and the Commission to implement special communication actions aimed at addressing the information needs of all schools students;
- considers that the objectives and content of campaigns on “Enlargement” should be redefined and adapted in the light of the accession of the ten new Member States;
- stresses the need to put greater emphasis on the “Area of Freedom, Security and Justice” by increasing budgetary allocations and by undertaking joint information initiatives on aspects of particular relevance to citizens like the fight against crime and terrorism;
- attaches great importance to the “Role of Europe in the World”, including the need to inform citizens on ESDP, especially in connection with the missions being carried out under that policy; calls for interested Member States and Institutions to consider co-ordinated activities in this regard in the forthcoming years;
- urges strongly that budgetary allocations and personnel resources for priority topics under the PRINCE programme should be consistent with the communication challenges ahead, at both institutional and local level;
- underlines the need to facilitate effective co-operation between Member States and the Commission's Representations in the Member States;
- recommends the future regrouping of the PRINCE budget in a single budget line in order to make the best use of available funds;
- shares the Commission's view that PRINCE should continue to be based on partnership between Commission and Member States;
- considers "strategic partnerships" to be the most practicable option for implementation and invites interested Member States to define and carry out joint communication plans whose measures are financed separately but complementarily by Member States and the Commission;

- urges the Commission to take the necessary procedural steps to allow for the implementation of "management partnerships" and "one-off partnerships" with interested Member States.

3. Concerning the information relays and networks, the Council

- notes their extremely pro-active role as multipliers of information and considers them to be crucial suppliers of information to the general public and wishes to preserve their valuable experience and know-how;
- agrees on the need to create a stable legal framework which guarantees funding of networks from 2005 onwards and their operability, thus preventing any interruption in the flow of information provided to the public; and to this effect, urges the Commission to adopt without delay the necessary implementing measures;
- attaches great importance to the funding of similar networks in the new Member States.

4. The Council acknowledges the important role of the existing major European Information Centres and invites the Commission to examine speedily and constructively new proposals of Member States for the creation of major Centres.

5. The Council stresses the importance of continued support to the Euronews channel as a major element of audiovisual communication on Europe.

6. The Council

- reiterates the key-role of the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI) in laying down guidelines for EU communication and information activities, selecting the priorities for future initiatives and making suggestions for the conduct and financing of the major information campaigns;
- stresses the need to implement the EU communication and information strategy in conformity with the IGI orientations."

TRANSPARENCY

Public access to documents

The Council adopted the reply to the confirmatory application made by Mr Antonio TERRA BARBENA (1/04), the Finnish delegation voting against (9750/04).

APPOINTMENTS

Committee of the Regions

The Council adopted a Decision appointing:

- Mr Ossi MARTIKAINEN, Lapinlahden kunnanvaltuuston puheenjohtaja, as a member in place of Mr Markku KAUPPINEN;
- Ms Auli HYVÄRINEN, Keminmaan kunnanvaltuuston ja kunnanhallituksen jäsen, as an alternate member in place of Mr Ossi MARTIKAINEN,

for the remainder of their term of office, which runs until 25 January 2006 (10117/04).
