



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



16289/06 (Presse 352)

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2770th Council Meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Brussels, 11 December 2006

President **Mr Erkki Tuomioja**
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland

* The 2771st meeting on External Relations is the subject of a separate press release (16291/06).

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Main Results of the Council

The Council adopted conclusions on the **enlargement** of the EU as concerns the accession of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007 and accession negotiations with Croatia and Turkey.

As regards **Turkey**, the Council decided in particular to suspend negotiations on eight chapters relevant to Turkey's restrictions as regards the Republic of Cyprus, and will not close the other chapters, until it fulfils its commitments under the additional protocol to the EU-Turkey association agreement, which extended the EU-Turkey customs union to the ten member states, including Cyprus, that joined the EU in May 2004.

The Council emphasized that chapters for which technical preparations have been completed will be opened in accordance with established procedures.

The Council also examined draft conclusions for the December meeting of the European Council, which includes language on the EU's enlargement strategy.

The Council confirmed the establishment of the EU **network of energy security correspondents** and invited each Member State to nominate their energy correspondent(s) before the 31st January 2007 with a view to the Network being operational in early 2007.

The Council agreed a number of items on external relations and the European security and defence policy, including on:

- the transition of operation ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- the mandate of the EU planning team for a future ESDP mission in Kosovo;
- the Aceh (Indonesia) peace process and the contribution of the Aceh Monitoring Mission;
- the creation of a WMD Monitoring Centre.

CONTENTS¹

PARTICIPANTS..... 6

ITEMS DEBATED

ENLARGEMENT - *Council conclusions* 8

PREPARATION OF THE DECEMBER EUROPEAN COUNCIL 11

OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME OF THE COUNCIL 12

CIVIL PROTECTION FINANCIAL INSTRUMENT..... 13

¹

- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- 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.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

–	Arms trade treaty - <i>Council conclusions</i>	14
–	UN reform - <i>Council conclusions</i>	14
–	Illicit trafficking of small arms.....	16
–	Small arms and light weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean	16
–	Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.....	16
–	Relations with Africa - Implementation of the joint strategy	17
–	Relations with Guinea	17
–	Liberia - Imports of round logs and timber products	17
–	Indonesia/Aceh - <i>Council conclusions</i>	18
–	Fiji - <i>Council conclusions</i>	18
–	Mediterranean and Middle East - Report on the EU's strategic partnership.....	19
–	European neighbourhood policy - <i>Council conclusions</i>	19
–	Human rights and democratisation - <i>Council conclusions</i>	19
–	Support to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration.....	24
–	Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe - Special coordinator.....	24
–	Efficiency, coherence and visibility of the European Union's external policies	24

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

–	Bosnia and Herzegovina - Operation ALTHEA - <i>Council conclusions</i>	25
–	EU crisis management operation in Kosovo	25
–	Civilian headline goal 2008	26

TRADE POLICY

–	Dual-use goods.....	26
–	WTO - Transparency mechanism for regional agreements.....	26
–	Anti-dumping - India - Cotton-type bedlinen.....	26
–	Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine - Steel products	27
–	Agreement with South Africa - Automotive products	27

GENERAL AFFAIRS

- EU emergency and crisis response capacities27
- Proceedings in the Council's different configurations27

SOCIAL POLICY

- Seat of the European Gender Institute28
- European Social Fund - Combating early school leaving - *Council conclusions*28

ENERGY

- EU network of energy security correspondents - *Council conclusions*30

ENVIRONMENT

- Biodiversity - *Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Member States*31

TRANSPARENCY

- Review of the Council's transparency policy32

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

Czech Republic:

Mr Alexandr VONDRA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark:

Mr Per Stig MØLLER

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

Mr Frank-Walter STEINMEIER

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Greece:

Ms Dora BAKOYANNIS
Mr Ioannis VALINAKIS

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary 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

Ireland:

Mr Dermot AHERN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Italy:

Mr Famiano CRUCIANELLI

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

Mr Yiorgos LILLIKAS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Artis PABRIKS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

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 FRENDU

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 Luís AMADO

Ministro de Estado, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Dimitrij RUPEL
Mr Janez LENARČIČ

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary at the Government Office for European
Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Ján KUBIŠ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Erkki TUOMIOJA
Ms Paula LEHTOMÄKI

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for European Affairs, Foreign Trade and
Development

Sweden:

Mr Carl BILDT
Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖM

Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Minister for European Affairs

United Kingdom:

Ms Margaret BECKETT
Mr Geoff HOON

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Minister of State for Europe

.....
Commission:

Ms Margot WALLSTRÖM
Mr Olli REHN

Vice President
Member

.....
General Secretariat of the Council:

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

.....
The Governments of the Acceding States were represented as follows:

Bulgaria:

Mr Ivailo KALFIN

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Romania:

Mr Mihai-Răzvan UNGUREANU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

ITEMS DEBATED

ENLARGEMENT - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"Bulgaria and Romania

The Council looks forward to welcoming Bulgaria and Romania as Member States on 1 January 2007 and notes with satisfaction that the process of ratification of the Accession Treaty is close to completion. In line with the Council conclusions on Bulgaria and Romania of 16-17 October 2006, the Union institutions will cooperate with both member countries and verify progress in the areas of judicial reform and the fight against corruption and organised crime after accession. This and other accompanying measures will ensure that Bulgaria's and Romania's accession to the European Union will be a success.

Turkey

The Council takes note of the Commission's report of 8 November 2006 and welcomes the findings and recommendations contained therein.

Council welcomes the continued progress made by Turkey in the reform process, but regrets that the pace of reforms has slowed down in 2006. It is essential that Turkey undertakes determined efforts to intensify the reform process and to implement it with determination, so as to ensure its irreversibility and sustainability. The substantial and technical preparation of the negotiations have progressed well. The Council recalls that, in line with the Negotiating Framework, the advancement of the accession negotiations continues to be guided by Turkey's progress in preparing for accession. In this context the Council notes that further significant efforts are required to strengthen freedom of expression, freedom of religion, women's rights, minority rights, trade union rights and civilian control of the military. In line with the Negotiating Framework, Turkey also needs to commit to good neighbourly relations and to the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the United Nations Charter, including, if necessary, jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

The Council recalls the declaration of the European Community and its Member States of 21 September 2005 and notes that Turkey has not fulfilled its obligation of full non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement.

The Council welcomes the Commission's recommendation of 29 November. In this context the Council agrees that the Member States within the Intergovernmental Conference will not decide on opening chapters covering policy areas relevant to Turkey's restrictions as regards the Republic of Cyprus until the Commission verifies that Turkey has fulfilled its commitments related to the Additional Protocol.

These chapters are: Chapter 1: free movement of goods, Chapter 3: right of establishment and freedom to provide service, Chapter 9: financial services, Chapter 11: agriculture and rural development, Chapter 13: fisheries, Chapter 14: transport policy, Chapter 29: customs union and Chapter 30: external relations.

The Council agrees that the Member States within the Intergovernmental Conference will not decide on provisionally closing chapters until the Commission verifies that Turkey has fulfilled its commitments related to the Additional Protocol.

The Council will follow up and review progress made on the issues covered by the declaration of 21 September 2005. The Council invites the Commission to report on this in its forthcoming annual reports, in particular in 2007, 2008 and 2009, as appropriate.

The Council emphasizes that the screening process will now continue and chapters for which technical preparations have been completed will be opened in accordance with established procedures, in line with the Negotiating Framework.

The Council looks forward to speedy progress on these issues."

Croatia

The Council takes note of the Commission's report of 8 November 2006 and welcomes the findings and recommendations contained therein.

The Council commends Croatia for the progress it has made in the past year. The accession negotiations have begun well and first results have been obtained. Croatia is now required to build on the progress made. The Council recalls that, in line with the Negotiating Framework, the advancement of the accession negotiations continues to be guided by Croatia's progress in preparing for accession. Particular attention should be paid to accelerating the pace of reforms in the areas of judicial and public administration reform, the fight against corruption, and economic reform. Rigorous implementation of Croatia's obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, in particular in the areas of state aid and real estate acquisition, will be essential to maintain Croatia's positive momentum on the path to EU membership. The Council welcomes Croatia's full co-operation with ICTY and emphasises that Croatia needs to maintain it. Croatia also needs to pay due attention to good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, including making the necessary efforts towards finding solutions to outstanding bilateral issues, in particular border disputes."

PREPARATION OF THE DECEMBER EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The Council examined draft conclusions prepared by the presidency for the European Council meeting to be held in Brussels on 14 and 15 December.

The issues to be addressed by the European Council are:

- EU enlargement, including enlargement strategy;
- Justice and home affairs, in particular migration policy;
- Innovation, energy and climate change;
- External relations, including relations with Africa, European neighbourhood policy, Afghanistan and the Middle East.

The European Council will also hear an assessment by the presidency of its consultations with the member states regarding the EU constitutional treaty.

Work on the draft conclusions will continue in the run-up to the European Council, in particular as regards external relations.

OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME OF THE COUNCIL

The Council took note of a presentation by the incoming German and future Portuguese and Slovenian presidencies of a draft operational programme of the Council for 2007 and the first half of 2008 (16158/06). It held an exchange of views.

The document contains a strategic framework, established in consultation with the subsequent three presidencies, a list of specific priorities in each policy area and a comprehensive programme setting out the issues that are expected to be covered during the 18-month period.

It highlights the following specific priorities:

- The future of the Union;
- The Lisbon strategy for jobs and growth;
- Strengthening the EU's area of freedom, security and justice;
- Enhancing the role of the EU externally in the areas of security, development and economic relations.

The three presidencies will finalise the programme in the light of the Council's discussion.

CIVIL PROTECTION FINANCIAL INSTRUMENT

The Council reached political agreement on a draft regulation aimed at establishing an instrument for the financing of Community action in the field of civil protection for the 2007-13 period. The regulation will be adopted without discussion at a forthcoming Council meeting, after finalisation of the text.

The new financial instrument will cover:

- response and preparedness actions covered by the EU's civil protection mechanism;
- actions already covered by the 1999-2006 civil protection action programme, such as prevention (study of the causes of disasters, forecasting, public information) and preparedness (detection, training, networking, exercises, mobilisation of expertise) within the EU;
- new areas such as additional equipment and transport in response actions under the civil protection mechanism.

Indicative annual amounts of EUR 17 million for actions within the EU and EUR 8 million for actions in third countries are available under the EU's 2007-13 financial framework.

The Council's political agreement follows broad agreement reached at its "justice and home affairs" session on 4 and 5 December.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Arms trade treaty - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council welcomed the formal start of the process towards the elaboration of a legally binding international Arms Trade Treaty through the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the resolution "Towards an arms trade treaty: establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms" on 6 December 2006. The Council noted with appreciation that a clear majority of UN Member States supported the resolution, including all EU Member States. The Council remained convinced that the United Nations is the only forum that could deliver a truly universal instrument.

The Council welcomed in particular the fact that the operational paragraphs of the resolution request the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on the feasibility, scope and draft parameters for a comprehensive, legally binding instrument, and to establish a group of governmental experts, commencing in 2008, to examine these matters. The Council reaffirmed that the EU and its individual Member States would play an active role in this process, and called upon them, as well as all other UN Member States, to actively support the ATT process, to submit their views to the Secretary-General and participate in the work of the group of governmental experts.

The Council underlined the importance of co-operation in this process with other States and regional organizations and expressed its firm belief that a comprehensive, legally binding instrument, consistent with existing responsibilities of States under relevant international law, establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms, would be a major contribution to tackling the undesirable and irresponsible proliferation of conventional arms which undermines peace, security, development and full respect for human rights."

UN reform - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council recalls its conclusions adopted on 10 April 2006 on the UN World Summit follow-up and reaffirms its commitment to ensure that the reforms agreed at the Summit are fully and urgently implemented.

2. During the sixtieth session, the UN General Assembly agreed on a number of measures to reinforce the Organisation. The follow-up of the implementation of those decisions needs to be assured and carefully monitored. In particular, the Council stresses the EU's commitment to the work of the newly established Peacebuilding Commission and Human Rights Council, and to implement the development commitments of the Summit. Progress in these areas will enable the UN to continue to make a genuine contribution to the achievement of lasting peace, the protection and promotion of human rights as well as sustainable development.
3. The Council recognises the need to reform the main UN bodies, among them the General Assembly, ECOSOC and the Security Council, with a view to enhancing the representativeness, transparency and efficiency of the system. For its part the EU will engage actively in constructive dialogue to advance all the reforms agreed at the UN World Summit. The Council furthermore welcomes the adoption of GA resolution on the reform of ECOSOC and encourages all Members of the United Nations to make full use of the new opportunities offered by a strengthened ECOSOC to discharge its redefined functions
4. The Council welcomes the report by the UN Panel on System-wide Coherence and looks forward to the Secretary-General's comments and proposals on the implementation of the Panel's recommendations. The EU considers it important to engage all UN Member States and other stakeholders in active discussion of the Report's recommendations and to agree on measures that will strengthen the UN's capacity to deliver as one in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance, the environment and the achievement of the MDG's. The Council also welcomes the progress towards the establishment of the "One UN" country pilots.
5. The Council also stresses the importance of the full implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and reiterates its commitment to reaching an agreement on the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) as soon as possible.
6. Management reform is crucial to achieving a more efficient and more effective UN. The Council supports the steps already taken to improve the management of the Organisation, including the creation of an Ethics Office in the Secretariat. The Council underlines the need for Member States to continue to engage constructively to secure further results in the equally important areas of human resources management, procurement reform and governance and oversight.
7. The Council underlines the importance of the Mandate Review as necessary in order to ensure that the UN's resources are matched to its priorities. The Council emphasizes that Mandate Review is neither a cost-cutting exercise nor intended to reduce the activity of the UN or to put into question the priorities set by the General Assembly. The Council invites all Member States to contribute positively and flexibly to the process underway to secure agreement on the way forward on Mandate review, and to engage actively in the review process itself.

8. The Council pays tribute to the outstanding efforts of the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in successfully managing a difficult and complex reform phase. The Council has highly valued Mr Annan's leadership and vision during the past ten years and would like to thank him for his ceaseless work for the principles of the UN Charter as well as his courage in the much-needed transformation of the World Organisation. The Council also thanks the successive Presidents of the General Assembly for their vital role in support of reform during this period.

9. The Council warmly welcomes the appointment of Mr Ban Ki-Moon as the next Secretary-General of the United Nations and commits its full support to him in his new challenging task of leading an effective and efficient World Organisation towards its objectives of peace and security, development and human rights, including by pursuing UN reform."

Illicit trafficking of small arms

The Council endorsed a second report on implementation of the EU's strategy to combat the illicit accumulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW).

The EU strategy, adopted by the European Council on 16 December 2005, builds on existing EU policies and actions in this area and puts them under a common heading. It contains an action plan calling for continuous monitoring by means of implementation reports every six months.

Small arms and light weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean

The Council adopted a decision on implementation of joint action 2002/589/CFSP on the European Union contribution to combating the accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean.

By means of this decision, the European Union intends to contribute financial assistance to the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for peace, disarmament and development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UN-LiREC). This will be the third and final EU contribution to be provided in form of a EUR 700.000 grant to UN-DDR/UN-LiREC. Activities covered include development of firearms-related databases, a parliamentary exchange initiative and support for weapons destruction and stockpile management.

Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

The Council approved a concept paper on the monitoring and enhancement of implementation of the EU's strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) through a WMD Monitoring Centre.

Since its adoption by the European Council in December 2003, considerable progress has been made in implementation of the EU's WMD strategy, including through the adoption of Council joint actions. In line with the strategy, the concept paper (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/wmd>) outlines how to monitor and further enhance consistent implementation of the strategy through a WMD Monitoring Centre.

The aim of the paper, which has been prepared by the personal representative of the high representative for non-proliferation, in cooperation with the Commission, is to establish a cooperative working method which allows the Council Secretariat, the high representative, the Commission services and the member states to work together and ensure better synergy.

Relations with Africa - Implementation of the joint strategy

The Council approved a draft report, to be submitted for adoption by the European Council, on implementation of the EU-Africa joint strategy.

The report, entitled “The EU and Africa: Towards a Strategic Partnership – The Way Forward and Key Achievements in 2006”, was jointly prepared by the presidency, the Council Secretariat and the Commission.

Relations with Guinea

Following political consultations under the ACP-EU partnership agreement, the Council adopted a declaration on progress made by the Republic of Guinea in establishing an electoral framework for free and transparent elections (15978/06).

Liberia - Imports of round logs and timber products

The Council adopted a regulation ending a ban on imports into the EU of round logs and timber products originating in Liberia, with retroactive effect from 19 September 2006 (15007/06).

The regulation is aimed at implementing United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 1689(2006), by which it was decided last June not to renew the 2003 prohibition of imports of round logs and timber products from Liberia, after concluding that Liberia had adopted the necessary forestry legislation.

The regulation amends regulation 234/2004 which banned the provision to Liberia of technical and financial assistance related to military activities and the import of rough diamonds and of round logs and timber products originating in that country. The Council had adopted regulation 234/2004 in order to implement restrictive measures imposed by UNSC resolution 1521(2003).

Indonesia/Aceh - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council welcomes the significant progress made in restoring peace and stability in the Indonesian province of Aceh since the signing of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding in August 2005. A visible manifestation of this progress to date is the local elections held in Aceh on 11 December 2006. Given the importance attached to the peace process the EU has deployed an EU election observation mission. The Council expresses its hope that the elections contribute to the further consolidation of the peace process to the benefit of the people of Aceh and the whole Indonesia.

The Council commends the parties for their political vision and for respecting the commitments undertaken in Helsinki. The Council encourages the parties to further work closely together on the continued implementation of the MOU to ensure the sustainability of the peace process.

The Council expresses its satisfaction at the important role played by the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), which will conclude its mandate on 15 December, in monitoring and supporting the peace process. The Council underlines the need to draw comprehensive lessons from this experience for future EU civilian crisis management missions. The Council also expresses its appreciation for the very close cooperation between the EU countries and the five ASEAN Contributing Countries in this mission. In this context, the Council looks forward to building on this experience at the upcoming EU-ASEAN Foreign Ministerial meeting in Germany in 2007.

The Council underlines the European Union's determination to develop a lasting and comprehensive partnership with Indonesia, including its readiness to stay engaged in post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building in Aceh. The EU will remain committed to this process through Community programmes and Member States' bilateral efforts."

Fiji - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council condemns the military takeover in Fiji and the removal of its democratically elected Government. It deplores the actions by Commodore Bainimarama and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces in deposing the Prime Minister and assuming executive control of the country. The Council calls for the urgent and full restoration of democracy as well as the return of civilian rule as soon as possible."

Mediterranean and Middle East - Report on the EU's strategic partnership

The Council took note of an interim report on the EU's strategic partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East with a view to forwarding it to the European Council for endorsement.

The Council agreed in June 2004 that a report on implementation of the EU strategic partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East would be presented at the June 2005 European Council and thereafter on a six-monthly basis.

The European Council underlined in December 2005 its commitment to support political, social and economic reform in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

European neighbourhood policy - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council welcomed the Commission's Communication on "Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy" (ENP), noting that significant progress has taken place in the first eighteen months of implementation of the first seven ENP Action Plans. The Council underlined the importance it attaches to the ENP as one of the core priorities of the Union's external action.

The Council looked forward to further examining the Communication and considering future proposals from the Commission, and invited the future Presidencies to take forward the work in the relevant Council bodies on strengthening the ENP. The Council invited the incoming Presidency to make a report to the Council in June 2007."

Human rights and democratisation - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council has continued to implement the EU policy on human rights and democratisation in third countries. Human rights remain a priority field in the Council's actions and human rights and democratisation will be kept on the agenda of the Council.

2. The Council commends the crucial work of human rights defenders worldwide. This year, the EU has emphasised the essential role of women human rights defenders, and has actively supported their work. As underscored by the Council in June, the EU is committed to continuing its actions in support of all human rights activists who - often at the risk of their own lives - take action to defend others. In this respect, the EU has noted with concern some negative developments and a visible trend in some countries aimed at limiting free civil society activities.
3. The Council remains deeply committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of children affected by armed conflicts. The implementation of the EU Guidelines and Strategy on Children and Armed Conflict as well as of the checklist for the integration of the protection of children affected by armed conflict into all ESDP operations will be continued and strengthened.
4. The Council reiterates its firm opposition to the death penalty in all cases. It welcomes the fact that in 2006 several states decided to abolish the death penalty, but at the same time deplores the wide use of it in some other countries. The EU will continue its efforts to encourage retentionist countries to abolish capital punishment. The EU will continue to raise this issue in all relevant fora. In this regard, the EU supports the organisation of the third World Congress against the Death Penalty in February 2007.
5. The Council reaffirms its commitment to the prevention and eradication of all forms of torture and ill-treatment within the EU and world-wide. The EU is campaigning to promote the global instruments for the prevention of torture, and encouraging full participation and cooperation of states with the relevant mechanisms. The EU will continue to address both specific cases and more structural aspects with a view to preventing and eradicating torture.
6. The EU remains firmly committed to the absolute prohibition of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment. It guides our own actions and we raise our concerns with third countries. In this context, the Council reiterates that human rights, refugee law and international humanitarian law have to be respected and maintained when combating terrorism. The Council will continue to follow closely developments with regard to human rights in combating terrorism and take adequate measures for their protection. The existence of secret detention facilities where detained persons are kept in a legal vacuum is not in conformity with international humanitarian and human rights law.

7. The Council welcomes the progress made in mainstreaming of human rights into all EU policies. The Council underlines the importance of taking human rights aspects into consideration in all relevant geographical and thematic policies of the EU and stresses the continuing character of this work. The Council commends in this regard the work done by the Personal Representative of the SG/HR for Human Rights. The EU will actively and regularly convey its position on this issue in a coherent manner in relevant contacts with third countries. In this context, the Council welcomes the adoption of best practises for the interpretation of the human rights criteria of the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports and underlines the need for practical implementation of the criteria.
8. The Council emphasizes the need to take practical measures to strengthen the human rights perspective in the ESDP and welcomes efforts made in this direction. Those include developing a standard field manual on human rights for ESDP missions and ensuring the inclusion of human rights expertise both in the planning and in the implementation of ESDP operations. The Council underlines the need to continue the active implementation in the EU of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and Security and reiterates its commitment expressed in November on promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in crisis management.
9. The Council reaffirms its commitment to improving the coherence and consistency of the EU's human rights policy in its internal matters as well as in external affairs. The EU's Fundamental Rights Charter as well as the establishment of a Fundamental Rights Agency are to be seen as important steps in this context. The importance of the EU's cooperation with regional and international organisations, such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the OHCHR, is underlined.
10. The Council reaffirms the importance it attaches to dialogue as a key tool in promoting human rights worldwide. Apart from the specific human rights dialogues and consultations, the various agreement-based, ad hoc and local human rights dialogues that the EU has with third countries are an important channel to promote the EU's objectives in the area of human rights, rule of law and democracy. The Council welcomes the efforts made to include all relevant human rights issues on the agendas of the Article 8 dialogue meetings. The Council, however, underlines that bilateral human rights dialogues do not exclude other action in the field of human rights such as raising human rights concerns through public declarations or in multilateral forums.

11. The Council continues to be deeply concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Iran. The Council reiterates its serious concern over the on-going harassment of human rights defenders and the treatment of religious minorities in Iran. During the past year the EU has on several occasions expressed its concerns over the freedom of association and expression, including its concern over the closure of reformist newspapers. The Council deplores the fact that, despite Iran's obligations under the UN human rights conventions, the use of the death penalty in Iran is rising, and that Iran is one of the few countries where minors are still being sentenced to death and executed. The Council welcomes the adoption of a resolution on human rights in Iran at the 61st session of the UNGA Third Committee, and expresses its hope that Iran will move swiftly to address the concerns of the international community contained in that resolution. The Council regrets that, in spite of the mutual agreement to hold a meeting of the EU-Iran Human Rights Dialogue in Helsinki on 18-19 December 2006, Iran finally decided not to engage in the dialogue with the EU. The EU remains willing to take up the dialogue with Iran.

12. The Council reaffirmed the high importance the EU attaches to its exchanges with China on human rights, including through the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue and the legal seminars. The Council welcomes progress made by China in giving effect to the economic rights of its citizens and the commitment made to reform its criminal justice system. It also appreciates the commitment made by China to fulfil its international human rights obligations and to co-operate with UN human rights mechanisms, in particular the Human Rights Council. However, the Council continues to have serious concerns about the human rights situation in China and deplores the fact that there has been very little progress in a number of areas of concern, which include freedom of expression, religion and association as well as the rights of persons belonging to minorities and the continued and extensive use of the death penalty. The EU will continue to monitor the human rights situation in China and to work for positive change through continued and improved dialogue and cooperation. The EU urges China to announce a timetable for the ratification of the ICCPR and work towards a timely ratification. A swift accession to the Rome Statute should be considered.

13. The Council welcomes the continuation of the human rights consultations with the Russian Federation. The EU, however, remains concerned about certain developments in Russia during the past year, notably in relation to the situation of human rights defenders, torture, media freedom, NGOs, impunity, respect for the rule of law as well as racism, xenophobia and intolerance. The Council deplores the recent assassinations of high-profile journalists and urges Russia to do its utmost to bring the perpetrators to justice. The Council remains deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Chechnya and will continue to pay close attention to it.

14. The Council reiterates its strong support to the mandate of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), which was established in the context of the broader UN reform and began its work this year. The EU remains committed to working for an efficient body able to timely address the full range of human rights issues, including urgent human rights issues and situations. In this regard, the EU reaffirms the essential role of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. The EU looks forward to the HRC's work to strengthen international human rights law and its implementation. The Council underlines the need for constructive cooperation between states in order to secure a meaningful dialogue and practical and effective results and reiterates its commitment to work towards this. The EU will continue to engage actively in the development of tools and mechanisms that are needed to make the HRC an effective and constructive body. Transparency, predictability and inclusiveness allowing for the participation of all stakeholders, including NGOs and national human rights institutions, should remain the guiding principles of this institution building process.
15. The Council welcomes the convocation of a special session on Sudan/Darfur by the HRC thus proving the HRC's ability to effectively address urgent human rights situations. The Council expresses its continuing deep concern at the appalling humanitarian and human rights situation in Darfur, and calls for an immediate end to the ongoing violations of humanitarian law and human rights law by all sides, with special focus on vulnerable groups, including women and children. The Government of Sudan has a responsibility to protect its citizens against violence and guarantee respect for human rights. The Council calls on all parties to put an end to impunity by implementing relevant UN resolutions. The Council also expresses its deep concern about the recent escalation of the conflict in Sri Lanka which has led to increasing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.
16. The Council welcomes the adoption of resolutions on several pressing issues and country situations, including the DPRK, Burma/Myanmar, Iran and Belarus at the 61st session of the UNGA Third Committee. Action on Uzbekistan was prevented by a "no action motion". The Council reiterates its strong opposition to the increasing use of no action motions and finds it of utmost importance that UN Member States be given the possibility to debate the substance of all initiatives presented. The EU also welcomes the adoption of several resolutions on important thematic issues such as the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, religious intolerance and the rights of the child. The EU further welcomes the adoption by the General Assembly of the International Convention for the protection of all persons from enforced disappearance, thus opening this new instrument for ratification.
17. The Council welcomes the efforts to complete the negotiations on the regulation of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and underlines the need for the EU's continuous support for human rights and democracy work worldwide.

18. The Council further welcomes the continuation during the past year of its ongoing close cooperation with the European Parliament and civil society. The Council takes note of the recommendations of the Annual EU Human Rights Forum, held in Helsinki on 7-8 December 2006, and underlines the need to continue the existing active cooperation among the European human rights community."

Support to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration

The Council approved an EU concept for support to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR).

DDR of ex-combatants has been identified as a key area for the European Union's engagement in post-conflict peace building. It has been also highlighted in the Union's development policy statement, "The European consensus on development", in the European security strategy and in the EU strategy for Africa.

The ultimate aim of DDR processes is the social and economic reintegration of ex-combatants in order to contribute to sustainable peace, reconciliation of society, stability and long-term development. The intention is to help ex-combatants move away from the roles and positions that defined them during conflict to identifying themselves as citizens and members of local communities. This includes providing alternatives for combatants and their dependents in terms of access to the political process, viable livelihoods and social and economic prospects for the future.

The aim of the concept is to set out the EU's approach to DDR for future engagements, based on previous experiences and lessons learned within the international community. It includes clear principles for EU support and measures for strengthening the Union's future work in this area.

Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe - Special coordinator

The Council adopted a decision on the reappointment of Dr Erhard Busek as special coordinator of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe from 1 January to 31 December 2007 (14960/06).

Efficiency, coherence and visibility of the European Union's external policies

The Council took note of a report on progress made and recommendations on future work in improving the efficiency, coherence and visibility of the Union's external policies (16419/06).

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Bosnia and Herzegovina - Operation ALTHEA - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council reviewed Operation ALTHEA and welcomed the positive contribution of the operation to the safe and secure environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The Council approved the SG/HR's recommendations for Operation ALTHEA in the light of the advices received from relevant Council bodies and underlined the continued need for an EU military presence to provide reassurance and to react to any possible security challenges.

The security situation in BiH has evolved enough to permit the Council to decide in principle on a transition of Operation ALTHEA. The implementation should go ahead in accordance with the agreed concept for transition, subject to a definitive decision (revised OPLAN) by the Political and Security Committee set to be taken by the end of February 2007, taking into account the security situation in the country as well as the impact on that, of the regional security situation.

The decision to proceed to the subsequent steps of the transition will be taken by the Council in due time.

The EU remains committed to BiH and through its military presence will continue to contribute to the maintenance of the safe and secure environment.

The Council noted that cooperation with NATO continues to work well in respect of Operation ALTHEA, in Brussels as well as in BiH, in the context of the "Berlin Plus" arrangements."

EU crisis management operation in Kosovo

The Council adopted a joint action amending and extending the mandate of the EU planning team in Kosovo (EUPT Kosovo) as concerns a possible EU crisis management operation there (14875/06).

The joint action extends the EUPT Kosovo mandate until 31 May 2007, or until the launching of a EU crisis management operation, whichever comes earlier. It also adapts the mandate in order to take forward planning and to take action to ensure a smooth transition between selected tasks of the United Nations interim administration mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the possible EU operation relating to the rule of law and other areas that might be identified by the Council in the context of the Kosovo status process.

The financial allocation for the extension of the action amounts to EUR 10.5 million, in addition to EUR 3 million already committed for the initial phase of establishment of EUPT Kosovo from 10 April to 31 December 2006.

The Council established EUPT Kosovo last April by means of joint action 2006/304/CFSP (*see press release 7938/1/06, page 12*).

Civilian headline goal 2008

The Council approved a civilian capabilities improvement plan, which covers the civilian headline goal process in 2007.

On 13 November, ministers of foreign affairs meeting within a civilian capabilities improvement conference adopted a ministerial declaration. Its annex contained elements of a civilian capability improvement plan (*14981/06*).

TRADE POLICY

Dual-use goods

The Council took note of a report on progress made during 2006 in implementation of peer-review recommendations on member states' export control systems for dual use goods.

WTO - Transparency mechanism for regional agreements

The Council adopted a decision establishing the position to be taken by the European Community in the General Council of the World Trade Organisation in favour of the provisional application of the transparency mechanism for regional trade agreements (*14925/06*).

Anti-dumping - India - Cotton-type bedlinen

The Council adopted a regulation amending regulation 74/2004 imposing a definitive countervailing duty on imports of cotton-type bedlinen originating in India (*15393/06*).

Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine - Steel products

The Council adopted regulations maintaining for 2007 quantitative limits for imports of certain steel products originating in Kazakhstan (*14530/1/06*), Russia (*14536/06*) and Ukraine (*14533/06*), at the same level as for 2006, pending the conclusion of new agreements with these countries for subsequent years.

Agreement with South Africa - Automotive products

The Council approved the EU's position on an amendment to the agreement on trade, development and cooperation with South Africa in order to take into account the consolidation of tariff preferences on automotive products granted to South Africa by the Community scheme of generalised tariff preferences (GSP) and commitments made by South Africa to improve market access on automotive products from the EU.

GENERAL AFFAIRS

EU emergency and crisis response capacities

The Council took note of a presidency report on the EU's emergency and crisis response capacities, to be submitted to the European Council.

The report reviews progress achieved during the past six months and sets out the tasks ahead.

The European Council stressed in June 2006 that improving the Union's responsiveness to emergencies remained a political imperative. It agreed that particular attention should be given to: further developing the Union's rapid response capability; rapid implementation of steps already agreed; acquired experience to improve disaster response; work for adoption of the necessary legal provisions to reinforce the Community's civil protection capabilities; and closer consular cooperation among EU member states.

Proceedings in the Council's different configurations

The Council took note of a presidency report on proceedings in its different configurations (*16095/06*).

SOCIAL POLICY

Seat of the European Gender Institute

The Conference of the representatives of the governments of the member states adopted a decision designating Vilnius (Lithuania) as the seat of the European Gender Institute (16303/1/06).

European Social Fund - Combating early school leaving - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL:

1. WELCOMES the Special Report by the Court of Auditors on the contribution of the European Social Fund in combating early school leaving and CONSIDERS it very useful that the audit has been made some years before the new programming period of the European Social Fund starts;
2. RECALLS the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda as revised in March 2005 and RECALLS that, at the same time, the European Council adopted the European Youth Pact as one of the instruments contributing to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives;
3. STRESSES, also on this occasion, the importance of the Employment Guidelines on expanding and improving investment in human capital, including through significantly reducing the number of early school leavers (Integrated Guideline No. 23) and on adapting education and training systems in response to new competence requirements, including by raising and ensuring the attractiveness, openness and quality standards of education and training (Integrated Guideline No. 24);
4. AGREES with the Court that the topic of early school leaving (ESL) is of the utmost importance;
5. AGREES also with the Court's approach of auditing the contribution of the ESF in reducing early school leaving in a limited number of cases in six Member States. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy of the procedures in the Commission and in the Member States intended to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of ESF co-financed actions addressing early school leaving;

6. NOTES, however, that the Report reflects the situation in 2004; NOTES also that the situation has evolved since then, both at Member State level and at Community level, in particular in the context of the recent adoption of the new ESF regulation;
7. NOTES the conclusions of the Report which, on the one hand, stress rigour, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the use of ESF funds, and on the other hand, call for identifying and targeting those most at risk of leaving school prematurely and for an innovative use of ESF funding in tackling ESL;
8. NOTES the comments of the Commission, attached to the Report, which underline especially the fact that the ESF has translated the national priorities identified by Member States into concrete priorities and measures for funding;
9. AGREES with the main recommendations of the Court in relation to the actions to be taken:
 - defining and identifying the incidence of ESL;
 - identifying and targeting those most at risk of leaving school prematurely;
 - encouraging the exchange of information and best practice between organisations responsible for tackling ESL;
 - actively promoting the innovative use of ESF funding in tackling ESL;
10. STRESSES that both labour market and education authorities and organisations must be involved in tackling ESL;
11. RECOGNISES that the Member States carry the main responsibility for designing and implementing their own policies in the fields of employment and education and that, to be effective, ESF support for early school leaving must reflect the specific situations and policies in each Member State;
12. NOTES with satisfaction that this important topic will be able to be the subject of ESF funding also during the programming period 2007-2013;
13. NOTES that the Commission is working in partnership with the Member States to strengthen monitoring, evaluation, management and control systems for the new programming period;

14. RECALLS the links to activities in the education and youth fields, especially to the implementation of the European Youth Pact; STRESSES the need for young Europeans to benefit from policies and measures concerning education, training, mobility, vocational integration and social inclusion;
15. CALLS for coordination between different Community instruments and spending programmes in the fields of employment, lifelong learning including education and training, as well as youth, during the programming period 2007-2013;
16. STRESSES the importance of continuous flexibility in the approaches adopted on the basis of the needs and priorities of Member States, where appropriate at the regional and local levels;
17. STRESSES the importance of mutual learning, including through peer reviews, the exchange of good practice, and the dissemination of information."

ENERGY

EU network of energy security correspondents - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The joint paper by the Commission and Secretary-General/High Representative (doc. 9971/06) welcomed by the June 2006 European Council stated that an external energy policy "has to be based on a clear prior identification of EU interests and reliable risk assessments", with the necessary monitoring capabilities to provide "early warning" and to enhance its "capacity to respond". It proposed that "the EU should envisage a network of energy security correspondents, including representatives from the Member States, the Commission and the Council General Secretariat to monitor energy security, develop analysis and action plans".

The Commission Communication to the Informal Meeting of Heads of State or Government in Lahti proposed that, in order to ensure an efficient follow-up and coherence in pursuing EU's external energy initiatives and processes, it will be crucial for EU partners to be constantly informed and aware of developments, and ready to share essential information with each other in case of an external energy crisis. At the Lahti Summit it was confirmed to move on with the establishment of the network before the end of the year.

By providing shared assessments of external factors affecting the EU security of supply, the network will contribute to better integration of the Union's internal and external policies and to the development of increased cooperation between the Member States and the EU institutions, and will be designed to contribute to the prevention of emergency situations. It should not engage in policy or decision-making, but collect and process existing geopolitical and energy related information.

In light of the above the Council:

- confirms the establishment of the EU Network of Energy Security correspondents
- invites each Member State to nominate their energy correspondent(s) before the 31st January 2007 with a view to the Network being operational in early 2007.
- once these nominations have been made, the Commission as focal point will, in agreement with the Presidency, convene a first meeting of the Network to establish clear terms of reference on the basis of the outline of the network as set out in the annex.
- invites the Commission to report on the functioning of the network and give guidance for further development and possible revision of the EU Network of Energy Security Correspondents on the basis of the experience gained, no later than December 2007."

ENVIRONMENT

Biodiversity - Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Member States

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council

1. EMPHASISES the essential contribution of biodiversity and ecosystem services to human well-being, particularly for poor people who are both users of and contributors to the development of these resources; RECOGNISES the important link between biodiversity and achieving poverty reduction as well as other MDGs; and UNDERLINES that conservation, sustainable use of and equitable sharing of benefits from biodiversity as well as sustaining ecosystem services are core development issues.
2. WELCOMES the Message from Paris; SHARES the concern expressed on the continuing decline of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and UNDERLINES the urgent need for intensified and coordinated efforts to halt this trend;

3. APPRECIATES that the Conference on Integrating Biodiversity in European Development Cooperation in Paris, 19-21 September 2006, brought together development, environment and biodiversity experts, policy makers from the EU as well as from partner countries and private sector, representing a broad range of stakeholders; and EMPHASISES the importance of continued joint work to implement the commitments already made.
4. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of including biodiversity and sustaining ecosystem services in policy dialogue processes with partner countries and regions encouraging them to further identify needs and prioritise them in national and regional development strategies and plans; and EMPHASISES, in this context, the important links to good governance and coherence with relevant international conventions;
5. REITERATES that, to ensure sustainable results, mainstreaming of ecosystem services and biodiversity in development cooperation programming and any subsequent enhanced financial support from the international community and partner countries must be founded on national and regional ownership that is reflected by the integration and mainstreaming of biodiversity into development strategies and plans;
6. UNDERLINES, in this context, the importance of strengthening civil society, and capacity building programmes for all relevant stakeholders;
7. STRESSES the need to turn commitments into practical action;
8. INVITES the Commission, within the framework of its biodiversity reporting and in close cooperation with Member States, to report to the Council on a regular basis on the implementation of main priority actions identified in the Message from Paris; and RECALLS the importance of close cooperation with partner countries in monitoring processes, where relevant."

TRANSPARENCY

Review of the Council's transparency policy

The Council took note of a presidency report on implementation of its policy on transparency(15951/1/06).

Last June the European Council set out an overall policy on transparency with a view to improving openness and involving citizens more closely in the work of the EU. It requested the Council to review implementation of the measures with a view to assessing their impact on the effectiveness of the Council's work.

This first report notes that between July and mid-November there was a significant increase in the number of deliberations, debates and legislative items being dealt with in public session on important issues affecting the Union and its citizens.

Moreover, 120 public sessions and press conferences were broadcast via the Council website (videostreaming)¹. The number of visits to the website providing access to Council documents relating to public deliberation or debate amounts to more than 19 000.

The report concludes that since the new rules on transparency have been in operation for less than five months, it is too early to lay down any definitive conclusions and that a more thorough evaluation will be needed at the end of 2007.

¹ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/videostreaming>