



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



7565/09 (Presse 63)

PROVISIONAL VERSION

PRESS RELEASE

2933rd Council meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

External relations

Brussels, 16 March 2009

President **Karel SCHWARZENBERG**
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

* Some external relations items were adopted without debate at the 2932rd meeting on General Affairs (7564/09).

P R E S S

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

7565/09 (Presse 63)

1
EN

Main results of the Council

*The Council reiterated its full support to the European perspective of **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and called upon the local political leaders to engage thoroughly and with stronger determination on the necessary reform agenda in order for the country to make substantial progress on its way towards the European Union. The Council appointed Ambassador Valentin Inzko as EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina and welcomed his appointment as High Representative in BiH.*

*The Council evaluated the developments in **Belarus** and decided to extend the suspension of the visa ban on certain Belarussian officials for another 9 months. At the same time it decided to extend the restrictive measures for another 12 months. At the end of the 9-months period, the Council will conduct an in-depth review of the measures, taking into account the situation and developments in Belarus.*

*The Council adopted conclusions on **Afghanistan**, underlining that the challenges facing the country and the broader region require a renewed international engagement, and that the EU will play a major role in this.*

*The Council also adopted conclusion on the successful of operation **EUFOR TCHAD/RCA** (see General Affairs press release, doc. 7564/09).*

CONTENTS¹

PARTICIPANTS4

ITEMS DEBATED

WESTERN BALKANS - *Council conclusions*6

SUDAN - *Council conclusions*7

BELARUS - *Council conclusions*8

AFGHANISTAN - *Council conclusions*9

EU-US RELATIONS 11

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS 11

OTHER BUSINESS 12

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

none

¹ Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks. Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>). Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

PARTICIPANTS

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

Belgium:

Mr Karel DE GUCHT Minister for Foreign Affairs

Bulgaria:

Mr Boyko KOTZEV Permanent Representative

Czech Republic:

Mr Alexandr VONDRA Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for European Affairs

Mr Karel SCHWARZENBERG Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark:

Mr Per Stig MØLLER Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Michael ZILMER-JOHN State Secretary for Foreign and Security Policy, EU Policy and EU Coordination

Germany:

Mr Frank-Walter STEINMEIER Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Günter GLOSER Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ireland:

Mr Bobby MCDONAGH Permanent Representative

Greece:

Ms Dora BAKOYANNI Minister for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr. Miguel Ángel MORATINOS Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

France:

Mr Bernard KOUCHNER Minister for Foreign and European Affairs
Mr Bruno LE MAIRE State Secretary with responsibility for European affairs

Italy:

Mr Franco FRATTINI Minister for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

Mr Marcos KYPRIANOU Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Māris RIEKSTIŅŠ Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Vygaudas UŠACKAS Minister for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg:

Mr Jean ASSELBORN Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration

Mr Nicolas SCHMIT Minister for European Affairs and Immigration

Hungary:

Ms Kinga GÖNCZ Minister for Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr Tonio BORG Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Netherlands:

Mr Maxime VERHAGEN Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Frans TIMMERMANS Minister for European Affairs

Austria:

Mr Michael SPINDELEGGER Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Poland:

Mr Radosław SIKORSKI

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Portugal:

Ms Teresa RIBEIRO

State Secretary for European Affairs

Romania:

Mr Cristian DIACONESCU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Samuel ŽBOGAR

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Mitja GASPARI

Minister without Portfolio Responsible for Development and European Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Miroslav LAJČÁK

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Alexander STUBB

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ms Astrid THORS

Minister for Migration and European Affairs

Sweden:

Mr Carl BILDT

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖM

Minister for European Affairs

United Kingdom:

Mr David MILIBAND

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Ms Caroline FLINT

Minister of State for Europe

Commission:

Ms Margot WALLSTRÖM

Vice President

Ms Dalia GRYSBAUKAITĖ

Member

Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER

Member

General Secretariat of the Council:

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

ITEMS DEBATED

WESTERN BALKANS - Council conclusions

The Council had an exchange of views on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Based on a joint letter by High Representative Javier Solana and Commissioner Olli Rehn, the Council discussed the recent developments in the country. It also welcomed the appointment of Ambassador Valentin Inzko as EU Special Representative/High Representative and discussed the continued planning for a reinforced EU presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

After the discussion, the Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council reiterated its full support to the European perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina and called upon the local political leaders to engage thoroughly and with stronger determination on the necessary reform agenda in order for the country to make substantial progress on its way towards the European Union. The Council encouraged Bosnia and Herzegovina to continue fully implementing the Interim Agreement. Remaining deeply concerned about the overall political situation in BiH, the Council called upon BiH's political leaders to refrain from nationalist rhetoric and unilateral actions.

The Council reconfirmed its readiness for a transition from the Office of High Representative to increased local ownership, supported by a reinforced European Union presence, as soon as the conditions are met. The Council acknowledged the progress of the EU preparations, presented by the SG/HR and the Enlargement Commissioner, for its strengthened engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina under a reinforced, double-hatted EUSR/Head of the Commission Delegation.

Recalling its conclusions of 10 November 2008, the Council urged Bosnia and Herzegovina to maximize its efforts to complete fulfillment of the five objectives and two conditions set by the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board. To this aim, the Council strongly encouraged continuation of the Prud/Odzak process, urging that the widest possible consensus be found and called for the commitments undertaken in this context to be rapidly translated into further progress and concrete legislative results.

The Council appointed Ambassador Valentin Inzko as EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina and welcomed his appointment as High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Council commended the former EU Special Representative and High Representative Miroslav Lajčák for his outstanding efforts and commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina and its European future.

The Council noted that, despite the challenging political environment, the security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina remained stable. The Council welcomed the progress on the preparatory work for a possible evolution of Operation ALTHEA. The Council agreed to keep this work under regular review so that a decision on the future of the operation could be taken once the necessary conditions had been met. In this context, the Council reiterated that the possible evolution of operation ALTHEA would need to take political developments into account. The Council noted that cooperation with NATO on operation ALTHEA was continuing to work smoothly."

SUDAN - Council conclusions

The Council discussed the consequences of the International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant for President Al-Bashir and expressed serious concerns about the current humanitarian situation in Sudan after several international Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been expelled from the country.

After the discussion, the Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council recalls the declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union following the Government of Sudan's decision to expel 13 international humanitarian NGOs and revoke the licenses of three local NGOs. It reiterates its call upon the Government of Sudan to reconsider their decision urgently, and ensure that humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people in Sudan be continuously guaranteed, guided by the principles of human rights and international humanitarian law."

BELARUS - Council conclusions

In line with the Council's decision on Belarus last October, the Council evaluated the developments in the country and decided on the direction of the EU policy, in particular on the further suspension of the visa-ban sanctions and the extension of restrictive measures.

After the discussion, the Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council welcomes that certain positive steps have been taken by Belarus following the Council's decision on the temporary suspension of the travel restrictions imposed on certain officials of Belarus in October 2008. The Council also welcomes the increased high-level EU-Belarus dialogue, including bilateral contacts, and the intensified technical cooperation initiated by the Commission, as a way of building mutual understanding and providing an opportunity to address the parties' concerns and issues of common interest. The Council also welcomes and further encourages the continuation of Belarus' cooperation with OSCE/ODIHR on electoral legislation.
2. Nevertheless, the Council continues to be concerned about the human rights situation in Belarus and the recent cases of violation in this area. The Council stresses the importance for Belarus to address the concerns raised in this regard and to continue moving forward, through progressive substantial steps, in the areas identified in the Council Conclusions of 13 October 2008. In this context, the Council looks forward to the launching of a Human Rights Dialogue with Belarus in the near future.
3. In order to encourage the adoption and implementation of further concrete measures towards democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the Council – while deciding to extend for one year from the date of the Council the restrictive measures provided for by Common Position 2006/276/CFSP, as extended by Common Position 2008/844/CFSP – has decided to maintain the suspension of the application of the travel restrictions imposed on certain officials of Belarus, in accordance with the terms set out in Council Common Position 2008/844/CFSP, for a nine months period. By the end of the nine months period, the Council will conduct an in-depth review of the restrictive measures taking into account the situation in Belarus, and provided that there are further positive developments, it will be ready to consider the possibility of lifting the restrictive measures.

At any time, the Council may decide to re-apply the travel restrictions if necessary, in the light of the actions of the Belarusian authorities in the sphere of democracy and human rights.

4. The European Union remains ready to deepen its relations with Belarus subject to progress made by Belarus on the path towards democracy, human rights and rule of law and to assist Belarus in attaining these objectives. The European Union underlines the importance of all the principles and commitments made by Belarus in the framework of the OSCE. The European Union will intensify its cooperation with Belarusian civil society in order to support the development of a democratic and pluralist environment."

AFGHANISTAN - Council conclusions

The Council discussed the situation in the country and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council considers that the challenges facing Afghanistan and the broader region require a renewed international engagement. The EU will play a major role in this. It therefore reaffirms its long-term commitment to working with the people and government of Afghanistan for the stability, reconstruction and development of their country. The EU will look urgently at how to enhance and improve its engagement. The Council stresses the overriding importance of Afghan ownership and the continuing need for a comprehensive approach from the EU and its international partners, including on the inter-connected challenges of development, counter-narcotics, good governance and security. The Council recalls its conclusions of 26 May 2008 and underlines the urgency of fulfilling the commitments undertaken at the London Conference in 2006 and the Paris Conference in 2008.
2. The Council attaches the greatest importance to the holding of free and inclusive elections in Afghanistan. The Council welcomes the confirmation by the Independent Election Commission that Presidential and provincial elections will be held in August 2009. It is now up to the Afghan authorities, all the political parties and other stakeholders to work for transparent, fair and credible elections, in order to ensure that the next Afghan Government has legitimacy and a strong mandate. The Council confirms the EU's willingness to play a prominent role in supporting the elections throughout the country, working alongside the Afghan Government and the UN. In this regard, the EU will provide substantial financial assistance and, subject to security and other conditions being met, deploy an electoral observation mission.
3. The Council is committed to the improvement of governance and the rule of law in Afghanistan. It reiterates the EU's commitment to significantly enhance capacity building in the justice and rule of law sectors. Protection and support of human rights, the fight against corruption and impunity are central to good governance. The Council looks to the Afghan authorities to uphold the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Afghanistan and under international law. The Council underlines the importance of freedom of expression and a diverse media in Afghanistan and in this regard calls upon the Afghan government to pass the media law approved by the Lower House of Parliament.
4. The Council confirms its commitment to assist police reform in Afghanistan also through its civilian ESDP mission EUPOL. The EUPOL is an essential contribution to the establishment of a competent and legitimate Afghan national police force which is crucial for the long term stability of Afghanistan. The Council underlines that the decision to substantially increase the size of the mission is being implemented.

5. With a view to further enhancing the impact of EU policy in Afghanistan, the Council recognizes the importance of increasing the EU's coherence and visibility including by working towards a single EU representation.
6. The Council fully supports the role of UNAMA and its Head, Mr Kai Eide and stands ready to further support UNAMA in its coordinating efforts. The Council agreed long term development of Afghanistan demands not only more assistance, but also greater aid effectiveness, transparency and better coordination including more use of Afghan systems where possible.
7. The Council will address the challenges facing Afghanistan in the context of a wider regional approach. Fostering stability in Afghanistan is in the interest of all countries in the region and the international community. The Council stresses the importance of cooperation by all these countries so as to ensure sustainable development in Afghanistan and the wider region. The improvement of the bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan is essential and the Council stands ready to actively contribute to this process. In this regard it underlines the EU's intention to play a greater role in supporting Pakistan in the development of the rule of law, stability and security and looks forward to the ad hoc EU/Pakistan summit. The Council recalls the regional dimension of the mandate of the EUSR in Afghanistan, in particular as regards Pakistan. The Council looks forward to practical results from the upcoming Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) to be held in Islamabad. The Council welcomes the forthcoming international conference on Afghanistan to be held in the Hague on the 31 March.
8. The Council welcomes the recent visit of the Vice President of the United States J. Biden to the EU. The Council looks forward to continued cooperation with the new US administration in a renewed commitment to Afghanistan and the wider region. "

EU-US RELATIONS

The Presidency informed delegations on preparations for the informal meeting of EU Heads of State or Government with the US President, to be held on 5 April 2009 in Prague. In addition to the Heads event, a Foreign Ministers meeting will be held.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

Ministers took stock of the situation in Gaza, the inter-Palestinian talks and the political situation in Israel. The Presidency, High Representative Javier Solana and Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner briefed the Ministers on their recent contacts with partners in the region including the dinner on 14 March 2009 with representatives of Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.

OTHER BUSINESS

G8 priorities

The Italian delegation briefed the Council on this issue.

Durban Review Conference

The Council discussed the Durban Review Conference, which will take place in Geneva in April 2009. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, agreed in 2001, provide a framework for guiding governments, non-governmental organisations and other institutions in their efforts to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Sri Lanka

The Council discussed the dramatic humanitarian situation in the country. In this context, the Commission called for the organisation of a visit of the EU troika to the region as soon as possible.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

Some external relations items were adopted without debate at the 2932rd meeting on General Affairs (7564/09).
