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General Affairs and External Relations

External Relations

Brussels, 10 and 11 November 2008

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Main results of the Council

*The Council conducted its half-yearly examination of developments and projects in the field of **European Security and Defence Policy**, in the presence of the Ministers for Defence. It noted a number of real advances, such as:*

- the adoption of a Joint Action on a European Union military operation to contribute to the deterrence, prevention and repression of acts of piracy and armed robbery off the **Somali** coast;*
- the endorsement of ministerial commitments as regards the development of **military capabilities** and of **civilian capabilities**;*
- progress on **force projection** (European airlift fleet, European carrier group interoperability, helicopters), including the signing of declarations of intent;*
- the signing by five Member States of a letter of intent relating to **space surveillance**;*
- the adoption of a statement on a European **young officers exchange** scheme, modelled on Erasmus.*

*The Council discussed **EU-Russia relations**, with a view to the summit meeting in Nice on 14 November. In a statement, the Presidency reaffirmed in particular the relevance of the Council conclusions of 1 September and 15 and 16 October on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia and the implementation of the agreements of 12 August and 8 September. It noted that an in-depth examination of relations between the EU and Russia had been carried out, and that it will continue, in particular in the light of Russia's actions, and will be taken into account in the further negotiations on the new agreement with Russia and in other aspects of EU-Russia relations.*

*The Council also discussed recent events in the east of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**. It expressed utmost concern at the increase in clashes in North Kivu and the consequences for the population and for the whole region. It urged all the parties involved to respect the ceasefire and emphasised the urgency of finding a political solution, to which the EU stands ready to contribute. It reiterated its support for the MONUC and called for enhanced cooperation between the EU, its Member States and the MONUC. Finally, it welcomed the organisation of a summit on the crisis in Nairobi on 7 November and the final declaration of the Heads of State and the involvement of the States of the region in the quest for a solution.*

*On development cooperation, the Council approved the position of the EU for the next UN Conference on **financing for development** to be held in Doha.*

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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.
- 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.

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Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

ITEMS DEBATED

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO – *Council conclusions*

The Council discussed recent events in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council heard a report from its President, following his visit to Goma on 31 October and 1 November 2008.
2. It is very concerned at the increase in clashes in North Kivu and the consequences for the population of the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region as a whole.
3. It is very concerned at the fighting that has occurred since 28 August 2008 and the serious humanitarian consequences of the recent offensive by the CNDP, resulting in large numbers of displaced people in North Kivu. It welcomes the decisions taken by the European Commission and the Member States to increase humanitarian aid to the civilian population affected by this crisis. It calls on all the parties involved to guarantee unconditional access to these people.
4. The Council firmly condemns the continuing unacceptable violations of human rights in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular the numerous cases of sexual violence and the recruitment and use of child soldiers by the armed groups. It calls on all the parties involved to stop such violations of human rights. It would point out that the DRC Government is responsible for the behaviour of its armed forces and urges it to make every effort to strengthen the protection of the civilian population and to fight against impunity.
5. The Council urges all the parties involved to respect the ceasefire. It would emphasise once more the urgency of finding a political solution, which is the only way to restore long-term stability to the region. The EU will continue to contribute to the diplomatic efforts which are essential to consolidate the ceasefire and ease tensions in the long term, in particular in the framework of international facilitation.

6. The Council reiterates its firm belief that the Goma and Nairobi processes are still the appropriate framework for stabilising the situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the long term.
7. The Council calls on the CNDP to rejoin the Goma peace process in a constructive spirit and without delay. It reaffirms its support for the Congolese authorities in the search for a political solution to the crisis. It welcomes the programme put forward by the Congolese National Assembly. It calls on all the parties to the Goma and Nairobi agreements to commit themselves unreservedly to implementing the undertakings entered into.
8. It reiterates the need for further efforts to bring to an end the activity of foreign armed groups in the east of the DRC, in particular the FDLR. It calls on the DRC and other governments in the region to take the necessary steps to this end. It calls on the countries in the region to respect the sovereignty of the DRC.
9. It points out that the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the east of the Congo is a source of funding for the rebel groups and, therefore, of instability in the region. It reiterates the importance of combating such illegal exploitation and of the role played by the MONUC in this respect, in association with the United Nations Sanctions Committee for the DRC, and is prepared to consider all means of stepping up such action.
10. The Council urges the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda to step up their cooperation in order to implement the commitments entered into in Nairobi, and to give priority to dialogue and consultation to help bring about lasting peace in the east of the Congo and stability in the region.
11. The Council reiterates its support for the MONUC in difficult circumstances and urges that all efforts should be made to allow it to fully assume its role. In the light of the latest developments, the Council stresses the importance of the forthcoming discussions on renewing the mandate of the MONUC and on strengthening its operational capacities. In this context it calls for enhanced cooperation between the EU, its Member States and the MONUC.

12. The Council welcomes the initiative of President Mwai Kibaki, acting Chairman of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and President Jakaya Kikwete, President-in-Office of the African Union, of organising the summit on the crisis in the east of the DRC on 7 November in Nairobi. It welcomes the final declaration of the Heads of State and Government and is pleased at the involvement of the States of the region in the quest for a solution to the crisis. The Council notes with interest the appointment of a team of facilitators including the former President of the Republic of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Mr Benjamin Mkapa. The Council underlines the EU's commitment to work together with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the African Union to stabilise the situation in the east of the DRC.

13. The Council will keep a close eye on the humanitarian and security situation in the east of the DRC so that it can reflect in greater detail on the different courses of action that may be envisaged in the light of circumstances."

PREPARATION FOR THE EU-RUSSIA SUMMIT

Ministers discussed EU-Russia relations, with a view to the summit meeting in Nice on 14 November. On the conclusion of their discussion, the Presidency made the following statement:

1. The conflict in Georgia has affected the trust which is necessary for the partnership between the European Union and Russia. All points regarding the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia and the implementation of the agreements of 12 August and 8 September, as set out in the European Council conclusions of 1 September and 15 and 16 October, remain valid and relevant, including those concerning access to certain areas. Russia must continue to implement its commitments and enter constructively into the international discussions which have opened in Geneva. We continue fully to support the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.
2. The Commission and the Council Secretariat have carried out an in-depth examination of relations between the EU and Russia, as requested by the European Council in its 1 September conclusions. That process will continue, in particular in the light of Russia's actions. It will be taken into account in the further negotiations on the new agreement with Russia and in other aspects of EU-Russia relations; it forms part of a regular process which will be continued by the Council and the Commission after the Nice Summit.
3. For the Union, dialogue and negotiation are the best means of pursuing its aims, furthering its principles and values, and resolutely defending its interests with a united front, in accordance with the negotiating mandate, which was adopted unanimously. Negotiation and dialogue on bases such as these in no way legitimise the status quo in Georgia, or Russian action contrary to our values and principles.
4. In accordance with the European Council conclusions of 1 September which reiterate what is at stake in relations between the European Union and Russia, we expect Russia to behave in a responsible manner, honouring all its commitments, in a way which will restore the necessary confidence; we will remain vigilant, in particular on common neighbourhood issues that are covered by the Union's negotiating mandate.

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY – Council conclusions

In the presence of the Ministers for Defence, the Council conducted a broad review of recent developments and projects in the area of European Security and Defence Policy. It discussed ESDP operations, the Western Balkans, Afghanistan, civilian crisis management capabilities, military capabilities and the European Defence Agency, as well as a number of Presidency initiatives.

The Council noted a number of real advances, such as:

- the adoption of a joint action on a European Union military operation to contribute to the deterrence, prevention and repression of acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast (EU NAVFOR Somalia – operation Atalanta);
- agreement on extending the mandate of the Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq (EUJUST LEX) from June 2009 and also the mandate of the EUBAM Rafah Mission by a further year, until 24 November 2009;
- the endorsement of commitments by the Ministers for Defence as regards the development of military capabilities;
- progress on force projection, with work under way on helicopters and the signing by several Member States of declarations of intent on optimising the use of their airlift aircraft, on an A400M multinational unit and on a European carrier group interoperability initiative;
- the signing by five Member States of a letter of intent on the MUSIS project relating to space surveillance;
- the adoption by the Council of a statement on cooperation between the European Defence Agency (EDA) and OCCAR (Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation);

- the endorsement of commitments by the Ministers for Development as regards the development of civilian capabilities;
- the adoption of a statement on a European young officers exchange scheme, modelled on Erasmus.

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

I. ESDP OPERATIONS AND MISSIONS

Africa

The fight against piracy off the Somali coast: EU NAVCO coordination action and operation ATALANTA

EU NAVCO

The Council noted with satisfaction that the EU NAVCO military coordination action had been established at the General Secretariat of the Council since 19 September 2008. This measure in support of UN Security Council Resolutions 1816 and 1814 enables coordination of the protection needs of vessels chartered by the World Food Programme (WFP) and of other vulnerable vessels with the presence of Member States' and third States' naval units operating in the region. EU NAVCO has, since October 2008, made it possible to organise warship accompaniment of merchant vessels and has contributed to increasing Member States' mobilisation, including in providing continued protection for WFP chartered vessels.

Operation ATALANTA

The Council recalled its resolve, in support of UN Security Council Resolutions 1816, 1814 and 1838, to contribute to the improvement of maritime security off the Somali coast as part of the European Union's overall action to stabilise Somalia. Against this background, planning is continuing on a maritime operation intended to contribute to the protection of WFP vessels delivering food aid to displaced persons in Somalia, in accordance with the humanitarian objectives of UN Security Council Resolution 1814, to the protection of vulnerable vessels cruising off the Somali coast and to deterrence, prevention and intervention with a view to putting an end to acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1816.

The Council adopted the Joint Action on operation ATALANTA, thus confirming its decision to take action. It hoped to see operational planning and force generation move ahead rapidly and that operation ATALANTA would commence at the beginning of December 2008.

EUFOR Tchad/RCA

EUFOR Tchad/RCA, deployed in a remote theatre which is difficult to access, is making a significant contribution to the security of this area of Africa, to containing regional tensions and to supporting international efforts to protect civilians hit by the Darfur regional crisis. EUFOR has patrolled very extensive areas and has lent its support to the deployment of MINURCAT. EUFOR has also implemented protection measures for humanitarian organisations, thus highlighting the European Union's essential role in facilitating access to humanitarian aid.

The EUFOR Tchad/RCA operation forms part of the multidimensional support which the European Union is providing for the region. The Council noted with satisfaction the complementary nature of the European force's action and the cooperation and development measures taken by the European Community on the ground, as well as the continuing provision of humanitarian aid. The Council particularly welcomed the Commission's implementation of the Accompanying programme for the stabilisation of eastern Chad, whose purpose is to contribute to that region's rehabilitation and reconstruction.

In the context of the mid-term review of EUFOR Tchad/RCA, the Council had emphasised that an international military presence would still be needed in the region after the European force had departed to ensure that the progress achieved would be lasting. The Council welcomed the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1834, which stated the United Nations' intention that a military component of MINURCAT should take over from EUFOR. The Council expressed its hope that the United Nations would be able to expedite the preparations for an efficient transition, together with the planning and force generation, with a view to effective transfer of authority to a United Nations military operation when the EUFOR mandate expires on 15 March 2009.

The Council was pleased to note that close cooperation had been established to that end between the General Secretariat of the Council in Brussels, the Operation Headquarters at Mont Valérien and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York.

The Council welcomed the participation by three non-Member States of the European Union: Albania, Croatia and Russia.

Democratic Republic of the Congo: EUSEC RD Congo and EUPOL RD Congo

The Council expressed its grave concern at the serious developments which have recently occurred in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). With respect to Security Sector Reform (SSR), the Council reaffirmed the need to continue the efforts undertaken in support of the local authorities.

EUSEC RD Congo

The extension of the EUSEC RD Congo Mission by one year, until 30 June 2009, is witness to the European Union's ongoing commitment to supporting SSR in the field of defence and to the stabilisation of the Great Lakes Region. In addition, the EUSEC RD Congo Mission has continued to provide support to the EU Special Representative.

EUPOL RD Congo

The Council supports the efforts of the EUPOL RD Congo Mission to assist with the reform of the Congolese national police and its interaction with justice. The Council took note of the planned deployment of the mission in the east of the DRC.

EU SSR Guinea-Bissau

The Council reiterated its support for the EU SSR Guinea-Bissau Mission in assisting the local authorities in the process of security sector reform with respect to police, justice and defence. The Council reaffirmed that the process was intended to contribute to promoting stability in the country and region.

South Caucasus

EUMM Georgia

The Council welcomed the rapid and effective deployment, on 1 October, of the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM Georgia). It emphasised the quality of the work done to date and the need to maintain the same level of engagement over the coming months, and reaffirmed its determination that the mission would continue fully to implement its mandate in Georgia.

Western Balkans

Operation EUFOR ALTHEA

The Council assessed operation ALTHEA and approved the recommendations made in the Secretary-General/High Representative's six-monthly report on the operation.

The Council expressed deep concern at the recent political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, it noted that despite a difficult political situation, the security situation remained stable.

In the context of the European Union's overall commitment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Council highlighted the decisive progress made by operation ALTHEA towards accomplishing its mandate, and in particular the completion of the military and stabilisation tasks provided for by the Dayton/Paris Agreement. Accordingly, the Council considered that the preparatory work for a possible development of the operation should be continued, taking into account the future role of the EU Special Representative.

The outcome of this preparatory work will be submitted to the Council in March 2009 so that it can take a decision on the future of the operation as soon as the conditions have been met. The future development of operation ALTHEA will have to take political developments into account.

The Council noted that cooperation with NATO on operation ALTHEA was continuing to work smoothly.

European Union Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Council noted the efforts made by the EUPM to support the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in implementing the police reform legislation adopted in April 2008 and improving coordination of the police forces and judicial system. The EUPM, the mandate of which expires in December 2009, will continue to play an important role in the stabilisation and European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. When the time comes, the Council will consider the prospects for the development of the mission after 2009.

EULEX KOSOVO

The Council welcomed the preparations made for the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX KOSOVO), including the current deployment of the mission personnel, to enable the mission to fulfil its mandate from the beginning of December 2008.

Asia

EUPOL AFGHANISTAN

The Council reaffirmed its determination to make a significant contribution to the reform of the Afghan national police and welcomed the actual deployment, in Kabul and in some fifteen provinces of Afghanistan, of the EUPOL Afghanistan Mission. The decision to double the number of mission personnel so that there are 400 staff members in the field will be implemented progressively from December 2008. That will enable the mission, on the basis of a renewed mandate, to reinforce its activities in support of the Afghan national police.

Middle East

EUJUST LEX

The Council agreed to continue and strengthen the European Union's engagement in reinforcing the rule of law in Iraq and promoting human rights, including via the Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq, EUJUST LEX, by extending its mandate from June 2009. This will enable the mission to carry out, progressively and on an experimental basis, where security conditions permit, pilot activities in the area of the rule of law on Iraqi territory.

EUPOL COPPS

The Council took note of the current increase in the number of mission staff deployed and the continued activities by EUPOL COPPS in support of the Palestinian civilian police. The Council has begun work with a view to extending the mission mandate by two years, until 31 December 2010, without prejudice to a possible expansion of the mandate in the light of the evaluations to be carried out at the beginning of 2009.

EUBAM Rafah

The Council extended the mandate of the EUBAM Rafah Mission by a further year, until 24 November 2009. It pointed out that since the closure of the Rafah crossing-point the mission had maintained its operational capability and that the European Union was determined and prepared to redeploy its personnel at the crossing-point as soon as conditions permitted.

Human rights and ESDP

The Council reiterated the need to mainstream human rights issues, including children and women affected by armed conflict and gender issues, in the planning and conduct of ESDP missions. In this connection, it called for the efforts to implement UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1612 and 1820 to be stepped up and for increased participation by women in ESDP missions and operations. The Council also urged closer cooperation on these issues with the EU Special Representatives (EUSRs), whose mandates henceforward contain dedicated human rights provisions, and with the European Commission.

II. CIVILIAN AND MILITARY CRISIS MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES

Civilian capabilities

The Council endorsed the Ministerial Commitments as Regards the Development of Civilian Capabilities. It also endorsed the progress report on the implementation of the new Civilian Headline Goal 2010 and approved the guidelines for lessons learned and good practice in civilian missions.

The Council welcomed the statement that the Watchkeeping Capability and Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability had attained full operational capability in August and November 2008, respectively.

Military capabilities (including capability projects developed in the European Defence Agency)

The Council noted the work being carried out by the Member States in the area of military capabilities. The Council endorsed the Defence Ministers' Military Capabilities Development Commitments and called for work to continue with a view to a capabilities development declaration by the European Council.

The Council stressed that if the European Union was to match the ambitions of its security and defence policy, it was necessary resolutely to continue its efforts and strive to address the main capability shortfalls identified.

In this connection, the Council underlined the importance of the Capabilities Development Plan, which enabled Member States to orientate their capability efforts. It applauded the quality of the work of the European Union Military Committee (EUMC) and the European Defence Agency (EDA) on capability development.

Force projection

The Council noted with interest the current project to develop a European airlift fleet, the signing by 12 Member States of a Declaration of Intent on optimising the use of their airlift aircraft, and the signing by four Member States of a Declaration of Intent on an A400M multinational unit. These projects will enable the Member States concerned to improve the projection of their forces on external theatres. The projection of an airbase during the BAPEX national exercise will illustrate the deployment of an airbase intended for a European force.

The European Carrier Group Interoperability Initiative (ECGI), based on a Declaration of Intent signed by 9 Member States, will promote the interoperability of European navies and their carrier air groups and improve the efficiency of EU and of NATO operations.

The Council emphasised the importance of work under way on improving helicopter deployment in multinational, including European Union, operations. It reaffirmed in this connection the key role played by the EDA in training pilots and upgrading helicopters. The Council noted the possibility that the Franco-German project on a future transport helicopter might be transferred to the EDA.

Space

The Council was pleased to note that the European Union Satellite Centre was soon to benefit from government-source satellite images. This will enhance the Union's capability for analysis in the conduct of ESDP crisis management operations and missions.

To this end, the Council recalled the need to secure the European Union's future space observation capability. It welcomed with interest the signing of a Letter of Intent by 5 Member States on the MUSIS project and the possibility of its being transferred to the EDA. It further noted the European Space Agency's programme and the work conducted in the EDA on strengthening Europe's space surveillance capability.

Maritime aspect

The Council welcomed with interest the EDA's commitment to improving Europe's maritime surveillance capability, in particular through the future surveillance Unmanned Air Vehicles (UAV) project and the networking of European military maritime surveillance systems.

The Council also noted the importance of the maritime mine clearance project which will be developed by the EDA.

Force Protection

The Council noted that the biological equipment development and enhancement programme would be prepared under EDA auspices in 2009.

Information – communications

The Council noted the work in hand on the network-enabled capabilities project, which should facilitate European civilian-military cooperation and be consistent with the work of NATO. It also noted the work in progress on establishing communications and information systems, such as the OPSWAN system, connecting Brussels, EU Operation Headquarters provided by Member States, and the agencies concerned, such as the EU Satellite Centre.

Rapid response

The Council reiterated the importance of maintaining a high level of ambition with regard to rapid response. It noted the review of the European Union's rapid response concept, which is due for completion by the end of the year.

European multinational forces

The Council noted the work in hand to facilitate the use of European multinational forces in ESDP operations. The Council stressed the considerable potential that multinational forces represented for the European Union's capability for external action.

Evacuating nationals

The Council noted that consideration was being given to questions regarding the mobilisation of military assets in the framework provided by the consular lead State concept.

European Defence Agency

The Council noted the report by the Head of the European Defence Agency and the EDA's work in support of the ESDP.

The Council noted with satisfaction the establishment of a European long-term strategic framework, founded on:

- the Capabilities Development Plan, which has led to the initial identification of twelve priority actions;
- three strategies approved by the Steering Board regarding: the European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB), armaments cooperation, and defence research and technology.

The Council welcomed the implementation of the strategy to strengthen the EDTIB, notably through: (i) agreement on specific measures to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and non-traditional suppliers; (ii) adoption of a Code of Conduct on offsets, aimed at mitigating their adverse impact on competition and the EDTIB.

In addition to the advances made on practical capabilities projects (see above), the Council also welcomed the progress achieved on specific projects and initiatives, in particular the promising implementation of the Code of Conduct on defence procurement, the setting up of an EU forum for military airworthiness authorities, the intelligence training activities provisionally supported by the EDA and the signing of the arrangement for a defence research and technology Joint Investment Programme on innovative concepts and emerging technologies.

The Council noted with satisfaction the EDA's efforts to ensure that its work was complementary with the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR) and the LoI and consistent with NATO work, in compliance with the provisions of the Joint Action. The finalisation of an administrative arrangement between the EDA and OCCAR will enable the two bodies to organise their cooperation on the basis of the Statement on cooperation between the EDA and OCCAR (see Annex I).

European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB)

The Council emphasised the need for the European Union to pursue its efforts, also within the EDA, to secure a robust and competitive EDTIB capable of meeting the Member States' capability requirements and of supporting the ESDP. In particular, further consideration should be given to the questions of reinforcing security of supply, opening up national markets and strengthening supply chains, notably through measures to encourage SMEs.

Training

In a separate statement (see Annex II), the Council approved the launching of the European young officers exchange scheme, modelled on Erasmus. The aim is to develop exchanges between officers in their initial training phase, in order to reinforce the ability of the European armed forces to work together and the interoperability of forces. This initiative, which will facilitate exchanges between national training colleges, will be implemented on a national and voluntary basis, with assistance from the European Security and Defence College.

The Council noted that work on the study into the outlook for the European Security and Defence College was under way.

(...)

The full text of the conclusions on ESDP appears in 15465/08.

WESTERN BALKANS – Council conclusions

The Council discussed the situation in the Western Balkans, amongst other things on the basis of a joint report on EU policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina from High Representative Javier Solana and Commissioner Olli Rehn. It adopted the following conclusions:

"BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Council expressed its full support for the HR/EUSR (High Representative/EU Special Representative), Mr Miroslav Lajčák, and his efforts to ensure compliance with the Dayton/Paris agreements and progress with reform. The Council said that the signing of the SAA (Stabilisation and Association Agreement) constituted an important milestone in the relationship between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union. However, the Council voiced its deep concern at recent developments in the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly the use of nationalist rhetoric and the implementation of unilateral decisions by some leaders, thereby jeopardising power sharing and the foundations of the state. Such words and deeds compromise the reforms required for the country's future. The Council took note of the letter signed by the Presidency, the Secretary-General/High Representative and the Enlargement Commissioner.

While reaffirming Bosnia and Herzegovina's European prospects, the Council called on the Bosnian authorities to shoulder their responsibilities, and to renew their efforts to push through the necessary reforms for Bosnia and Herzegovina to progress on the path towards the European Union. The Council noted with satisfaction the agreement along these lines between three of the main Bosnian parties. It called for these proposals to be rapidly put into concrete form and invited the Bosnian political forces to unite around this project.

The Council reiterated its support for the aim of transition from the Office of the High Representative to a stronger European Union presence. The Council also pointed out that the Peace Implementation Council had listed five objectives and two necessary conditions for closure of the High Representative's Office. The Council called on the Bosnian authorities to intensify their efforts to fulfil all those objectives and conditions.

The Council emphasised the European Union's renewed willingness to step up its involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to assume its responsibilities by making use of all the instruments at its disposal. The Council welcomed the joint report by the SG/HR and the Enlargement Commissioner concerning greater EU involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Council underlined that political developments would have to be taken into account in the future course of operation ALTHEA."

AFGHANISTAN

The Council held an informal exchange of views, attended by the NATO Secretary-General, on developments in Afghanistan, in particular in the light of the security situation.

For their part, the Ministers for Development had an exchange of views on Afghanistan, and in particular on reconstruction and development aid five months after the International Conference in Support of Afghanistan (Paris, 12 June 2008).

The debate focused on:

- coordination of efforts by the international community to make the provision of aid more effective;
- the Afghanistan National Development Strategy with a view to ensuring ownership of the process by the Afghans themselves.

IRAQ

The Council held an exchange of views on the situation in Iraq and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council recalls its conclusions of May 2008. It reaffirms its desire for a secure, stable, democratic, prosperous and unified Iraq in which human rights are respected, and reiterates its commitment to the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq. It welcomes both the progress achieved in improving the security situation and the steps taken towards national reconciliation with the adoption of the law on provincial elections, the holding of which is essential in reinforcing democracy and the rule of law. It notes the adoption of an amendment to that law stipulating the conditions for the representation of persons belonging to minorities. It hopes that the elections will be held at the beginning of 2009 as planned.
2. The Council notes with satisfaction that a number of neighbours and partners in the region have honoured the commitments undertaken in the Final Communiqué of the Conference of the Neighbouring Countries of Iraq in Kuwait in April 2008 and have strengthened their representation in Baghdad. Constructive engagement of Iraq's neighbours and partners in the region remains essential to peace and stability. It urges all neighbouring countries and partners to follow suit. The EU continues to support the process set in motion by the neighbouring countries of Iraq and is ready to take part in a forthcoming expanded ministerial conference.
3. The Council continues to be concerned by the human rights situation and in particular the situation of women, children and those belonging to the ethnic and religious minorities, and welcomes the commitment undertaken by the Iraqi government to take action in this area. In this context, it supports the action by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and reiterates the need to afford particular protection to all vulnerable groups.
4. It emphasises the importance of a renewed commitment by the European Union on the rule of law via Community assistance, the ESDP mission and Member States' own programmes. The Council agrees in particular to extend the mandate of the integrated "rule of law" mission for Iraq, EUJUST LEX, with effect from June 2009. This will allow the mission to conduct progressive and experimental pilot activities, where security conditions permit, in the area of the rule of law on Iraqi territory.

5. The Council approves the central role taken by UNAMI and welcomes the progress achieved in implementing United Nations Security Council resolutions 1770 and 1830. It encourages continued close cooperation between UNAMI and the Iraqi authorities.

6. The Council welcomes the substantial progress achieved in negotiations on the trade and cooperation agreement and states its determination to conclude the negotiations as speedily as possible. This will enable contractual relations to be established between the EU and Iraq for the first time and a structured and regular political dialogue at both the technical and the political level to be embarked upon. It would open the way for a deepening of relations in specific areas, such as energy, in particular by the rapid conclusion of a memorandum of understanding on energy.

7. The EU remains committed to developing its partnership with Iraq in accordance with the principles of the International Compact with Iraq. It welcomes the holding of the First Annual Review Conference of the Compact in Stockholm last May, encourages progress in the Compact's implementation and invites all parties to honour the commitments made on that occasion."

FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT - DOHA CONFERENCE

The Council held a policy debate on financing for development in preparation for a United Nations Conference on this subject to be held in Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008. It adopted the conclusions laying down the EU position for that meeting.

The Council conclusions give guidelines for the negotiations and identify the measures to be proposed to the other partners in order to face the new challenges posed by the food, energy and environmental crisis and to ensure effective monitoring of the implementation of the 2002 Monterrey Consensus.

Through its conclusions, the EU seeks to reassure its development partners as to the seriousness of European commitments. The Council accordingly reaffirms its commitments in terms of volume, quality and coherence of its development assistance and encourages all donor and emerging countries to make similar commitments; The European Union also reaffirms its willingness to base its solidarity on a partnership among equals.

The debate on preparation of the Doha Conference further enabled Ministers to broach the question of the possible repercussions of the international financial crisis for development aid.

Long planned as a session to review the Monterrey Consensus, the Doha Conference closes a series of major international meetings on development in 2008, with the aim of intensifying the collective efforts being made to reduce poverty within the framework of sustainable development and guaranteeing the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Council conclusions are set out in [15480/08](#).

The Council also approved the following declaration:

- "1. At their informal meeting on 7 November 2008, the Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the European Union stressed that the necessary reform of the international financial system must form part of the series of challenges which the European Union and its Member States remain determined to face up to, in particular food security, climate change and poverty reduction.

2. The European Union will ensure that the developing countries are fully included in this process.
3. The Doha Conference on Financing for Development (29 November to 2 December 2008) will be an opportunity for the Union, which is aware of the major impact of the food, climate and financial crises on the most vulnerable countries, to reiterate its commitments regarding official development assistance.
4. The European Union undertakes to explore with its partners all new avenues for contributing to the financing of economic, social and environmental development that is sustainable, to encourage the implementation of innovatory mechanisms for mobilising additional resources and to reinforce the consistency of policies."

REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND THE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

The Council had a brief exchange of views on regional integration and the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) for development in the ACP countries. It adopted conclusions.

The European Union has long been a supporter of initiatives designed to strengthen regional integration throughout the world, particularly in the ACP countries. The Council again emphasised the importance of regional integration for peace, stability and development, as a process intended to overcome the political, physical, economic and social barriers which separate countries from their neighbours, and to cooperate in managing shared resources and regional common commodities.

In this context, it also reiterated its faith in the EPAs as instruments to assist the development of ACP countries and, in the context of the ACP-EU partnership, strengthen regional integration. In this connection, the Council welcomed the signing of the first EPA on 15 October in Barbados with countries of the Caribbean forum of ACP States.

These conclusions are set out in [15480/08](#).

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S RESPONSE TO THE FOOD CRISIS

The Ministers debated the European Union's response to the food crisis, and the Council adopted conclusions.

The rise in food prices and the international financial crisis, for which 2008 will be remembered, represent an additional challenge for development. The European Union has mobilised to assist the poorest countries and populations affected by the food crisis.

In its conclusions, the Council recognises inter alia the need for immediate action to:

- help the populations most affected and vulnerable;
- safeguard the next years' harvests by supporting agricultural production;
- address the structural causes of the crisis in order to boost food-producing agriculture in a sustainable way;
- ensure that developing countries are less vulnerable to the volatility in food prices, which harms the poorest.

These Council conclusions are set out in [15298/08](#).

OTHER BUSINESS

The Council took brief stock of the situation in **Zimbabwe**, and raised the situation in **Burma/Myanmar** and **Lebanon**. On these last two matters, it adopted conclusions as part of its General Affairs session (see press release 15394/08), without discussion.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED
