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REGIONS

AFRICA

♦ **Sudan**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the conflict in Abyei, Sudan (29/05/2008)**

The European Union is greatly concerned about the recent escalation of violence in Abyei in Sudan. If not urgently resolved, this latest crisis could pose a serious threat to the implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

The European Union calls upon the partners in the Sudanese Government of National Unity to immediately cease all hostilities, to respect the ceasefire agreed upon and secure the full implementation of the security arrangements set out in the CPA. The respective forces should be withdrawn and the Joint Integrated Units deployed in Abyei.

It is first and foremost the responsibility of the two parties to refrain from any armed confrontation and seek a peaceful settlement of their dispute in accordance with the provisions of the CPA. The European Union stands ready to support the parties in this endeavour in which they should make full use of the CPA mandated Assessment and Evaluation Commission.

The violent clashes in Abyei have already caused the displacement of many thousands of civilians and created a serious humanitarian crisis in the area. It is a clear responsibility of both sides to protect the civilian population and respect full and unhindered access for the humanitarian actors to reach the people in need.

The EU calls upon both parties to fully cooperate with UNMIS monitoring and verification in the Abyei region, and to ensure that its staff have full and unhindered access to all areas in, and neighbouring to, Abyei.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/May/0529MZZ_Sudan.html

AMERICAS

ASIA

♦ **Burma/Myanmar**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on the extension of the house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (29/05/2008)**

The EU strongly deplores the decision of the authorities of Burma/Myanmar to extend the house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy. In clear breach of

international norms, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate has now been under house arrest without charge for five years and has spent more than twelve of the last 18 years in detention.

The EU also condemns the detention of the group of political activists who were demanding the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and again urges the authorities of Burma/Myanmar to liberate all political prisoners and detainees. Only a genuine process of dialogue with all political stakeholders will help Burma/Myanmar achieve stability and prosperity.

The release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political detainees would have been an opportunity to begin a process of national reconciliation and genuine democratic transition, which Burma/Myanmar needs now more than ever.

The EU regrets that the authorities of Burma/Myanmar conducted the constitutional referendum on 10 and 24 May in an overall climate of intimidation and with results that lack credibility. In this regard, the European Union reaffirms its conclusions of 29 April 2008.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/May/0529MZZ_ASSK.html

EUROPE (OUTSIDE OF UE) AND CIS

- ♦ **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

- ▶ General Affairs and External Relations Council: the Signing of the SAA with Bosnia and Herzegovina on 16 June (26/05/2008)

The European Union will sign the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina at the June meeting of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, which will be held on 16 June in Luxembourg. Such an agreement was adopted at yesterday's GAERC meeting. The Foreign Ministers of the Member States also called upon Bosnia and Herzegovina to endeavour to start implementing the Agreement at the earliest possible opportunity. The GAERC also expressed satisfaction with the start of dialogue today regarding visa liberalisation with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

GAERC President, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, welcomed today's decision and outlined that the provision of the European perspective to all Western Balkan countries has been a priority of the Slovenian EU Presidency and that Slovenia has succeeded in achieving the goals that were set. "By signing the Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina, all the Western Balkan countries will be equipped with agreements, which will ensure their European perspective. It depends on them when they succeed in fully realising such," stated the Slovenian Foreign Minister.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/May/0526MZZ_GAERC_ZBalkan.html

- ♦ **FYROM**

- ▶ Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, voices concern at the incidents during the elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1/06/2008)

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), voiced his concern at the incidents during the elections today in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:

"Mr SOLANA is very concerned at the problems concerning the elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. He is following the situation very closely and he is in contact with all the parties.

Mr SOLANA appeals for calm and supports Acting Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski's call for a rerun of the elections in the polling stations where there has been violence and disorder. He expects to see improvements in the situation."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/100831.pdf

- ♦ **Moldova**

- ▶ **Slovenian Foreign Minister Rupel heads EU-Moldova Cooperation Council**
(27/05/2008)

The issue of Pridnestrovie (Transnistria) was the main theme of the political dialogue at the meeting of the EU-Moldova Cooperation Council held today in Brussels. The EU delegation was headed by the President of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, and the Moldovan delegation by Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin.

At the start of the meeting, the Slovenian Foreign Minister welcomed the measures to enhance mutual trust proposed by President Voronin. "It is an important step," commented Dr Rupel, assessing the measure as a response to the effective interests of Transnistria. The level of openness demonstrated by Russia in this context was also a favourable sign.

Dr Rupel also emphasised the positive developments in relations between the European Union and Moldova: among the objectives achieved, he mentioned the entry into force of agreements on the simplification of visa procedures; Moldova had also been granted trade preferences.

In addition, the Slovenian Foreign Minister pointed out that Moldova had made great progress in its reforms and that **the European Union was consequently willing to think about a new agreement with Moldova, provided, however, that Moldova continued to make efforts to pursue reform. Dr Rupel also welcomed Moldova's progress in the area of democracy, rule of law and human rights, but stressed that additional efforts are needed to implement these reforms. It is important that Moldova conducts its parliamentary elections in 2009 in line with international standards; on this point, Dr Rupel expressed concern at the latest amendments to the electoral law, which increased the electoral threshold to 6%. He specifically pointed out the urgent need to step up the fight against corruption and the importance of implementing the Telecommunications Act in a manner that ensures pluralism in the media. The Slovenian Foreign Minister also reminded his counterparts of the importance of enforcing human rights.**

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/May/0527MZZmoldavija.html

- ♦ **Serbia**

- ▶ **GAERC Council: Satisfaction with the election in Serbia** (26/05/2008)

The Council also discussed the situation in Serbia at today's session and noted with pleasure that the parliamentary elections were carried out smoothly and in an organised, peaceful, and democratic manner. The EU Foreign Ministers welcomed the strong support for the pro-European forces and expressed their hope that a pro-European government will be formed and that it will constructively integrate into the stabilisation and association process. The GAERC Council also confirmed that Serbia may continue on the path towards the EU, including acquiring candidate country status when all the necessary conditions have been fulfilled.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/May/0526MZZ_GAERC_ZBalkan.html

- ♦ **Turkey**

- ▶ **President of EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, Dimitrij Rupel, chairs EU-Turkey Association Council (27/05/2008)**

The current President of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, chaired the EU-Turkey Association Council in Brussels today. The Turkish delegation was headed by Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan.

At the beginning of the meeting, Dr Rupel highlighted the progress Turkey had made in negotiations for EU membership, in which it has opened six chapters and temporarily closed another. The Slovenian Presidency will make every effort to ensure further chapters are opened at the Accession Conference in June. "The state of negotiations will depend in particular on Turkey's progress in terms of fulfilling the conditions laid down in the negotiating framework," said the Slovenian Foreign Minister. He also noted that the conduct of the parliamentary elections in June 2007 had been fully compliant with democratic standards and the principles of the rule of law, and added that the high voter turnout and the broad representativity of the new parliament demonstrated the Turkish people's desire for democracy, stability and progress.

The GAERC Council President also observed that the European Union was closely monitoring procedures in connection with the proscription of political parties and expressed the hope that the decision on these issues would comply with the principles of the European Court of Human Rights and the guidelines of the Venice Commission. In any case, the European Union calls upon all the actors in the Turkish political arena to resolve differences of opinion through dialogue and compromise. Attention in Turkey should not be deflected away from the reform process aimed at achieving compliance with the Copenhagen criteria.

Dr Rupel continued by referring to a number of specific issues. **He reminded Turkey that an impartial, reliable, transparent and efficient judiciary which consolidates the rule of law is of utmost importance for the country: relations with the military forces during the constitutional crisis in 2007 show that priority should be given to the democratic process.** Dr Rupel also pointed to **the violation of freedom of speech since citizens are still being persecuted for expressing opinions, even non-violently.** He nevertheless welcomed the adoption of a new law which resolves some important issues relating to freedom of religious belief. He added, however, that further measures were required to ensure the coexistence of all religious beliefs without barriers. **Activities relating to concerns for the rights of women, children and trade unions also needed to be intensified.**

In respect of the situation in the eastern and south-eastern part of the country, Dr Rupel again condemned all terrorist attacks on Turkish territory and expressed support for the Turkish citizens who were the victims

of these attacks. He welcomed the dialogue and cooperation between Turkey and Iraq, but at the same time stressed the need for the authorities **to start tackling the economic and social problems of the population in this territory and to establish conditions for the Kurdish people to enjoy their rights and freedoms**. The Slovenian Foreign Minister concluded by warning Turkey that it must strive for good neighbourly relations and a peaceful settlement of disputes with neighbouring countries in accordance with the terms laid down by the European Council.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/May/0527MZZ_EU_Turcija.html

- ♦ **Turkey**

- ▶ **Turkish MPs and Foreign Minister on reforms, accession prospects - and Cyprus**
(28/05/2008)

Secularism, freedom of speech and Cyprus were among the issues debated at meetings between MEPs and Turkish MPs on Tuesday and Wednesday. The 59th EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee Meeting discussed ongoing reform efforts in Turkey, the state of accession negotiations, and foreign affairs. Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan and Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn were among the participants.

"Turkey is a focal point for its geographic position," said co-Chair Yasar Yakis, who is the Chair of the Turkish National Assembly's EU Integration Committee, adding that Turkey "can give impetus to Europe's economy once it joins the EU." From the EP side, co-Chair Joost Lagendijk (Greens/EFA, NL) noted that there have been "a lot of misunderstandings in recent months between European and Turkish parliamentarians," explaining that the goal of such Joint Parliamentary Committees (JPCs) was to make sure that the discourses connect, and such misunderstandings can be brought into the open, if not necessarily solved.

Accession negotiations

Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said his country was committed to EU membership, and warned that "if we were to lose the target of EU membership, we would have trouble keeping the momentum for reform." "Privileged partnerships, or other forms of association are not acceptable to us," he added, warning that some EU Member States seem to want to prevent Turkey from achieving its aims. He added that "while we are asked to give concrete dates for reforms, there has been no date hinted at for a deadline for Turkish accession to the EU." Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said "it was always clear that for Turkey, accession negotiations were never going to be a fast-track procedure," adding that the fundamental principle of all enlargements was that "the pace of negotiations depends on reform and especially implementation" in the candidate states.

The author of the Parliament's report on Turkey, adopted at last week's plenary session, Ria Oomen-Ruijten (EPP-ED, NL), said "when Turkey becomes a modern country where the rule of law prevails, and all individual freedoms are respected, it will be a prosperous place with social cohesion." She nevertheless warned that "the EU once gave a date for accession to two countries, Bulgaria and Romania, and very much regretted doing so." "The EU," she said, "would most likely not do so again," adding that "you don't need a date in order to affect reforms."

Political reforms in Turkey: freedom of expression; the AKP closure case

Several MEPs asked about the recent amendment of Article 301 (of the Turkish penal code on "insults to Turkishness"), noting that the revised law still does not guarantee freedom of expression as understood by the EU. Mr Babacan replied: "The approach taken to the Article is more important than the actual words," of the current legislation, as "the change made is at least a sign which shows that our Parliament is not satisfied with the current situation in Turkey."

Marios Matsakis (ALDE, CY) asked about the court case against the ruling AKP party, warning that a decision to ban the party "would spell the end of accession negotiations for Turkey." The Foreign Minister replied that the AKP did not want to increase tensions in Turkey by submitting a constitutional amendment to the Parliament on this issue, which could lift the basis for the legal case. He nevertheless said that he "hopes this subject will soon be off Turkey's agenda," so that the reform plans can

Cyprus the main focus of Foreign Affairs Committee in exchange of views with Babacan

On Wednesday, the Foreign Minister also appeared before the EP's Foreign Affairs Committee, where MEPs concentrated on Turkey's immediate neighbourhood. Hannes Swoboda (PES, AT) asked why Armenian-Turkish relations have not improved, István Szent-Iványi (ALDE, HU) urged Mr Babacan to respect the territorial sovereignty of Iraq, and Chairman Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (EPP-ED, PL) asked about Turkey's energy policy, especially concerning the Nabucco pipeline. Mr Babacan replied that his government had contacted the Armenian authorities and were hoping for official contacts in the near future, and assured MEPs that Turkey was respecting the sovereignty of Iraq, and "only targeting terrorists from the PKK in Northern Iraq." On Nabucco, he said his government supported the project, but the involvement of so many countries made progress much slower than expected.

The largest number of questions to the Foreign Minister concerned Cyprus. Ioannis Kasoulides (EPP-ED, CY) asked about the implementation of the Ankara Protocol (requiring access to Turkish ports and airports for all EU Member States, including Cyprus), while others wondered about the ongoing negotiations for the future of the island. Mr Babacan replied that on the Ankara Protocol, Turkey "has a different interpretation about the meaning of the protocol," but that a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue would automatically solve its problems. He urged MEPs to "give full support to the process on the island, since the window of opportunity may not stay open forever," and noted that Turkey has an official "guarantor role on the island," including "responsibility for the security of the people there," and intends to live up to this responsibility.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-29928-148-05-22-903-20080526IPR29927-27-05-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

♦ **Ukraine**

- ▶ **Meeting on Justice, Freedom and Security between the Troika of the European Union and Ukraine* - Conclusions (27/05/2008)**

The Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs of Ukraine and the EU Troika met for the sixth time in Kyiv on 28 and 29 May 2008 to discuss ways for further strengthening Ukraine-EU cooperation in the field of Justice, Freedom and Security.

Recalling that cooperation between Ukraine and the EU is at an advanced stage and well-established, both Parties expressed their strong commitment to continue to strengthen the Ukraine-EU partnership in the field of Justice, Freedom and Security, a partnership which is based on shared values such as democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

Since the last meeting in June 2007, significant progress has been made in Ukraine-EU cooperation. The approval of the revised Ukraine-EU Action Plan on Freedom, Security and Justice, accompanied by the

Scoreboard, has provided the framework for intensifying JLS cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. Both Parties also welcomed the entry into force of the Ukraine-EC visa facilitation and readmission agreements. These agreements promote people-to-people contacts and assist the Parties in combating illegal migration. Both sides underlined the importance of the full and effective implementation of both the visa facilitation and readmission agreements. The Ukrainian side referred to the preamble of the visa facilitation agreement, which inter alia provides for the introduction of a visa free travel regime for the citizens of Ukraine as a long term perspective and expressed its interest to start discussions on that issue in order to prepare a respective road map. The EU side took note of the Ukraine's message and undertook to convey it to the EU Member States.

Ukraine informed the EU side on the progress made in the establishment of custody centres for irregular migrants and the refurbishment of temporary accommodation centres for asylum seekers. The EU side welcomed the much-needed progress in this area; however, at the same time, the EU stressed the need for further improvements in compliance with human rights standards, including acceptable living conditions, as well as for the provision of legal, medical and psychological aid. The EU expressed its readiness to further assist Ukraine in the setting up of adequate procedures and facilities within the financial limits determined by the assistance programmes. The EU urged Ukraine to allocate sufficient state funds to the proper running and maintenance of the centres. In this context, the EU encouraged Ukraine to create a civilian central authority as a State Migration Service with responsibility for dealing with all migration and asylum issues.

The parties stressed their firm rejection and condemnation of any manifestation of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism as flagrant violations of fundamental rights. They reaffirmed their commitment to fight against such phenomena with all means at their disposal, including through improvements of the relevant legislative framework and the identification of proper preventive measures. **Ukraine provided an update on actions taken in this area, including the establishment of a Task Force for the development of a National Action Plan to combat xenophobia and intolerance and of a special Public Council in the Ministry of the Interior, as well as efforts to prosecute and punish the perpetrators of such acts.**

Along with this, the EU Troika noted the need to take further measures to combat corruption and to reform the judicial system. In particular, it was stressed that a process of extensive constitutional reforms is urgently required in order to develop a balanced and operational system of public administration that provides clear checks and balances between the state power authorities.

The Parties discussed priorities for future common work in line with the revised Ukraine-EU Action Plan on Freedom, Security and Justice, and stressed that it would be important for the Parties to:

- Ensure full implementation by the Parties of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements;
- Proceed with the implementation of the working arrangement and continue the operational cooperation between FRONTEX and the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine;
- Encourage the conclusion of local border traffic agreements between Ukraine and neighbouring EU Member States while ensuring that these agreements are fully compliant with EC law;
- Cooperate in setting up adequate procedures and facilities for irregular migrants and asylum seekers;
- Continue efforts to fight racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism in all their forms, including by fostering a climate of respect towards persons belonging to minorities and ensuring the thorough investigation of all racist incidents and the prosecution of their perpetrators;
- Reinforce cooperation in the sphere of combating organized crime;
- Ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings;

- Follow up on further cooperation in combating drugs trafficking and developing a balanced national drugs strategy that covers the reduction of supply of and demand for drugs, taking into account the discussions to be held during the forthcoming Ukraine-EU Troika meeting on drugs;
- Enhance bilateral and international cooperation in the sphere of combating money laundering and terrorism financing;
- Ensure the implementation of the relevant international standards in the sphere of combating money laundering and terrorism financing, particularly FATF standards;
- Continue the dialogue on fighting terrorism;
- Enact further necessary legislative and administrative measures in order to ensure an effective anti-corruption policy in accordance with the UN Convention against Corruption and the Council of Europe Criminal Law Convention against Corruption and its Additional Protocol;
- Ensure the adoption by Ukraine of personal data protection legislation in accordance with European and international standards, and establish the administrative capacity necessary for its implementation;
- Conclude a strategic cooperation agreement between Ukraine and Europol;
- Continue negotiations between Ukraine and Eurojust on a cooperation agreement; and
- Explore different possibilities of further development of Ukraine-EU cooperation in civil matters, inter alia by enhancing it in the framework of the Hague Conference and considering the possibility of a bilateral agreement.

In order to achieve these objectives, both Parties inter alia pledged to use the financial instruments available, including intensified use of TAIEX events and TWINNING arrangements, in line with overall assistance priorities.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/May/0529JHA_Ukrajina.html

♦ **Western Balkans**

- ▶ **Slovenian Minister Rupel at the meeting of the European Parliament and national parliaments on the Western Balkans (27/05/2008)**

"The stability of South Eastern Europe is of crucial importance for the security and prosperity of the entire European Union, which is why the process of further enlargement is one of the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency. Through this policy, the EU is extending the area of peace, stability, prosperity, democracy, human rights and the rule of law." These are the words of the President of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Dimitrij Rupel, who on Monday afternoon started his intervention at the session of the European Parliament with the presidents of the parliaments of the EU Member States and the presidents of the Western Balkan countries, with special attention paid to the European future of the Western Balkans.

At the meeting, co-chaired by the President of the European Parliament, Mr Hans-Gert Pöttering, and the President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr France Cukjati, Dr Rupel presented a clear analysis of the accession to the European Union in all the Western Balkan countries, where he devoted particular attention to the situation in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

Considering Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Slovenian Foreign Minister confirmed that the signing of the Association and Stabilisation Agreement is due on 16 June, thereby linking the Western Balkan countries via agreements guaranteeing a European perspective for the region.

As for Bosnia, Dr Rupel pointed out that the recent signing of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Serbia and the presentation of a roadmap on visa liberalisation have undisputedly functioned as an important incentive to the local pro-European forces. "The Presidency welcomes the victory of pro-European forces at the recent parliamentary elections reaffirming the desire of the majority of the Serb population to bring Serbia closer to the European Union. We hope that a new government with a clear agenda will be formed as soon as possible, committed to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations," added Dr Rupel. He also assessed that according to the conclusions of the EU GAERC Council meeting in April and depending on the fulfilment of the conditions known in advance, closer Serbian relations with the European Union can be established, including the granting of the status of candidate country.

As regards Kosovo, Dr Rupel noted that the heads of State and Government at the EU Council meeting held in December pointed out the EU's readiness to help Kosovo attain permanent stability. Notwithstanding the decisions of the individual Member States on recognition, the stability of Kosovo – and hence the region – is in the interests of the entire European Union. "I would also like to point out that the attempts of certain forces in the region that see in the question of recognition or non-recognition an opportunity for destabilisation of conditions or an opportunity to turn back the development of the status process are unacceptable. The status process is irreversible," asserted the Slovenian Foreign Minister, adding that under the present circumstances it is necessary to assure, to the greatest possible extent and as soon as possible, the continuation and conclusion of the launch of the EULEX Kosovo mission, to form an Office of the EU Special Representative and establish both missions in the entire territory of Kosovo for further stabilisation of this country. With the new Constitution brought into force on 15 June, new circumstances will obtain to which the international community will have to adjust accordingly. "We also expect the Kosovo government to meet the commitments they have voluntarily adopted, in particular in respect of the position and rights of minority ethnic communities and their cultural and religious heritage, which is part of the heritage of the whole of Europe. The Serbian component is an integral part of Kosovo's identity, and it is the responsibility of the majority of the population in Kosovo to keep it that way. Special attention will be paid to the supervision of implementing the above-mentioned commitments," concluded Minister Rupel.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/May/0527MZZ_Zah_Balkan_EP.html

MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST

♦ **Egypt**

- ▶ **Statement by the EU Presidency on extension of the emergency law in Egypt**
(28/05/2008)

The Presidency of the EU regrets that on 26 May 2008 the Egyptian Parliament voted the extension of the state of emergency, in force for several decades, until 31 May 2010. It looks forward to its (early) lifting, while at the same time expecting the adoption of counter terrorism legislation in line with international standards as soon as possible.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/May/0528MZZegypt.html

♦ **Gulf Cooperation Council**

- ▶ **Minister Rupel chairs EU Ministerial Meeting – Gulf Cooperation Council**
(26/05/2008)

The exchange of information, the implementation of the cooperation agreement, an exchange of views on the Middle East, Iraq, and Iran, **and a discussion on human rights, intercultural dialogue, terrorism, and non-proliferation – all these topics were discussed at the 18th GCC-EU Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting, which was held in Brussels today after the session of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council.** The meeting was attended by EU foreign ministers, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, and European commissioners Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Peter Mandelson; the delegation of the Gulf states was composed of the foreign ministers of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait, the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the GCC coordinator for negotiations with the EU. The meeting was chaired by the President of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel.

The Joint Council is the highest body provided for under the cooperation agreement between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council. **This year's ministerial meeting particularly dealt with political dialogue.** GAERC President Dimitrij Rupel outlined the EU's commitment to political dialogue with the Gulf Cooperation Council, particularly in this period when the international community is facing difficult challenges in the Middle East. "This meeting offers the opportunity to discuss important global issues, e.g. human rights, the fight against terrorism and non-proliferation, as well as regional topics, such as Iraq, Iran, and the Middle East Peace Process," stated Foreign Minister Rupel, who on this occasion commended Qatar for its efforts. Together with the Arab League, Qatar managed to overcome a standstill in Lebanon and organised the election of a new president in the country, as well as introducing political normalisation.

The Slovenian Foreign Minister informed the ministers about the recent activities in the EU, particularly relating to the Lisbon Treaty and the preparations for the June European Council. As regards the issue of human rights, the Minister noted that **"the EU is founded on the values of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms"**, which are promoted within the European Security and Defence Policy. **He emphasised that this year marked the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The EU advocates the UN system in this regard, and the Human Rights Council within the UN framework. Minister Rupel also expressed his wish to establish closer cooperation with the Gulf states in the area of human rights.**

Various ministers on both sides took part in the discussion of other topics on the agenda. A joint communiqué was adopted at the end of the meeting which summarizes the main points of the discussion. In terms of cooperation, it devotes particular attention to climate change and energy; it also welcomes progress in negotiations on free trade. On the Middle East Peace Process, the communiqué calls upon Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate on the final status of the region, and emphasises that the objective of negotiations is to establish an independent and democratic Palestinian state, which will represent a step towards long-term peace. It also welcomes the initiative by Qatar to resolve the crisis in Lebanon and elect a new president of the country. On Iraq, it calls the Iraqi government to international reconciliation; it also ensures support to the government in the fight against violence and condemns crimes from the past regime.

The joint communiqué condemns all forms of terrorism and emphasises the importance of the fight against terrorism, taking into account international law. It states that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is one of the worst threats to peace and security. **The ministers confirmed the respect for human rights and democratic principles, calling for their promotion.** On intercultural dialogue, they remarked on the necessity of promoting the values of tolerance and moderation.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/May/0526MZZ_EU_Svet_za_zalivsko_sodelovanje.html

♦ **Iran**

- ▶ **EU Presidency Statement on the occasion of the first session of the new Iranian Parliament** (27/05/2008)

The Presidency recalls that the Iranian Majlis starts a new parliamentary session today, following the recent elections. The task facing the Majlis is an important one, with a heavy responsibility for the future prosperity of the Iranian people. The **Presidency calls for the Majlis to fully comply with Iran's international human rights obligations in its legislative work, in particular during the ratification of a new penal code.**

The Presidency notes that major challenges for Iran and its foreign policy lie ahead. It urges members of the Majlis to **call for and support peaceful and responsible government policies, which should aim at enhancing regional stability and at restoring confidence between Iran and the international community.** The Presidency underlines the EU's continued interest in a meaningful dialogue with the Majlis and its members about the challenges and opportunities for our future relations.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/May/0527MZZIranP.html

♦ **Iraq**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on the Annual Review Conference of the International Compact with Iraq** (29/05/2008)

The EU welcomes the Annual Review Conference of the International Compact with Iraq in Stockholm, Sweden on 29 May 2008. An EU member state hosting this event strongly manifests the EU's support to the partnership with the Government of Iraq and to the principles of the International Compact with Iraq and underlines the EU's clear commitment to contribute to the political and economic reconstruction of Iraq.

The EU reaffirms the goal shared with the Government of Iraq of a secure, stable, democratic, prosperous and unified Iraq where human rights are respected and reiterates its commitment to the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq.

The EU recalls its support for the International Compact with Iraq and welcomes the Annual Review Report (May 2007 - May 2008) entitled "A New Beginning", which reflects the progress made since the launch of the ICI and indicates how the Government of Iraq intends to ensure further progress in the implementation of the Compact. The broad involvement of the international community, including Iraq's neighbours is vital for further achievement of the agreed bench marks and promotion of sustainable development.

The EU supports the Government of Iraq's proposed mutual priority areas for 2008-9, in addition to national reconciliation and further consolidation of the economy and the security situation, as being human development, human rights, reconstruction and anti-corruption. The EU is concerned about the human rights situation in Iraq, including that of vulnerable groups such as children, women, religious and ethnic minorities, and welcomes the expressed commitment by the Government of Iraq to improve the situation throughout the country. Increased respect for human rights is essential to

achieve reconciliation between Iraq's communities and sustain improvements in the security situation.

The EU recalls the obligation of the Government of Iraq and the international community to protect and assist displaced Iraqis inside Iraq and in neighboring countries. It supports the stated commitment of the Government of Iraq to cooperate with host countries and the international community to address the needs of displaced Iraqis and help in their return or resettlement.

It commends the progress made so far on economic aspects of the ICI and welcomes the Government's 6-point proposal entitled "Partnership for Development". It notes the progress on the political and legislative agenda including the passage of a number of laws such as the Justice and Reconciliation, Amnesty, Provincial Powers Laws and the budget and it calls upon the Government of Iraq to ensure a swift implementation of these laws, while it strongly encourages the Government of Iraq to make further progress in the political process and on national reconciliation and other important legislative challenges as the Hydrocarbon Law. The EU will continue to develop a close co-operation and partnership with Iraq in accordance with the priorities indicated in the ICI and will do its utmost to assist Iraq in the implementation of the ICI together with others of the international community. The EU recalls that further improvements in the security situation in Iraq are key to the Government of Iraq's efforts to build a stable and prosperous state. It condemns all acts of terrorism in all its forms in Iraq and calls for the immediate cessation of all such acts. It supports the Iraqi Government's increasing efforts in combating terrorism and sectarian violence and to disarm militia forces.

The EU underlines its strong support to the central role of the UN in Iraq as formulated in the UNSCR 1770, and its role of co-chair of the International Compact, and will continue its close cooperation with UNAMI and the Iraqi authorities in supporting the implementation of the resolution.

Taking into account the €829 million already committed by the European Community in reconstruction and humanitarian support since 2003, the additional substantial contributions from EU Member States, and the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq, the EU is ready to support the further implementation of the ICI by contributing to the Partnership for Development in accordance with Iraqi priorities. The EU:

- commits to provide further assistance to basic services and to strengthen Iraqi institutions and capacities to unlock Iraq's own resources;
- welcomes the substantial progress on the negotiations on the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and states its determination to conclude negotiations as soon as possible, thereby establishing the first contractual relationship between the EU and Iraq;
- aims to enhance energy co-operation in the mutual interest of the EU and Iraq;
- notes the significant diplomatic EU presence in Baghdad, including the EC Delegation, and expresses intentions for further strengthening the EU presence;
- looks forward to enhancing the current political dialogue at ministerial and senior official level with Iraq, including through regular meetings, and building on the mutual desire to take such a dialogue forward;
- underlines the importance of establishing a system of rule of law and a culture respecting human rights and will continue providing assistance in this area through the Commission's programme and the EUJUST LEX;
- underlines its readiness to consider ways to build on the significant contribution of EUJUST LEX when its mandate comes to an end;

- will explore possibilities to provide further expert assistance to the secretariat of the International Compact;
- accepts the invitation to the EU, including the Commission, to participate in the three Expanded Neighbouring Countries of Iraq working groups on refugees, energy and security cooperation and coordination;
- commits to provide further contributions to help alleviate the humanitarian situation of displaced Iraqis inside Iraq and Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries in particular in Jordan and Syria;
- will continue support to the preparations for local elections scheduled to be held before the end of the year through funding provided already.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/May/0529MZZ_Stockholm.html

♦ **Israel/Palestine**

▶ **MEPS: Fresh viewpoints on the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts** (28/05/2008)

Building confidence and trust among future leaders is crucial to ending the Israeli Palestinian conflict, concluded a meeting of young European, Israeli and Palestinian political leaders who worked together at the European Parliament from 25 to 28 May. This event on the relationships between identities and politics was hosted by EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering.

"The involvement of young political leaders is crucial for the transformation of present conflicts into future peace. This platform has enabled young leaders from both sides to exchange views and real life experiences, building the foundation for trust between future generations", says a joint message (**now available below**) delivered to President Pöttering.

"Building confidence and trust for future political leaders is essential", said the EP President, who wants to continue this dialogue between the three parties.

"This could lead to a more fruitful outcome if we lead in the future", said Hussam Jubran for the Palestinian side. Israeli delegate Roy Shaposhnik, from Kadima, underlined that issues normally not raised have been discussed, such as options for Jerusalem. Jochem De Groot, European delegate pointed out the "immense amount of respect between parties".

As part of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, this meeting enabled young political leaders to exchange political and individual experiences and establish interpersonal relationships in a neutral environment.

Several MEPs took part in the event, to discuss issues such as constructing identities and politicised regional identities in the EU, with examples from the Basque country, with Carlos Iturgaiz Angulo (EPP-ED), Belgium, with Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroek (ALDE), and Northern Ireland, with Bairbre de Brún (GUE/NGL).

Michael Gahler (EPP-ED, DE) led a debate on "From hereditary enemies to pooled sovereignty - the EU integration experience as a model?" Workshops were held on "Creative solutions for Jerusalem" and on "Identity and sovereignty - the question of Jerusalem", led by David Hammerstein Mintz (Greens/EFA, ES).

President Pöttering organised the event using the €20 000 he received as winner of the Hallstein Prize, which he received in Frankfurt on 5 November 2007. The prize recognises work for European integration

and is awarded by the City of Frankfurt, the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University and Dresdner Bank.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-30235-147-05-22-903-20080528IPR30234-26-05-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

THEMATIC

FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

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MISCELLANEOUS

♦ **Development issues**

- ▶ **Development Ministers discuss Millennium Goals, situation in Burma/ Myanmar, rights of children, and situation of women in armed conflicts (27/05/2008)**

In the context of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC), the EU ministers responsible for international development cooperation, headed by Slovenian State Secretary Andrej Šter, convened on Monday and Tuesday in Brussels. Although the main focus was on the European Union's contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the ministers discussed also the humanitarian situation in Myanmar. "As the major donor of development aid, the EU is aware of its responsibility in achieving the MDGs, so the conclusions we have confirmed are an important step in this direction," commented Mr Šter at the end of the meeting.

He also reported that the ministers had agreed that, in their efforts for the progress in this field, **the Member States would prepare multi-annual national timetables on funding development until 2010 and 2015, with the European Commission monitoring and reporting on these efforts annually.** The conclusions will serve as a basis for the participation of both the Member States and the Commission at this year's international forums on the subject of the MDGs; they will, moreover, provide input on the subject to inform the conclusions of the June meeting of the European Council.

The ministers also reviewed the status of negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). "EPAs are a key component of our external relations with the ACP countries, in which the EU places great emphasis on partnership and cooperation," said Mr Šter. The conclusions adopted confirm the EU's commitment to further negotiations and implementation of the EPAs. Implementation of the development dimension of the agreements plays a very important part in the process. By adopting these conclusions, the ministers intended to send a positive message prior to the meeting of the ACP-EC Council to be held in Addis Ababa in June.

In addition, the ministers confirmed conclusions on humanitarian aid following the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis in Burma/Myanmar. **The conclusions state the EU's support for the efforts of the UN and the ASEAN countries and advocate the coordination of efforts with international and local agencies and NGOs.** The ministers were acquainted with the latest estimates of the impact of the disaster and undertook to work to further eliminate obstacles and to ensure the more accessible and efficient delivery of supplies to the affected population. "The EU welcomes the Myanmar authorities' decision to facilitate the access of supplies to the affected areas; there are still, however, concerns about remaining obstacles in terms of estimating the impact of the disaster and of expert monitoring of the aid provided," reported Mr Šter. Given that the focus was on the massive humanitarian disaster, the ministers did not discuss the constitutional referendum carried out on 10 and 24 May in Burma/Myanmar; however, GAERC will return to this issue on a future occasion.

The ministers devoted some attention to the promotion and protection of the rights of children in external activities, stressing development and humanitarian dimensions. This topic is one of the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency, and **the conclusions adopted contribute guidelines to boost the effective inclusion of children's rights in the EU's external cooperation instruments and they also take account of the needs of children in exceptional circumstances, especially children separated from their families and unaccompanied children, as well as the education of children in exceptional circumstances.** The Presidency's efforts in the field of children's rights extend beyond development cooperation. **"We advocate an integrated approach that embraces human rights and ESDP operations,"** declared Mr Šter.

At their working dinner on Monday, the ministers discussed the topic of women in armed conflicts as a reminder of the importance of gender equality in development cooperation and of the need for the EU to make a special commitment in this field. The Presidency took the opportunity to call for a comprehensive EU approach to resolving the issue as well as to more specific EU action in this area, both cross-sectoral and within individual sectors. The Presidency made a special public statement on the subject.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/May/0527MZZ_razvojni.html