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1922ND COUNCIL MEETING - GENERAL AFFAIRS - BRUSSELS, 13 MAY 1996 -PRESIDENT:SUSANNA AGNELLI, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE ITALIANREPUBLIC

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

Belgium:

Erik DERYCKE Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark:

 Niels Helveg PETERSEN Minister for Foreign Affairs
 Jorgen ØRSTROM-MØLLER State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

 Klaus KINKEL Minister for Foreign Affairs
 Werner HOYER Minister of State, Foreign Affairs

Greece:

Theodoros PANGALOS Minister for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

 Abel MATUTES Minister for Foreign Affairs
 Ramon de MIGUEL State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

France:

 Hervé de CHARETTE Minister for Foreign Affairs
 Michel BARNIER Minister with special responsibility for European Affairs

Ireland:

Dick SPRING Minister for Foreign Affairs

Italy:

 Susanna AGNELLI Minister for Foreign Affairs
 Luigi Vittori FERRARIS State Secretary for Foreign Affairs
 Mario D'URSO State Secretary for Foreign Trade

Luxembourg:

Jacques POOS Minister for Foreign Affairs

Netherlands:

 Hans VAN MIERLO Minister for Foreign Affairs
 Michiel PATIJN State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Austria:

Wolfgang SCHÜSSEL Minister for Foreign Affairs

Portugal:

holding free and orderly elections. This will also provide the Union with the necessary elements for adopting a decision, in compliance with the conditions set by the Council on 22 April, on continuing the European Union's presence in Mostar as requested by the parties themselves.

The Council emphasizes the great importance which it attaches to the electoral process in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in accordance with the timetable laid down and in the context of the OSCE's action.

The Council points to the importance of providing the necessary funds for the organization of the elections by the OSCE in the context of an equitable division of international effort in support of the electoral process. The Union will consider ways to support the electoral process in Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly as regards the activities of OSCE observers. The Council states its agreement to the principle of a joint action and instructs the competent bodies to prepare a draft to be submitted to it for adoption as soon as possible.

With a view to ensuring that the elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina take place in an orderly, correct and safe fashion, the Union again calls upon the parties to implement the essential points already identified by the OSCE. The phased and orderly return of refugees under safe conditions is of paramount importance here.

The Union remains committed to the aim of consolidating the Croat-Bosnian Federation as an essential element of the peace process and of the integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It welcomes the undertakings entered into by the parties at the meeting in Petersberg on 25 April and emphasizes the need to follow them up with concrete action.

In this connection the Union expresses concern at the continued deadlock in the Republika Srpska, and would welcome the emergence of political leaders who are prepared to cooperate fully in the implementation of the peace plan.

The Union endorses the High Representative's decision to open an office in Banja Luka, and the Commission's decision to post staff there. In the light of information from the High Representative, the Union agreed on the need to carry out reconstruction projects to encourage the peace process and reconciliation in the region.

The Union recalls the undertakings entered into by the FRY and the Republika Srpska regarding implementation of the Peace Agreement, including cooperation with the International Tribunal.

The Council noted the decision of the Presidency and the Commission to postpone the visit by the Presidents of the Council and the Commission which was to have taken place on 16 and 17 May 1996, to demonstrate the EU's approach to the region's future. It also reiterated the Union's hope that the visit could take place very soon. The Council will examine the question of autonomous measures in the light of that visit and on the basis of a Commission proposal.

In the context of that approach, the Union is prepared to consider - in coordination with the High Representative - a gradual improvement in relations with the FRY and to take appropriate measures in the light of the latter's attitude, particularly as regards the criteria set in the Presidency's Declaration of 9 April 1996 concerning recognition of the FRY by the EU Member States, the right of return for refugees and the obligation to readmit nationals.

The Mid-term Conference to be held in Florence on 13 and 14 June will provide an opportunity for taking stock of the progress of the peace process and economic reconstruction, including the setting up of the United Nations Transitional Administration in eastern Slavonia, and for drawing conclusions regarding the Union's attitude over the coming months.

Regarding Croatia's accession to the Council of Europe, the Council, while confirming its support for this step, takes the view that a precise timetable should be established as regards the undertakings entered into by Croatia with a view to its accession. The Council proposes that an extraordinary meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

be held before the summer to take a decision on this accession in the light of the degree of compliance with the aforesaid timetable.

ALBANIA

The Council was pleased to note that the Commission would be submitting draft directives for negotiations with Albania with the aim of concluding a new agreement which would represent an important step along the road to an association agreement.

MEDITERRANEAN POLICY

- EURO-MEDITERRANEAN AGREEMENTS

On the basis of an oral report from the Commission, the Council took stock of the progress of the negotiations currently taking place with Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon and of developments in the exploratory talks between the Commission, the Palestinian Authority and Syria.

The Commission also put to the Council its proposal for negotiating directives for a Euro-Mediterranean association agreement with Algeria.

The Council encouraged the Commission to work towards a rapid conclusion of the current negotiations and to ensure that the exploratory talks with the Palestinian authority and Syria resulted as soon as possible in proposals for negotiating directives.

The Council also instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to study the Commission proposals on Algeria with the aim of adopting the negotiating directives before the end of June.

- MEDA REGULATION

The Council decided - with the abstention of Greece - to consult the European Parliament again on the text of the MEDA programme as a result of the substantial changes to be made to the original text on which the European Parliament had delivered its Opinion on 14 December 1995.

The Council agreed to enter this item on the agenda for its next meeting on 10 and 11 June with the aim of reaching a conclusion on this subject then.

MIDDLE EAST

Following the informal meeting with Rafic HARIRI, Prime Minister of Lebanon, the Council reaffirmed the Union's willingness to assist in the reconstruction of Lebanon.

In this context, it instructed its competent bodies to prepare a reply to the recent United States démarche relating to the Consultative Group for the Reconstruction of Lebanon and a possible meeting of a conference with the same aim.

The Council took note of the Presidency's report on the recent journey by the Troika to Cairo, Amman and Beirut and of the very strong desire expressed by all discussion partners at that time for Europe to play a greater role in the peace process.

In preparation for any discussions by the Florence European Council on achieving peace in the Middle East, the Council instructed its competent bodies to look into the approach which the Union should adopt and to report back in time for its next meeting on 10 and 11 June.

RELATIONS WITH ASIA: CAMBODIA, LAOS, BANGLADESH AND PAKISTAN

The Council was informed by Vice-President MARIN of the proposals for directives which the Commission had just adopted for the negotiation of cooperation agreements with Cambodia, Laos, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The Council stressed that it attached great importance to strengthening relations with these countries, which was also part of its Asian strategy, and instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to examine the

Commission proposals with the aim of having the negotiating directives adopted quickly.

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

The Council held a discussion on the situation in Russia. It took the view that the Russian Presidential election campaign was progressing satisfactorily. It stressed that it was of crucial importance that these elections take place and be free and fair, which would prove that democratic principles had taken root and become widespread in Russia.

It reiterated the Union's willingness to make a positive contribution to the proper conduct of the electoral process by being involved in observing them in collaboration with OSCE bodies and on the basis of the experience acquired in the Parliamentary elections on 17 December 1995.

Moreover, the Council is convinced that the action plan which has just been approved and which constitutes the practical follow-up to the Council conclusions of 20 and 21 November 1995 on the strategy for the European Union's future relations with Russia testifies to the Union's willingness to establish and reinforce a strong and fruitful partnership with Russia and its readiness and determination to continue to support the democratic and economic reforms in that country.

European Union action plan for Russia

The European Union is committed to establishing a substantial partnership with Russia in order to promote the democratic and economic reform process, to enhance respect for human rights, to consolidate peace, stability and security in order to avoid new dividing lines in Europe and to achieve the full integration of Russia into the community of free and democratic nations. To that end, the European Union signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia and the Council meeting on 20 November 1995 adopted conclusions on the strategy to be followed for the European Union's future relations with Russia, which were confirmed by the Madrid European Council.

On the basis of these priorities, the European Union hereby adopts the action plan outlined below.

The action plan will clearly require close and ongoing coordination between the actions of the European Community, whose principal support instrument remains the TACIS programme, and the actions of the Member States and, where appropriate, with the other main donors in order to ensure maximum efficiency in terms of synergy and complementarity.

Action based on this plan will be reviewed if necessary.

I. Contribution to Russia's democratic reforms

- Participation in the international monitoring of the forthcoming presidential elections on the basis of the positive experience acquired during monitoring of the parliamentary elections on 17 December 1995. This action will be supported under the TACIS Democracy Programme (TDP).
- Implementation of the Agreement between the European Community and the Council of Europe on the harmonization of Russian legislation with Council of Europe rules, centred on the constitutional and legal aspects of the legal reform commitments entered into by Russia upon accession to the Council of Europe.
- Support for contacts between the European Parliament, the Parliaments of the Member States and the Russian Parliament to promote the further development of democratic institutions and the rule of law.
- Support for cooperation between regions and the twinning of cities in the European Union and Russia, notably via the TACIS "City Twinning Programme".
- Support for the development of local and regional administration in

Russia by means of long-term programmes, to consolidate democracy at local and regional level throughout the country.

- Continuation of seminar programmes organized by the European Community and its Member States for the benefit of young decision-makers (MPs, businessmen, senior administrators, etc.) and journalists to facilitate, inter alia, direct contact with European institutions and political and administrative systems in the West and a deeper understanding of Russia within the EU.
- Support for institutions, particularly within the framework of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, which organize ad hoc seminars on the rights of individuals belonging to minority groups and on human rights, open to political, legal and administrative leaders.
- Support for legal training, particularly through activities centred on the training of law professors and through training and exchange programmes for members of the Russian judiciary.

II. Economic cooperation

Contractual relations

- Implementation of the Interim Agreement - which entered into force on 1 February 1996 - ensuring observance of the rights and obligations deriving therefrom.
- Ratification as soon as possible of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and early accession to that Agreement of the three new Member States on the basis of the appropriate instruments.
- Negotiation and conclusion of new bilateral agreements provided for in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. These agreements should be used to strengthen cooperation and commercial links with Russia in the context of its transition to a market economy. Particular attention should be paid to improving market access in certain sectors such as financial services.
- Proper coordination between sectoral negotiations and specific trade questions and the European Union's general policy as reflected in its strategy.

Development of trade relations and integration of Russia into the international economy

- Support for Russia, inter alia through the TACIS programme, in its efforts to meet the conditions for accession to the WTO and to integrate fully into the international economy. In this connection, the Community will attach particular importance to Russia's meeting the obligations regarding the liberalization of trade policy.
- Support for Russia's alignment on international standards and, as far as possible, on those of the European Union single market.
- Setting up of studies to detect obstacles to expanding trade and investment flows. Particular attention should be paid to clarifying a whole series of questions, especially the impact on the economies of the Union Member States and the extent to which legislation will have to be aligned, from the point of view both of Russia's accession to the WTO and - in the light of the relevant provisions of the PCA - of the possible introduction of a free-trade area between the EU and Russia.
- Regular assessment, on the basis of clearly defined criteria, of Russia's progress towards a market economy.
- Creation with Russia of a joint Working Party on Trade Facts which will collate factual information on specific trade questions with a view to facilitating the management of trade relations between the Community and Russia. The Council will be kept regularly informed of the work of this Working Party.

Regional cooperation

- Promotion of regional cooperation between Russia and its neighbours in accordance with the principles of the OSCE through a series of initiatives to:
 - . promote transfrontier cooperation between the new Independent States and the Union and between the new Independent States and Central Europe;
 - . strengthen regional cooperation with Russia in the Baltic Sea region by means, inter alia, of the initiative which the Commission was instructed to prepare further to the conclusions of the Madrid European Council, in the Barents Sea region and in the Black Sea region;
 - . promote the development of trans-European transport and energy networks between Russia and its Central and East European neighbours and with the European Union;
 - . continue selective assistance for the promotion of economic cooperation on a voluntary basis between Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Nuclear energy and nuclear safety

- Development of programmes, also in the TACIS framework, for the approximation of laws in the context of the Energy Charter and for energy sector reforms with a view, inter alia, to improving the quality and safety of the Union's energy supplies (various programmes are under way concerning either Russia and adjacent Member States, or a more regional context in which the full association of Russia is desirable).
- Assistance on energy price policy, bearing in mind the recommendations of the International Energy Agency, with particular reference to accountancy and management training.
- Further assistance to Russia in applying in the nuclear sector internationally agreed principles of nuclear safety taking into account the outcome of the nuclear summit in Moscow. To that end, the Union will support, in particular, the independent regulation of the nuclear sector, together with improvements in the safety of nuclear installations, including short-term improvements in those installations most at risk, with a view to closing them down as soon as possible. The Union's assistance will also include the preparation of decommissioning operations including fuel cycle and waste management aspects.
- Willingness to consider providing on-the-spot emergency assistance should Russia so request.
- Encouragement to Russia to ratify the International Convention on Nuclear Safety and to adhere to the 1993 amendments made to the London Convention which ban the dumping of radioactive waste at sea, and to the Vienna Convention on Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage.
- Support for the objective of a high degree of nuclear safety and sound management of pipelines, both of which, inter alia, are essential to the prevention of ecological disasters.

Environment

- Continued support for Russia in the field of the environment based, as far as TACIS is concerned, on the possibilities afforded by the new Regulation. In this connection, particular importance will be given to the strengthening of institutions, to legislation and to training.

On a general level, special attention will also be given to cooperation in combating pollution in a transboundary context.

- Environmental considerations will also be taken into account when it

comes to designing and implementing assistance programmes, in particular in the TACIS framework.

- All the attention necessary will also be given to initiatives already proposed or likely to be proposed at regional level, such as those already being prepared for the Baltic region.

Modernization of the production system

- Help to make Russian businesses more competitive. With this in view, the introduction of modern information technologies should be encouraged and, in particular through TACIS, the training of businessmen and executive staff to develop the competitiveness of undertakings.

Particular attention should continue to be paid to assisting the introduction of an effective social policy to back up the economic restructuring process.

- Particular attention will be given - inter alia in the TACIS programme and in the context of the action already undertaken by the European Union to support the privatization process - to the restructuring and setting up of undertakings, and of a modern banking system and capital market.
- Assistance for Russia's efforts to create an environment capable of developing both national and foreign investment. In this connection, particular importance will be given to assistance centred on the improvement of taxation, the introduction of modern standards of accounting and auditing and proper legal protection for investors.
- Support for local and regional economic development in Russia in order to consolidate progress towards a market economy throughout the country.
- Promotion of industrial cooperation, for example by encouraging small and medium-sized undertakings in the European Union to set up joint ventures in Russia, in particular through the Joint Venture Promotion Scheme.
- Encouragement of more active competition policies in Russia with a view to reducing the importance of monopolies.
- Support for cooperation programmes in the field of research and development. Preservation of Russia's potential for research and development in the field of basic science and encouragement of cooperation in high-tech industries.
- Organization of round tables between European Union and Russian businessmen with the aim of strengthening direct contacts in professional areas of common interest.

Humanitarian aid

- Further provision of humanitarian aid through the Community and its Member States as necessary. The European Union will ensure that there is proper coordination between humanitarian aid and the other forms of aid provided by the European Union.

III. Cooperation in the field of Justice and Home Affairs

- Action to combat organized crime, particularly drug-related crime, including money laundering and action to combat terrorism. Cooperation to prevent the diversion of chemical precursors. Illegal economic activities, including corruption, counterfeiting and illegal transactions in various goods should also be covered. Cooperation could take the form of regular exchanges of information, having due regard to national and international legislation on data protection, the setting up of a network of contact points and participation in seminars.

- Action to combat illegal immigration and cooperation on asylum and readmission policy. Priority in this context should be given to preparation and follow-up of the Regional Conference which is to take place in Geneva in May 1996 concerning the problem of refugees and displaced persons in the CIS countries.
- Cooperation on mutual judicial assistance, in particular by establishing a network of contact points.
- In putting cooperation in these areas into effect, any duplication of Council of Europe initiatives will be avoided.

IV. Security in Europe

- Initiatives to develop more contacts within the framework of existing mechanisms between specialist working parties and Russian experts in the field of security, covering relevant aspects of disarmament, non-proliferation, arms export controls and conflict prevention and management.
- Further cooperation with Russia in the elaboration of a security model for the Europe of the 21st century, in preparation for the OSCE summit due to take place in December 1996.
- Initiatives to strengthen the role played by the OSCE in Chechnya, in particular in order to give tangible support to the activities of the "Assistance Group" in Grozny in carrying out its mandate and to stress the importance of its role in seeking a negotiated solution to the conflict.
- Measures to develop existing cooperation between the EU and Russia with a view to preventing and suppressing illegal traffic in nuclear material, particularly as a follow-up to the conclusions of the Essen European Council (9 and 10 December 1994), and bearing in mind the Moscow Conference on nuclear safety, especially the ideas put forward in the "Action plan to prevent illegal traffic".
- Support for Russia's efforts to meet its commitments in the field of disarmament in order to comply with the international agreements on the matter, for example, promoting the speedy ratification by Russia of the Convention on chemical weapons.
- Continued European Community support for the International Science and Technology Centre (ISTC-Moscow).
- Continued promotion of information activities, particularly those of the Member States, with a view to outlining EU policies on security, and sponsoring of conferences and debates with Russian university institutions.
- Projects, particularly within the context of the TACIS programme, for the conversion of Russian military industries and the retraining of demobilized Soviet army personnel, as well as in the wider field of relations between the civilian and military spheres. Continued support for the Moscow School of Political Studies and the development of civilian responsibility for security issues could also be considered.

V. Foreign Policy

- Strengthening of the political dialogue with Russia, in accordance with the provisions of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Under that heading, organization of meetings between Russian experts and EU working parties, according to requirements and on the basis of a programme to be drawn up by each Presidency.
- In the context of the political dialogue, organization of consultations with Russian representatives on the eve of important international political events.
- Exchange of experience on the conduct of foreign affairs, especially exchanges on foreign policy formulation and foreign ministry

organization, for example, legal departments.

- Creation of a training programme covering the European Union (institutional and legal structures, development, etc.) for diplomats and other Russian officials, drawing on TACIS and the resources of the Member States (e.g. training procedures for diplomats).
- Increased consultation with Russia on questions relating to the peaceful settlement of disputes in the context of the OSCE and the United Nations.
- Initiation of discussions with Russia on the concept and practice of preventive diplomacy.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

The Council was very interested to hear Vice-President Brittan's report on the recent progress of the preparatory work for the Singapore Conference to be held from 9 to 13 December 1996.

The Council stressed that it attached great importance to the success of this Conference for the operation of the WTO and the multilateral trade system.

This matter is linked to possible multilateral initiatives to be taken by the European Union to secure a consistent market access strategy as outlined in a Commission communication on 14 February 1996.

The various points in that communication have already been examined in depth by the Article 113 Committee and conclusions reached which the Council endorsed; in those conclusions, the Commission is called upon to defend the interests of the Community and its Member States.

Work should continue to enable the European Union to prepare a common position on all the proposals submitted by the Commission in its communication on a market access strategy, in particular in preparation for the Singapore Conference, and to play a dynamic and constructive role in the process of preparing for that Conference.

These matters should be discussed in greater detail at the forthcoming Council meeting on 10 June 1996.

RELATIONS WITH NIGER - COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

The Council noted with satisfaction that a constitutional referendum was held yesterday in Niger.

It decided that as soon as the results of the referendum had been announced and the ban on political parties lifted, cooperation between the European Union and Niger could be progressively resumed.

Initially this resumption will involve:

- support for the electoral process,
- aid for structural adjustment: at this stage such aid will be directed exclusively towards the most pressing needs in the social sectors.

The Council decided to return to this question at its next meeting and examine whether the conditions were fulfilled for resuming European Union cooperation with Niger.

DECLARATION ON THE LIBERIAN BOAT PEOPLE

The European Union is deeply concerned about the serious humanitarian situation created by the continuing fighting in Monrovia and condemns acts of violence towards the civil population and the harassment to which aid operations are subject.

While recognizing the tremendous efforts already made by the neighbouring countries to help the hundreds of thousands of Liberian refugees, the Council deplores the fact that thousands of people crammed together in boats

in perilous conditions are still seeking a port which will accept them. For humanitarian reasons, it appeals to the neighbouring countries to grant shelter, even if only temporarily, to the victims of the fighting and affirms its willingness to provide humanitarian aid to cover their most pressing needs.

The Council calls on all factions in Liberia to stop fighting immediately and put the peace process back on track so that further suffering can be avoided.

RELATIONS WITH SWITZERLAND - PROGRESS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS

The Council assessed current progress in the negotiations being conducted with Switzerland in the following areas: research and technological development, agriculture, mutual recognition of conformity assessment, public contracts, free movement of persons, inland and air transport.

It began by stressing yet again the importance of completing these negotiations as soon as possible so as to develop the European Union's long-standing close and mutually beneficial relations with Switzerland.

The Council accordingly noted with interest the latest proposals by the Swiss Federal Council of 3 April 1996 based on a phased approach that could inject a new dynamic into the negotiations. It expressed satisfaction at the progress achieved hitherto, but nevertheless noted that there were still problems of varying degrees of seriousness. The most important concerned free movement of persons and transport.

On the subject of free movement of persons it was necessary in particular to move on from the principle already accepted by Switzerland of national treatment in accordance with the *acquis communautaire* to an examination of the detailed arrangements for full attainment of such free movement, by means of a phased approach.

As regards inland transport, it should in particular be ensured that as soon as the agreement comes into force and thereafter non-discriminatory and proportional taxation is applied in accordance with Community law in force, taking account of the level of road charges applied by adjacent countries so as to avoid deviation of traffic, and that 40 tonne lorries have access to Swiss towns and cities. The Council noted that transport issues would be discussed by the Transport Council on 17 and 18 June 1996.

The Council consequently asked the Commission to continue the negotiations with Switzerland in close collaboration with the Member States and to report back at its July meeting, with the objective of reaching as soon as possible a positive outcome based on the principles of the global nature of the negotiations, a balance between the different sectors and parallel shouldering of commitments in accordance with the directives approved in 1994.

ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES - DECLARATION BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

At the closure of the Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the European Union recalls that it has, over the last years, redoubled its efforts to combat the severe consequences caused to civilians by the indiscriminate use of landmines, in particular anti-personnel mines.

The European Union, which had adopted in May 1995 a joint action in order to reconfirm its commitment to the objective of an overall strengthening of Protocol II of the CCW, considers that the achievements of the Review Conference (such as the extension of the scope of Protocol II; the strengthening of restrictions on the use of mines; the new and immediate prohibitions regarding transfers; the provisions on technological cooperation and assistance; the regular review mechanism, etc.), taken together, are significant steps forward, both in terms of landmines protocol itself and of the development of international humanitarian law.

The European Union however underlines that the results of the Review Conference fall short of its expectations and of some of the goals set out in its joint action. In particular, the EU should have liked an effective

and binding verification mechanism and no periods of deferral of compliance, or at least much shorter ones.

The European Union is convinced that the conclusion of this Review Conference is only the beginning of a challenging process which requires constant and widespread efforts and persistence in order to fully achieve its basic humanitarian objectives. The European Union will continue to seek solutions to the problems caused by anti-personnel landmines and will strive towards the goal of their eventual elimination as stated in UN Resolution 50/70 (0). In the meantime, the Member States of the European Union will seek early ratification of the amended Protocol II, as well as of the new Protocol IV on blinding laser weapons, and will take urgent steps to ensure their compliance with all the provisions of these two protocols pending their entry into force.

The European Union will also continue to lend active efforts with a view to achieving universal adherence to the CCW, since its objectives can only be effectively attained through implementation of its provisions by the widest number of States and parties to conflicts.

Furthermore, the European Union recalls its determination to pursue its contribution to the international mine clearance efforts. The EU has already contributed to the UN Voluntary Trust Fund, financing in particular projects in Angola and Mozambique as well as in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. In addition, the EU will consider the possibility of conducting specific demining actions and will continue to seek to that effect the contribution of the WEU to the elaboration and implementation of such actions.

The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia) and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the EFTA countries members of the EEA, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, align themselves with this statement.

ASSOCIATION COUNCILS WITH CYPRUS AND MALTA

The Council defined the positions which the Union would adopt at the 17th Association Council meeting with Cyprus and the 9th Association Council meeting with Malta, both scheduled for the morning of 14 May (Press Releases CE-M 602/96 Presse 144 and CE-CY 705/96 Presse 145).

In addition, it finalized the European Union's position for the joint ministerial meeting with Cyprus and Malta in the context of the structured dialogue, which was also scheduled for the morning of 14 May. The points for discussion at that meeting relate to the procedures for the structured dialogue, the follow-up to the Barcelona Conference, the Middle East Peace Process, the former Yugoslavia and the Intergovernmental Conference.

3rd MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE

The Council meeting coincided with the 3rd ministerial meeting of the IGC, which dealt with subjects relating to flexibility and differentiation in the integration process and the effectiveness and balance of the institutions in preparation for enlargement.

The ministerial meeting was preceded by a meeting with Mr HÄNSCH, President of the European Parliament, accompanied by Mrs GUIGOU and Mr BROK, Members of the European Parliament, which gave rise to a discussion on the topics for the IGC ministerial meeting.

MISCELLANEOUS DECISIONS

(Adopted without discussion. In the case of legislative acts, any votes against or abstentions are indicated. Decisions involving any statements which the Council has decided may be released to the public are marked with an asterisk; the statements in question may be obtained from the Press Office.)

Kazakhstan - conclusion of the Interim Agreement

The Council decided to conclude the Interim Agreement on trade and trade-related matters signed on 5 December 1995.

It also gave its assent and prior approval so that the Commission could proceed with the parallel conclusion of the Interim Agreement with Kazakhstan on behalf of the ECSC and the EAEC respectively.

The Interim Agreement will make it possible to apply the provisions of the trade section of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, pending completion of the ratification procedures for that Agreement, which was signed in Brussels on 23 January 1995.

Associated CCEE - Community quotas and ceilings

The Council amended Regulations

- (EC) No 2178/95 opening and providing for the administration of Community tariff quotas and ceilings for certain industrial and fishery products originating in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and establishing the detailed provisions for adapting these quotas and ceilings;
- (EC) No 1798/94 opening and providing for the administration of Community tariff quotas for certain agricultural products originating in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, and establishing the detailed provisions for adapting these quotas (1994-1997).

Pending completion of the negotiations with the CCEE on the adjustment of the Europe and free trade agreements following the enlargement of the Union, the aim of these amendments is to grant autonomous concessions in the form of tariff ceilings to Latvia and Lithuania for textile products and concessions in the form of tariff quotas to the three Baltic States and to Poland for certain fishery products, and to open two tariff quotas for potatoes for Estonia. Lastly, the changes provide for the opening of Community tariff quotas in favour of Bulgaria and Romania for certain agricultural products.

TACIS Regulation - conciliation with the European Parliament

The Council decided to accede to the European Parliament's request for the opening of a conciliation procedure - in accordance with the Joint Declaration of 1975 relating to acts with important financial implications - on the proposal for a Regulation concerning the provision of assistance to economic reform and recovery in the New Independent States and Mongolia (TACIS).

The Council hopes that this procedure can be concluded as soon as possible, to enable it to adopt the Regulation without delay.

San Marino

The Council agreed to two draft Decisions - to be approved by the EC-San Marino Cooperation Committee - the purpose of which is to adopt the procedures for making available to the San Marino Exchequer the import duties collected by the Community on behalf of the Republic of San Marino.

They relate more specifically to introducing an administrative procedure with regard to the establishment and accounting treatment of the import duties collected by the Community on behalf of the Republic of San Marino.

Principality of Andorra

In approving the results of the negotiations, the Council decided to sign a Protocol to the Agreement between the EEC and the Principality of Andorra, the purpose of which is to adjust that Agreement to take account of the enlargement of the European Union.

Thailand - consultations under GATT Article XXIII

The Council adopted the Decision concerning the conclusion of the results of consultations with Thailand under GATT Article XXIII.

The consultations resulted in an Agreement in the form of an Exchange of Letters providing for the opening of autonomous Community tariff quotas on broken rice and manioc starch with effect from 1 April 1996. The Agreement means that the current consultations under Article XXIII of the 1994 GATT will be suspended.

Directive on protection against ionizing radiation *

The Council formally adopted the Directive laying down basic safety standards for the protection of the health of workers and the general public against the dangers arising from ionizing radiation.

The Euratom Treaty provides for basic standards to be established within the Community for the protection of the health of workers and the general public against the dangers arising from ionizing radiation. These basic standards were set for the first time in 1959 in a Council Directive and amended on several occasions to take account of the development of scientific knowledge concerning radiation protection. The current version of the "basic standards" dates back to 1980 with some amendments, chiefly to the technical annexes, made in 1984.

The aim of the Directive adopted today is to reinforce the existing provisions on the subject, in particular by reducing the dose limits, to ensure that the general public and workers receive the best possible protection against the harmful effects of ionizing radiation.

The Directive also aims to maintain technical consistency with the recommendations of international organizations such as the WHO and the IAEA/OECD. Lastly, it adapts the existing legislation to the new situation created by completion of the internal market.

Considerable account has been taken in drafting the Directive of the recommendations of the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP).

The Directive applies to all practices involving a risk from ionizing radiation emanating from an artificial source or from a natural radiation source in cases where natural radionuclides are or have been processed in view of their radioactive, fissile or fertile properties.

Emphasis should be placed particularly on the following provisions relating to

- dose limits:
 - for exposed workers, the effective dose is to be 100 millisieverts ("mSv") in a consecutive five year period, subject to a maximum effective dose of 50 mSv in any single year. Member States may decide an annual amount.
 - for members of the public, the limit for effective dose is to be 1 mSv in a year. However, in special circumstances, a higher effective dose may be authorized in a single year, provided that the average over five consecutive years does not exceed 1 mSv per year.
- natural radiation sources:
 - the provisions in Title VII of the Directive apply to work activities not covered by the general scope within which the presence of natural radiation sources leads to a significant increase in the exposure of workers or of members of the public which cannot be disregarded from the radiation protection point of view;
- radiological emergencies:
 - the provisions in Title VI apply to intervention in cases of radiological emergencies or in cases of lasting exposure resulting from the after-effects of a radiological emergency or a past or old practice or work activity.

Directive on investor-compensation schemes

Noting that it was impossible to accept all eight amendments to its common position voted by the European Parliament on second reading at its March 1996 part-session, the Council decided to convene the Conciliation Committee in accordance with Article 189b(3) of the Treaty.

The Council adopted its common position on 23 October 1995.

Directive on cross-border credit transfers

Noting that it was impossible to accept all 14 amendments to its common position voted by the European Parliament on second reading at its March 1996 part-session, the Council decided to convene the Conciliation Committee in accordance with Article 189b(3) of the Treaty.

The Council adopted its common position on 4 December 1995.

Directive on the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal elections

The Council amended Directive 94/80/EC of 19 December 1994 laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal elections by citizens of the Union residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals, to take account of the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden.

The purpose of the amendment is to adjust the Annex to the Directive so as to provide a reference to the basic local government units of these three countries.
