

Athens, 13 February 2003

As you are aware, the Presidency has set top priority in trying to ensure a common stance of the "15" on Iraq. The GAERC conclusions of 27 January and the public demarche to Iraq of 4 February had everyone (including the Associates) agreeing on a considerable number of points and were welcomed by the other main players of the international community.

Nevertheless, it is now clear that the current crisis will soon reach a new, possibly decisive, turning point. This is why I deem it important that we get together and discuss the latest developments, especially in the light of the report that the UN inspectors will submit to the UN Security Council on 14 February 2003.

I also feel that we should not forget the implications of the Iraqi problem on the Middle East Peace Process which, in my view, needs more than ever to be invigorated, as well as on the wider issue of non proliferation.

Consequently, taking into account the seriousness of the situation and further to consultations with all partners, I have decided to convene an extraordinary informal meeting of the European Council in Brussels on 17 February 2003. This will start at 6.00 p.m., followed by a working dinner at 7.30 p.m. and a press conference by the Presidency. The President of the European Parliament, Pat Cox, will briefly address us at the beginning of the meeting and the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, will be with us till 7.30 p.m.

Our meeting will be preceded by a preparatory meeting of our Foreign Ministers, in the morning of the same day. This meeting will start at 11.00 a.m., followed by a working lunch.

The Associates will be briefed by the Presidency at the level of Head of State or Government on Tuesday 18 February 2003.