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Title: Informal meeting of Foreign Ministers (Gymnich):
Round-up

Category: Press Releases by the Belgian EU Presidency

Description: Press Conference by the EU Presidency, Sunday 9
September 2001
Discussion on the Future of Europe

We debated this issue on the basis of the Presidency discussion paper. As a result we were able to draft an outline of the way in which we believe the debate should be structured. Our work on the Declaration of Laeken will focus on:

- a political analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Union;
- the choice of the main themes that should be tackled before 2004;
- the format of the Convention.

The definition of the governing rules and the composition, chairmanship and objectives of the future Convention is not merely a procedural matter. A democratic, transparent and credible mechanism needs to be found before the Intergovernmental Conference is held in 2004. This mechanism should reflect as closely as possible the aspirations of the citizens of Europe.

There was considerable agreement among the members of the Council on the following issues in particular:

- the principle of a Convention consisting of Members of the European Parliament, national parliaments, governments and the European Commission;
- the need to involve the candidate countries in the Convention;
- the requirement for the Convention to propose a number of different options when necessary;
- the need for a distinction to be drawn between the Convention as such and a larger forum for the involvement of certain components of civil society in the debate on the future of Europe.

The specific themes for discussion will be defined at a later stage. We will discuss them at the General Affairs Council of 8 October. On behalf of the General Affairs Council, I will then report on our work to the informal European Council meeting in Ghent.

We will have to decide whether we wish to go beyond the themes identified in Nice. That will be the principal agenda item of the 8 October Council meeting.

Finally, this discussion allowed us to inform our partners of our intentions and the progress we have made to date. They are now fully informed and any concerns that some of them may have had have been dispelled.

Turkey

We were unable to discuss this agenda item due to time constraints.

I met briefly this morning with the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Cem. We discussed the Common Foreign and Security Policy for Cyprus. However, because there have been no new developments in this regard, I decided, in agreement with our partners, to postpone discussion of this topic until the General Affairs Council of 8 October.

Situation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

We talked at length about the situation on the ground and what the European Union intends to do in the short term.

Where the political issues are concerned, we agreed that we must maintain the pressure on the parties to ensure that they respect the agreement in terms of according equal importance to disarmament and the adoption of constitutional amendments. The agreed schedule must be adhered to.

We have decided to maintain and augment the presence of the European Union on the ground. The Council members agreed on the principle of sending in more observers. It is essential for the European Union to be constantly represented on the ground.

As for economic assistance, the Union will have to draw the Macedonians' attention to the extent of the assistance that has been provided by the EU since the start of the conflict. It should be pointed out to them that the non-humanitarian part of our assistance is contingent upon progress being made towards finding a political solution to the crisis.

We all insisted on the need to avoid a security vacuum when NATO withdraws. The option considered by partners as the most realistic would be the deployment of a force on the basis of the one that is already present (NATO plus force) with, if possible, a mandate from the United Nations Security Council. One delegation pointed out that such a decision would require the approval of its parliament. I would imagine that other partners could find themselves in the same situation.

Where security is concerned, several speakers insisted on the need to tackle arms trafficking.

The Union's action in this regard should be part of a wider effort. It should be consistent with the process that began in Zagreb. The regional aspects, and most notably the elections in Kosovo, should be taken fully into account. It was suggested that a regional conference could be organised. The agenda and the most suitable date for such a conference has yet to be worked out.

The integrity of the states and regional stability will also have to be taken into account.

The issue of the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was discussed briefly. Member States again encouraged the parties concerned to find a compromise in accordance with the United Nations resolutions on the matter.

We also heard a statement from Javier Solana presenting his view on the current situation.

Africa

I informed my colleagues of our intentions with regard to staging an EU-Africa ministerial meeting

in Brussels on 11 October.

This meeting will seek to discuss the eight themes that arose at the Cairo meeting (regional cooperation, AIDS, food security, conflict prevention, environment, return of cultural objects, debt and human rights). I will also be discussing more political issues, such as the transition of the OAU towards the African Union, the New Africa Initiative and the crises on the African continent.

A meeting of the New Africa Initiative will be held in Brussels on 10 October. The Belgian Presidency has invited heads of state involved in this initiative as well as the Chairman and the Secretary General of the OAU to discuss development promotion in Africa.

I announced that the Presidency intends to postpone my trip to Africa so that I can be joined by High Representative Solana and European Commissioners Patten and Nielsen, which will make for a strong and efficient representation.

My British colleague spoke briefly about the situation in Zimbabwe, expressing the hope that the Abuja agreement would be respected. He insisted that pressure on the main parties involved should be maintained.

Cuba

I took the opportunity of this informal meeting to give my colleagues a detailed account of the objectives and results of my exploratory mission to Cuba on 23 and 24 August.

The initiative of the Cuba trip was generally well received. Several countries noted my meeting with representatives of dissident movements and the fact that those movements insist that the European Union should not isolate the Cuban government.

Certain countries also insisted on the need for Cuba to take concrete steps to respect the commitments it made during my visit. Dialogue could be renewed if the necessary signals are forthcoming.

Libya

My Italian colleague mentioned Colonel Gaddafi's desire to normalise relations with the West, in particular with the European Union. Several countries welcomed this development. We agreed to continue talking amongst ourselves as we examine the expediency of following up on the Libyan request.

WTO

My French colleague made a statement insisting on the role of the General Affairs Council in preparing for the next Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Doha. He underlined the need to view trade in all its aspects: liberalisation, regulation and development.

Lunch with the candidate countries

Our meeting over lunch gave us the opportunity to note the growing awareness of the candidate countries of what Europe stands for in terms of constraints and advantages.

Mention was made also of the advantages which enlargement represents for all – for candidate countries as well as for EU Member States. A total of 500 million inhabitants represents important political leverage for everyone concerned. In Durban, for example, Europe spoke on behalf of 28 States rather than 15.

Date: 09/09/2001

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