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og deres stedfortrædere

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Til underretning for Folketingets Europaudvalg vedlægges formandskabets reviderede udkast til konklusioner vedrørende Det Europæiske Råds møde i Bruxelles den 16.-17. december 2004, 15630/04.

P. B. Orskov



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 6 December 2004

15630/04

LIMITE

POLGEN 50

NOTE

from : The Presidency

to : Coreper

Subject : *European Council (16-17 December 2004)*
– *Draft Conclusions*

The Presidency hereby submits to Coreper a revised draft of the conclusions to be arrived at by the European Council at its meeting on 16-17 December 2004.

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1. The meeting of the European Council was preceded by an exposé by the President of the European Parliament, Mr Josep Borrell, followed by an exchange of views.
2. The European Council welcomed the President of the Commission, Mr José Manuel Barroso. It congratulated him on the assumption of office of his College and expressed its wish to work closely with the new Commission.
3. The European Council discussed the following items
 - I. Enlargement
 - II. Terrorism
 - III. Financial Framework 2007-2013: principle and guidelines
 - IV. Area of Freedom, Security and Justice: the EU Drugs Strategy 2005-2012
 - V. External Affairs
 - VI. Other issues

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I. ENLARGEMENT

General

4. The European Council welcomed the findings and recommendations presented by the Commission on 6 October 2004 to the Council and the European Parliament in its Regular Reports on Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, Strategy Paper on Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, Recommendation on Turkey and document on Issues Arising from Turkey's Membership Perspective.
5. With the accession of ten new Member States to the European Union successfully accomplished, the European Council expressed its determination to continue the process it has engaged in with the candidate countries, thus contributing to Europe's prosperity, stability, security and unity.

Bulgaria¹

6. The European Council recalled that all of the outstanding chapters in the accession negotiations with Bulgaria had been provisionally closed earlier in 2004. [It welcomed the successful completion of these negotiations with Bulgaria on 14 December 2004.]
7. Taking due note of the relevant assessments and recommendations by the Commission, the European Council considered that Bulgaria will be able to assume all the obligations of membership at the envisaged time of its accession, January 2007, provided that it continues its efforts to that end and completes in a successful and timely way all necessary reforms and commitments undertaken in all areas of the acquis. Safeguard clauses will provide for measures to address serious problems that may arise before accession or in the three years after accession.
8. The European Union will continue to monitor closely Bulgaria's preparations and achievements; to this end the Commission will continue to submit annual reports on Bulgaria's progress towards accession, together with recommendations if appropriate.
9. Anticipating the successful completion by Bulgaria of its preparations for accession to the Union, the European Council called for the finalisation of the Accession Treaty with a view to its signing on [date to be decided] 2005.

Romania¹

10. [The European Council noted with satisfaction that progress made by Romania in implementing the acquis and commitments entered into as regards, in particular, Justice and Home Affairs and Competition, has made it possible to close formally all of the outstanding chapters with this candidate on 14 December 2004.]

¹ These two sections may be merged at a later stage in the light of developments.
NB: one common Treaty is envisaged for both countries

11. Taking due note of the relevant assessments and recommendations by the Commission, the European Council considered that Romania will be able to assume all the obligations of membership at the envisaged time of its accession, January 2007, provided that it continues its efforts to that end and completes in a successful and timely way all necessary reforms and commitments undertaken in all areas of the *acquis*, in particular the important commitments regarding Justice and Home Affairs, Competition and Environment. Safeguard clauses will provide for measures to address serious problems that may arise before accession or in the three years after accession.
12. The European Union will continue to monitor closely Romania's preparations and achievements; to this end the Commission will continue to submit annual reports on Romania's progress towards accession, together with recommendations if appropriate.
13. Anticipating the successful completion by Romania of its preparations for accession to the Union, the European Council called for the finalisation of the Accession Treaty with a view to its signing on [date to be decided] 2005.]

Croatia

14. The European Council noted with satisfaction the progress made by Croatia in preparation for the opening of accession negotiations.
15. Reaffirming its conclusions of June 2004, it urged Croatia to take the necessary steps for full cooperation with ICTY and reiterated that the remaining indictee must be located and transferred to the Hague as soon as possible.
16. It invited the Commission to present to the Council a proposal for a framework for negotiations with Croatia, taking full account of the experience of the fifth enlargement. It requested the Council to agree on that framework with a view to opening the accession negotiations on [date] provided that full cooperation with ICTY has been confirmed by the Council.

Turkey

17. The European Council recalled its previous conclusions regarding Turkey, in which at a first stage it agreed that Turkey was *a candidate state destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate states* and, subsequently, concluded that, if it were to decide at its December 2004 meeting, *on the basis of a report and recommendation from the Commission, that Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria, the European Union will open accession negotiations with Turkey without delay*. It also recalled its previous conclusions that *the Union's capacity to absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is also an important consideration in the general interest of both the Union and the candidate countries*.
18. The European Council welcomed the decisive progress made by Turkey in its far-reaching reform process and reiterated its determination to enable Turkey to join the European community of values, confident that Turkey will sustain the process of reform to that end. Furthermore, it expects Turkey to actively pursue its efforts to bring into force the six specific items of legislation identified by the Commission. To ensure the irreversibility of the political reform process and its full implementation, notably with regard to fundamental freedoms and to full respect of human rights, that process will continue to be closely monitored by the Commission, which is invited to continue to report regularly on it to the Council, addressing all identified points of concern, including the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy relating to torture and ill-treatment.
19. The European Council welcomed Turkey's [decision] to sign the protocol regarding the adaptation of the Ankara Agreement, taking account of the accession of the ten new Member States.

20. The European Council welcomed the improvement in Turkey's relations with its neighbours and Turkey's unequivocal commitment to good neighbourly relations and its readiness to continue to work with Member States towards resolution of border disputes, in conformity with the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the United Nations Charter. In accordance with its previous conclusions, the European Council reviewed the situation relating to outstanding disputes; in this connection it reaffirmed its view that unresolved bilateral issues, which might have repercussions on the accession process, should if necessary be brought to the International Court of Justice for settlement.
21. The European Council noted the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on [...] December 2004.

[PM: decision, date, process.]

Framework for negotiations

22. The European Council agreed that accession negotiations with individual candidate states will be based on a framework for negotiations. Each framework, which will be established by the Council on a proposal by the Commission, taking account of the experience of the fifth enlargement process, will address the following elements, according to own merits and specific situations and characteristics of each candidate state:
- As in previous negotiations, the substance of the negotiations, which will be conducted in an Intergovernmental Conference where decisions require unanimity, will be broken down into a number of chapters, each covering a specific policy area. The Council, acting by unanimity on a proposal by the Commission, will lay down benchmarks for the provisional closure and, where appropriate, for the opening of each chapter; depending on the chapter concerned, these benchmarks will refer to legislative alignment and a satisfactory track record of implementation of the *acquis* as well as obligations deriving from contractual relations with the European Union.

- Long transition periods, derogations, specific arrangements or permanent safeguard clauses may be considered. The Commission will include these, as appropriate, in its proposals for each framework, for areas such as freedom of movement of persons, structural policies or agriculture. Furthermore, the decision-taking process regarding the eventual establishment of freedom of movement of persons should allow for a maximum role of individual Member States. Transitional arrangements or safeguards should be reviewed regarding their impact on competition or the functioning of the internal market.
- The financial aspects of accession of a candidate state must be allowed for in the applicable Financial Framework. Hence, accession negotiations yet to be opened with candidates whose accession could have substantial financial consequences requiring financial reform can only be concluded after the establishment of the Financial Framework for the period from 2014.
- [PM: paragraph regarding goal and outcome of negotiations; ref. COM line: "open-ended process whose outcome cannot be guaranteed beforehand"]
- In the case of a serious and persistent breach in a candidate state of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law on which the Union is founded, the Commission will, at its own initiative or on the request of the Member States, recommend the suspension of negotiations and propose the conditions for eventual resumption. The Council will decide by qualified majority on such a recommendation, after having heard the candidate state, whether to suspend the negotiations and on the conditions for their resumption. The Member States will act in the IGC in accordance with the Council decision, without prejudice to the general requirement for unanimity in the IGC. The European Parliament will be informed.
- Parallel to accession negotiations, the Union will engage with every candidate state in an intensive political and cultural dialogue. With the aim of enhancing mutual understanding by bringing people together, this inclusive dialogue also will involve civil society.

II. TERRORISM

23. The European Council reiterated its unyielding determination to combat the continuing terrorist threat through a comprehensive and integrated approach reinforcing both internal and international cooperation, in accordance with the principles on which the European Union is founded.
24. Democracy and respect for fundamental rights must not be allowed to be undermined by terrorism. The European Council stressed the importance of promoting respect, tolerance, dialogue and full participation in society by all.
25. Radicalisation and terrorist recruitment can be closely connected. The European Council called on the Council to establish a long-term strategy and action plan on both issues by the end of 2005, building on the report on recruitment recently adopted by the Council. It invited the Secretary-General/High Representative and the Commission to submit proposals to this effect.
26. The European Council called for prompt implementation of measures identified in the *Hague Programme on strengthening freedom, security and justice* relevant to combating terrorism. As, in particular, obstacles to the exchange of information between terrorism related services must be removed, the European Council invited the Commission to present proposals to this end based on the principle of availability of information.
27. The European Council welcomed the revised EU Action Plan and additional reports presented by the Secretary-General/High Representative and the Commission on combating terrorism and the progress made since June 2004, which should lead to further concrete results as demonstrated in these contributions, notably:

- the reinforcement of practical and operational cooperation notably through Europol and the Police Chiefs Task Force; better exchange of information between Member States and Europol and Eurojust; the exchange of data on lost and stolen passports with Interpol; the peer evaluations in 15 Member States of the national structures on combating terrorism to be completed for 25 by September 2005. Member states are called upon to report on implementation of recommendations aimed at strengthening these structures;
- concerning judicial cooperation: improved exchange of information from criminal records (to be further developed by the end of 2005 on the basis of the Commission's White Paper); progress on retention of telecommunications data and the European Evidence Warrant (both to be agreed in 2005). The European Council invites the Commission to present proposals for a European Protection Programme – as soon as possible – to protect and assist victims of terrorism, as well as witnesses in terrorism cases;
- as regards border and document security: the enhanced security of EU passports by the inclusion of biometric data (facial image and fingerprints) and the establishment of the European Border Agency (to be operational by May 2005);
- concerning intelligence cooperation, the links established between the Counter Terrorism Group and the re-enforced EU Situation Centre which as of 1 January 2005 will provide the Council with strategic threat assessments based on intelligence from national services; and the improved exchange of information with Europol. The European Council invited the SG/HR to report on progress, including enhanced co-operation between police and security services, also in connection with the SitCen;

- measures to combat terrorist financing, notably agreement on controls on cash entering or leaving the Union and on the third Money Laundering Directive; best practices in implementing financial sanctions against terrorists and their organisations; and the overall strategy paper presented by the SG/HR and the Commission. In particular, the Commission is invited to present to the Council as soon as possible proposals to prevent misuse of charitable organisations for the financing of terrorism and Member States are urged to put forward the names of individuals and groups for inclusion in the European Union list for freezing of assets, thus contributing to the enhancement of the effectiveness of the sanctions system;
- conclusions on strengthening civil protection capacity on prevention, preparedness and response to terrorist attacks and the establishment of a Solidarity Programme regarding the consequences of terrorist threats and attacks. Further assessment and development of civil protection capabilities, including joint exercises and coordination of public information aspects, as well as improved availability of medical resources is required by June 2005. A European Programme for critical infrastructure protection with potential trans-boundary effects should be established before the end of 2005;
- progress on external policies through counter terrorism clauses in agreements with third countries which should be made operational as soon as possible; the implementation of the 2004 EU-US Declaration on combating terrorism; the conceptual framework and action points on the ESDP dimension of the fight against terrorism; and strengthening cooperation with priority third countries through dialogue and assistance. The Council and the Commission are called upon to set up a network of national experts to respond to requests for technical assistance by third countries and to establish a new financial instrument comparable with the twinning concept.

28. The European Council urged all Member States to implement on a priority basis the measures agreed by the European Union and other relevant international organisations, and urged the Council and the Commission to continue their efforts to implement the EU Action Plan and respect its deadlines.

29. The European Council requested the General Secretariat of the Council, together with the Commission, to submit a further progress report including any recommendations they may wish to make on improving delivery and/or additional efforts and initiatives in June 2005.

III. FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK 2007-2013

Principles and Guidelines

30. The European Council took note of the Presidency Progress Report on the intensive work undertaken on the Commission's 2007-2013 Financial Framework proposals, including the Interinstitutional Agreement/flexibility and own resources.
31. The European Council confirmed that the new Financial Framework, to be agreed in comprehensive negotiations, should equip the enlarged Union with the financial means necessary to enable it to address effectively future challenges through policies agreed in accordance with the Treaty, consistent with the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and solidarity and providing added value. Expenditure for individual policy areas must be seen in the context of the overall expenditure level, and such expenditure must be seen in the context of the overall negotiation including the linked question of own resources.
32. The next Financial Framework should attest to determined efforts towards budgetary discipline within a general context of budgetary rigour. Those efforts will be assisted by maintaining a strict demarcation between broad policy areas and a balanced ratio of commitments to payments. As existing measures to ensure budgetary flexibility have worked well, at this stage additional flexibility arrangements are not deemed necessary.

33. The European Council pointed out that alongside regulation, coordination and structural reforms, EU expenditure programmes also contribute to achieving the Lisbon objectives. In an enlarged Union the main effort in the context of structural policy should be directed towards reducing the disparities in development levels, with special attention to the least prosperous parts of the Union. On market related expenditure and direct payments under the Common Agricultural Policy, the European Council recalled its agreement of October 2002 as part of the overall agreement. The Area of Freedom, Security and Justice will be the main priority within the framework of actions designed to further citizenship and due account should be taken of the financial implications of the *Hague Programme* agreed in November 2004. Finally to make the European Union able to fulfil its international responsibilities, a set of simplified and effective foreign policy instruments has to be put in place with adequate means, including a margin to allow the Union to respond to unforeseen events.
34. The European Council endorsed the Commission proposal to maintain the ceiling for the own resources at the current level of 1,24% of EU GNI. The European Council took note of the presentation by the Commission of the report on the operation of the own resources system, including its budgetary consequences for the Member States, as well as a proposal to introduce a generalised correction mechanism. It called on the Commission and the Council to continue the examination of issues arising in this connection, including possible simplification of the system towards a GNI-based system in the light of discussions up to now.
35. The incoming Presidency is invited to press ahead with the work towards establishment of the next Financial Framework. Further work on the Financial Framework should take full account of the range of positions of Member States as reflected in the Progress Report including the building blocks and will comply with the timeframe of the Multiannual Strategic Programme, including the aim of reaching political agreement by June 2005.
36. The incoming Presidency is furthermore invited to take all necessary steps to establish appropriate contacts with the European Parliament.

IV. AREA OF FREEDOM, SECURITY AND JUSTICE

EU Drugs strategy 2005-2012

37. The European Council adopted the Drugs strategy 2005-2012, which will be included in the Hague Programme. The Strategy will be a key instrument to effectively confront drugs use and trafficking with a view to ensuring a high level of health protection, wellbeing and social cohesion, as well as a high level of security for the general public. The European Council invited the Commission to present to the Council a proposal for an Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy in 2005-2008 with a view to its adoption by the Council early in 2005 and to prepare an impact assessment of its implementation in 2008.

Immigrant integration policy

38. Recalling its conclusions of June 2003 and November 2004, the European Council welcomed the establishment of common basic principles for immigrant integration policy of the Member States. These are to be the basis of a comprehensive framework on immigrant integration, taking into account the legal, political, economic, social and cultural diversity of Member States. They need to be developed in the light of shared experiences. The European Council noted that effective integration policies and exchange of best practices within the Union can contribute to this, and in this respect welcomed the outcome of the Ministerial Conference on integration which paid special attention to youth susceptible to radical influences.
39. The European Council furthermore welcomed the outcome of the Ministerial Conference on Urban Policy and recognised the importance of urban areas for promotion of social inclusion.

V. EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

40. The European Council reiterated its commitment to the European Security Strategy, which it adopted one year ago. It invited the incoming Presidency to continue to implement the Strategy in cooperation with the High Representative and the Commission.

Addressing key threats

41. The European Council endorsed the report on the implementation of the EU Strategy on Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and noted the progress in this respect in the relations with third countries and cooperation with the IAEA and the OPCW. It reaffirmed its commitment to use all instruments at its disposal to counter the threat of proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery.
42. The European Council welcomed the agreement reached with Iran regarding nuclear issues and future cooperation on 15 November, following talks with France, Germany and the UK supported by the High Representative. It underlined that sustaining the full suspension of all enrichment related and reprocessing activities was essential for the continuation of the overall process. The European Council confirmed the Union's readiness to explore ways to develop political and economic cooperation with Iran, following action by Iran to address the EU's areas of concern.
43. The European Council reaffirmed its objective of a secure, unified, prosperous and democratic Iraq that will work constructively with its neighbours and the international community to meet common challenges. It reiterated its determination to support the Iraqi authorities and people, i.a. through elections support, financing of UN protection, reconstruction assistance, strengthening the criminal justice sector and promoting respect for the rule of law, and developing political and trade cooperation with Iraq.
44. The European Council underlined the EU's long-term commitment to the reconstruction, development and stabilization of Afghanistan. The EU will continue to support the ongoing democratisation process, including next year's parliamentary and local elections, the counter-narcotics efforts and the security-sector reform.

Building security in our neighbourhood

45. The European Council noted with satisfaction that a first series of Action Plans jointly prepared with Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Moldova, Ukraine, Israel and the Palestinian Authority were successfully finalised within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It adopted separate declarations on Ukraine and the Middle East peace process (annex). The EU looked forward to working together with partner countries to implement reforms and other agreed priorities, and to promote progress on the wider reform agenda in the countries of the Southern Caucasus and Belarus. The European Council invited the Commission and the High Representative to report regularly on progress accomplished.
46. It welcomed the start of the implementation of the EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East. It reiterated the importance of the commitment of the partners concerned to engage in reform and recognised that the EU's relations with these countries have distinct characteristics that merit a differentiated approach.
47. Regarding the Mediterranean region, the European Council welcomed the progress in the field of political and security issues that was made at the Barcelona Process ministerial meeting on 29-30 November in The Hague and the agreement to make good use of the Barcelona Process to foster the process of modernisation and reform. The ENP and its Action Plans are the main tools for partnership, cooperation and dialogue with the region.
48. The European Council welcomed the progress made with the other countries of the Middle East region and invited further consultations with governments and other stakeholders concerned. It called on the relevant bodies of the Council to continue the work towards strengthening relations with these countries – including Yemen and eventually Iran and Iraq – in all relevant political, economic, social and cultural fields.
49. The European Council reaffirmed its commitment to the full implementation of the Thessaloniki agenda, which sets out the road for the Western Balkans towards the EU. The recent ministerial meetings of the EU-Western Balkans Forum served to assess progress achieved and identify challenges ahead. The European Council underlined that the progress of each country towards the EU depended on its own efforts in meeting the Copenhagen criteria and the conditions of the Stabilisation and Association Process, in particular on key issues such as full cooperation with the ICTY.

An international order based on effective multilateralism

50. The European Council welcomed the report of the United Nations Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, in particular the comprehensive approach to collective security. The European Council urged UN member states to commit themselves to the reform process and called for decisions on reforms at the High Level Summit in September 2005. The follow up to the European Security Strategy regarding effective multilateralism and a rule based international order, as requested by the European Council in June, should aim at supporting the efforts of the UN Secretary-General in this respect.
51. The European Council welcomed the decision to appoint an EU Special/Personal Representative on Human Rights as a contribution to the coherence and continuity of the EU human rights policy. It called for further implementation of its decision in December 2003 to establish an EU Human Rights Agency which can play a role in monitoring the human rights situation within the EU.

Working with partners

52. The European Council underlined that a strong transatlantic partnership was crucial to address the key threats and challenges of our time and looked forward in this respect to President Bush's forthcoming visit to Europe. It welcomed the initiative of a yearly Justice and Home Affairs ministerial troika with the US and the broad participation of the stakeholders on both sides of the ocean in the consultations on the further deepening of transatlantic economic relations.
53. The importance the EU and Russia attach to their strategic partnership, based on common values and shared interests, was underlined at the latest EU-Russia Summit. Considerable progress was made on the creation of the four Common Spaces and the European Council looked forward to adopting a comprehensive package of roadmaps at the next EU-Russia Summit in Moscow in May 2005. In parallel, work on the implementation of elements on which agreement has been reached provisionally should start as early as possible.

54. The European Council welcomed the outcome of the Summit meetings with ASEM, the Republic of Korea, India and China, which broadened and deepened the relationships with the Asian partners. It invited the Council and the Commission to initiate the development of the Action Plan with India to be endorsed at the 6th EU-India Summit in New Delhi in 2005 and to further explore the feasibility of a new EU-China framework agreement and possible cooperation with China on issues such as re-admission and market economy status. The European Council also called on the Council and the Commission to intensify the cooperation with Indonesia in fields like counter-terrorism, interfaith dialogue, reforms and sustainable development.
55. During the past six months the EU strengthened its cooperation with the African Union (AU) and sub-regional organisations, including ECOWAS and SADC. The European Council underlined its commitment to continued contributions by the EU to improvement of the situation on the African continent. It welcomed increased regional ownership and underlined that the EU will continue to strengthen its ties with the AU and sub-regional organisations, notably in the field of peace and security.

[PM: Somalia]

ESDP

56. The European Council welcomed the successful start of the EU military operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 2 December, which underlines the Union's pledge to stability and security in this country and is a practical example of the strategic partnership in crisis management with NATO. It also noted the successful conduct of the three ongoing ESDP missions – the EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUPOL Proxima in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Rule of Law Mission Themis in Georgia. It requested the incoming Presidency and the SG/HR to take forward the preparations for a police mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo and for an integrated police, rule of law and civilian administration mission to Iraq that is expected to start after the January 2005 elections. The European Council endorsed the Presidency Report on ESDP, including the mandate for the incoming Presidency, and welcomed in particular the progress in the development of military and civilian capabilities reflected in this report.

Separate declarations on issues to be discussed at dinner:

- MEPP
- Ukraine

International cooperation

57. The European Council emphasised the importance of ensuring a coherent contribution of EC ODA to poverty eradication in all developing countries. In this context, whilst honouring existing commitments, the European Council underlined the need to find ways to increase the focus on the poorest, with a specific focus on Africa.
58. The European Council confirmed the full commitment of the European Union to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to the need to ensure progress towards achieving them, especially in Sub-Sahara Africa. In that respect, the European Council welcomed the consultation by the Commission of individual Member States with a view to presenting to the Council (GAERC) in April 2005 concrete proposals on setting new and adequate ODA targets for the period 2009-2010, while taking into account the position of new Member States. The European Union will also explore innovative ways of financing based upon proposals submitted by the Commission with a view to the 2005 high level Event.
59. The European Council called, in the framework of achieving the MDGs, for further strengthening of policy coherence for development by making wider and more systematic use of existing mechanisms for consultation and impact assessment and procedures to screen all relevant policies for their impact on developing countries.

VI. OTHER ISSUES

Commonly shared values

60. The European Council noted with approval the series of public debates hosted by the Presidency, engaging participants with wide-ranging backgrounds and experience, on the European identity and the concept of commonly shared values as foundation of European integration and cooperation.
61. The European Council took note of the results of this series of debates, of the report of the Education Council on Education and Citizenship and of the follow up initiatives and welcomed further initiatives to advance the values which contribute to active citizenship in the Union. The European Council invited the European Commission to incorporate the results of the debates and the main findings of the report into its future Citizens' Programme and its communication strategy for 2005.

Consular cooperation

62. The European Council confirmed the importance of intensified consular cooperation. It welcomed the agreement reached in the Council on pooling consular resources and cooperation both in normal times and in times of crises, thus helping Member States to deal more effectively with the increasing demand for consular services.

European External Action Service

63. The European Council welcomed the fact that, following the signature of the Constitutional Treaty, work on the European External Action Service has begun by the Presidency, Secretary-General/High Representative and the Commission.

64. It invited the Secretary-General/High Representative together with the Commission and the Member States to continue this preparatory work, in particular by identifying key issues, including the scope and structure of the future service. To ensure the full involvement of Member States in this process, regular discussions will take place in the General Affairs and External Relations Council, prepared by Coreper.
65. The European Council invited the Secretary-General/High Representative together with the Commission to prepare a progress report on this preparatory work to its June 2005 meeting at the latest, and to take appropriate steps to keep the European Parliament informed.
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