

Press Release

Council of Europe Press Division

Ref: 712a07

Tel: +33 (0)3 88 41 25 60

Fax: +33 (0)3 88 41 39 11

pressunit@coe.int

internet: www.coe.int/press

47 members

Albania
Andorra
Armenia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Belgium
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Croatia
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Georgia
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Latvia
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Malta
Moldova
Monaco
Montenegro
Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Russia
San Marino
Serbia
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
"The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom



25th Quadripartite Meeting Council of Europe/European Union Conclusions

Strasbourg, 23.10.2007 - The 25th Quadripartite Meeting between the European Union and the Council of Europe was held in Strasbourg on 23 October 2007 at the invitation of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It was the first meeting since the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union in May 2007.

The participants were, for the European Union:

- Mr Manuel Lobo Antunes, Secretary of State for European Affairs of Portugal, President of the Council of the European Union;
- Ms Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the European Commission, Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy;

and for the Council of Europe:

- Mr Vuk Jeremić, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Chair of the Committee of Ministers;
- Mr Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

The participants reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the Memorandum of Understanding in order to enhance co-operation on topics of common interest, including through joint projects. They agreed to regularly review its implementation at the technical and political level. In this context, it was noted that the Memorandum of Understanding provides for the possibility to hold ad hoc consultations, including at a high political level. Participants agreed to consider holding such ad hoc consultations on subjects of political significance which would particularly benefit from joining forces.

Specific reference was made to the synergies to be developed between activities of the Council of Europe and those of the newly-established European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Participants looked forward to the entry into force of the agreement which is to provide a framework for this co-operation. Participants also reiterated that early accession by the European Union to the European Convention for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms would contribute greatly to coherence in the field of human rights in Europe.

Participants envisaged to increase during the coming months political dialogue between the institutions of the two organisations on an informal basis, both at the level of the Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe and that of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) of the Council of the European Union, as indicated in the Memorandum of Understanding.

In this context, the participants welcomed the joint meeting held between the ad hoc Committee of the Chairpersons of Political Groups of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament on 30 August in Brussels.

/..

To receive our press releases by e-mail, contact : Council.of.Europe.Press@coe.int

A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 47 member states.

With a view to further facilitating co-operation, participants agreed to look into the possibility of preparing a Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement between the two organisations, which could complement the Memorandum of Understanding.

It was noted that the enhancement and strengthening of the presence of the Council of Europe and the European Union in Brussels and Strasbourg respectively would further facilitate contacts and co-operation between the two institutions.

a) Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union regarding the promotion of democracy

Both the European Union and the Council of Europe actively promote and support democracy at all levels of government and society, both in their member states and beyond.

The participants welcomed the important contribution of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission to promoting democracy and the rule of law and its close cooperation with the institutions of the European Union.

- ***Pre-electoral assistance***

Taking into account that 2007 and 2008 are periods of major elections in a number of European countries, the participants agreed on the importance of ensuring that Europe is an area of free and fair elections. In this context they agreed on the usefulness of joint actions aimed at assisting countries in setting up and implementing a sound legal framework for elections, in ensuring free access to media with fair coverage during election campaigns as well as in raising awareness with a view to increasing voters' turnout during elections. They also recalled the proposed CoE-EU Joint Programme on Fair and Free elections in the South Caucasus and Moldova (2008-2009)

- ***Forum for the Future of Democracy***

Participants expressed their support for the Forum's objective of promoting and strengthening democracy and good governance in all European states. They agreed to explore before the next session of the Forum (Spain, 2008) further ways to make the results of the Forum more specific and better disseminated, thereby helping to rekindle citizens' confidence in democracy.

- ***Belarus***

The participants reiterated their commitment to cooperate in order to promote democracy and citizen's participation also in countries aspiring for membership of the Council of Europe.

They expressed their growing concern over the lack of progress on democratic reforms in Belarus. They noted that, even though a few political prisoners have been released slightly ahead of time, it is still impossible to see any substantial improvement in the fields of human rights, democracy and rule of law.

The participants expressed their unequivocal expectation and request that the wide range of legal and practical obstacles to activities of the opposition, NGOs and independent media, notably the restrictive rules on the registration of NGOs, should be removed.

The European Union and the Council of Europe reaffirmed their support to civil society in Belarus for the advancement of democracy. In this respect, the project of the newly-established Belarusian School of Political Studies should provide an opportunity for dialogue between various layers of society on all aspects of the functioning of an open and democratic system of government.

They agreed to support each other's activities in respect of the democratisation process.

b) Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union within the framework of the European Union Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

- ***Presentation of the new orientations of the ENP***

The participants confirmed that the ENP constitutes an important element for the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the beneficiary countries. Many areas covered by the ENP are particularly relevant as regards countries' specific commitments towards the Council of Europe. The participants agreed to

develop synergies between ENP Action Plans and Council of Europe activities in relevant Council of Europe member states, including the principle of preparing new Joint Programmes and to explore all possibilities for planning, implementing and assessing these programmes together, involving also the countries concerned. This question should be studied as a priority matter by the Senior Officials, who should report back at the next Quadripartite meeting.

- ***Promotion of regional co-operation***

The participants agreed on the significance of regional co-operation as a tool for the promotion of the human rights, democracy and the rule of law, especially in areas of post-conflict situations and “frozen conflicts”. They encouraged Council of Europe member states participating in the ENP to develop regional co-operation with the assistance of the Council of Europe and the European Union.

The recently established Regional Cooperation Council, which allows countries in the South-East of Europe to develop co-operation and democratisation processes and structures under their own responsibility, was pointed out as a positive example that could be transposed to the ENP context.