

The meeting of the European Council was preceded by an exposé by Mr Hans-Gert Pötering, President of the European Parliament, followed by an exchange of views.

LISBON TREATY

1. The European Council took note of the preparatory work carried out in line with its December 2007 conclusions.
2. The European Council noted the outcome of the referendum in Ireland on the Lisbon Treaty and took stock of the situation on the basis of an initial assessment provided by the Taoiseach Brian Cowen.
3. The European Council agreed that more time was needed to analyse the situation. It noted that the Irish government will actively consult, both internally and with the other Member States, in order to suggest a common way forward.
4. Recalling that the purpose of the Lisbon Treaty is to help an enlarged Union to act more effectively and more democratically, the European Council noted that the parliaments in 19 Member States have ratified the Treaty and that the ratification process continues in other countries¹.
5. The European Council agreed to Ireland's suggestion to come back to this issue at its meeting of 15 October 2008 in order to consider the way forward. It underlined the importance in the meantime of continuing to deliver concrete results in the various policy areas of concern to the citizens.

¹ The European Council noted that the Czech Republic cannot complete its ratification process until the Constitutional Court delivers its positive opinion on the accordance of the Lisbon Treaty with the Czech constitutional order.

FREEDOM, SECURITY AND JUSTICE

6. Strengthening the EU as an area of freedom, security and justice is a key priority for citizens. The European Council calls on the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission to make every effort to ensure the rapid adoption of important legislative proposals still pending in this field before the end of the year or, as appropriate, before the end of the current legislature.
7. Last December the European Council underlined the need for a renewed political commitment for the purpose of developing a comprehensive European migration policy. Since then, important progress has been achieved, in particular on the development of an integrated border management strategy and the enhancement of cooperation with third countries. Efforts in this area should be strengthened in the coming months, in order to increase the efficiency and coherence of migration policies. In this context the European Council welcomes the presentation by the Commission of its Communication "A common immigration policy for Europe: principles, actions and tools" and looks forward to the forthcoming proposal of a pact on immigration and asylum by the incoming French Presidency.
8. The European Council emphasises the interlinkages between migration, employment and development as well as the importance of combating the major pull factors of illegal migration. It calls on the Council to intensify work with a view to adopting the proposals on the admission of third country nationals for the purpose of highly qualified employment, on sanctions against employers of illegal immigrants, and on a single application procedure and a common set of rights for third country nationals.
9. The European Council welcomes the conclusions of the Council of April 2008 on practical cooperation in the field of asylum and the Commission Communication "Policy Plan on asylum, an integrated approach to protection across the EU". It underlines the need to continue with progress on the future Common European Asylum System with a view to its realisation by 2010.

10. The European Council underlines the importance of continuing work on the further development of the integrated border management strategy, including addressing particular pressures faced by some Member States and promoting a fair sharing of responsibilities. Rapid progress is needed on the future development of FRONTEX, including through the enhancement of operational coordination. Modern technologies must be harnessed to improve the management of external borders. The Commission is invited to present proposals for an entry/exit and registered traveller system by the beginning of 2010. The European Council looks forward to the forthcoming studies and possible legislative proposals on an electronic system for travel authorisation and on the creation of a European Border Surveillance System. The European Council invites the Commission to step up efforts on these issues and to rapidly report back on progress achieved and further possible steps, with a view to the development and implementation of the overall strategy as soon as possible.

11. The European Council reiterates the need for an effective return and readmission policy. It welcomes the progress made on the proposal on common standards in this area and underlines the importance of enhancing cooperation on readmission with third countries, including through the implementation of obligations under existing instruments, and consequently stresses the need to conclude readmission agreements urgently with all major countries of origin and transit.

12. Endorsing the Council's conclusions of 16 June on enhancing the Global Approach to Migration, the European Council underlines the importance of continuing the dialogue, partnership and cooperation with third countries on migration issues in a geographically balanced manner. The Global Approach needs to be further developed, in particular through the development of concrete instruments such as migration missions, cooperation platforms, mobility partnerships and migration profiles. In this respect, the European Council welcomes the launching of Pilot Mobility Partnerships with Cape Verde and the Republic of Moldova and looks forward to the opening of the dialogue on such Partnerships with Georgia and Senegal. The Commission is invited to evaluate the Pilot Mobility Partnerships and report on the results by no later than June 2009.

13. Noting the important progress achieved over recent months in implementing the Union's Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the European Council stresses that efforts to fight terrorism must be stepped up, while fully respecting the rule of law and human rights. In this context the European Council welcomes the new impetus given to the implementation of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator with his recent report and recommendations. It invites the Commission to continue its work on the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment for terrorism as soon as possible. In its cooperation with third countries the Union should usefully contribute to the prevention of recruitment for terrorism, particularly through the delivery of technical assistance in the fields of education, human rights, rule of law, civil society and governance. The Commission is invited to focus efforts in particular on countries in the North African region and the Sahel, as well as countries in the South Asia region.

14. Access to relevant information by the competent authorities of the Member States and EU agencies is a necessity for efficient prevention of terrorism and serious crime. The European Council therefore stresses the need for a coordinated and coherent approach to the implementation of the principle of availability, aiming for effective use of information technology and information networks. Agreement has been reached on the integration of the provisions on exchange of information in the Prüm Treaty into the Union's legal framework, but further initiatives to enhance the exchange of information should be examined, taking due account of the protection of personal data.

15. In March 2008, the enlargement of the Schengen area by 9 Member States was finalised with the abolition of controls at internal air borders. This contributes to a higher level of mobility without affecting the security of EU citizens. The European Council welcomes the entry into force of the Schengen association agreement with Switzerland and the signature of the Protocol with Liechtenstein. It urges the Member States and the Commission to work closely together and to allocate sufficient resources to ensure that SIS II becomes operational in September 2009. It invites the Commission to present possible solutions for the long-term management of large-scale IT systems in the area of Freedom, Security and Justice.

16. The European Council welcomes an initiative to progressively establish a uniform EU E-justice portal by the end of 2009.
17. Recalling the European Council conclusions of June 2007 on the overall agreement on the Framework Decision on combating certain forms of racism and xenophobia, the European Council welcomes the first European hearing on crimes committed by totalitarian regimes and acknowledges the need to continue the process.
18. The European Council welcomes the agreement reached on the Directive on the protection of the environment through criminal law and the progress made with regard to the Directive against ship source pollution. The European Council reiterates the importance of achieving a high level of environmental protection throughout the EU. It also welcomes the rapid adoption of the framework decision for enhancing procedural rights in trials in the absence of the person, thus strengthening the procedural guarantees in this area.
19. Efforts to enhance judicial cooperation in civil law matters, including family law, need to continue, considering the positive impact such cooperation can have on citizens in their everyday lives. Important legal acts concerning mediation in civil and commercial matters, the law applicable to contractual obligations and parental responsibility and the protection of children have been adopted; nevertheless, further work is needed. The European Council therefore calls for the Regulation on maintenance obligations to be adopted before the end of 2008 and for a political solution concerning the Regulation on jurisdiction and applicable law in matrimonial matters to be found promptly. The Commission is invited to submit its proposal on succession and wills before the end of 2008.
20. The European Council underlines the need to rapidly follow up on the project to establish a common frame of reference for European contract law.

21. The roles of Eurojust and Europol need to be strengthened, and the cooperation between these two agencies enhanced, with a view to reinforcing the fight against serious cross-border crime. The European Council stresses the importance of the agreement reached at the April 2008 Council on the Decision on establishing Europol and calls for its swift formal adoption in line with the timetable agreed in June 2007. The European Council calls on the Council to rapidly conclude its work with a view to formally adopting before the end of 2008 the draft Council Decision on strengthening Eurojust.

22. The European Council emphasises the need to strengthen cooperation with third countries and international organisations (especially the Hague Conference on Private International Law, the Council of Europe and the United Nations).

23. The European Council strongly supports the aim of having all EU Member States participating as quickly as possible in the U.S. Visa Waiver Programme in order to ensure full reciprocal visa-free travel and equal treatment for all EU citizens as is already the case for U.S. citizens entering the territory of the Member States.

24. The European Council welcomes ongoing efforts to reinforce the Union's disaster-management capacities and stresses the need for a coordinated approach to managing disasters. It invites the Council, the Commission and Member States to take this work forward rapidly.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF HIGH FOOD AND OIL PRICES

25. The recent surge in commodity prices raises concerns both internally, especially as regards low-income households, and abroad, particularly for developing countries which are net food and/or oil importers. It is a complex phenomenon with many root causes and consequences, affecting EU policies across the board. The European Council welcomes the two Commission Communications on these issues.
26. In the agricultural sector the Union has already acted to moderate the pressure on **food prices** through the sale of intervention stocks, the reduction in export refunds, the removal of the set-aside requirement for 2008, the increase in milk quotas, and the suspension of import duties for cereals, thus improving supply and helping to stabilise agricultural markets.
27. Successive reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have enhanced its market orientation, reduced the number of supply management measures and made EU farmers more responsive to price developments. It is important to continue to improve the market orientation of agriculture and thus enable EU farmers to better respond to market signals, while ensuring fair competition and fostering sustainable agriculture across the EU and ensuring an adequate food supply. In the context of the CAP Health Check, the Council will consider further steps to address these issues.
28. There is a need to pursue work on innovation, research and development of agricultural production, notably to enhance its energy efficiency, productivity growth and ability to adapt to climate change.
29. A number of Member States are introducing short-term measures to alleviate the impact of recent food price developments on low-income households. In order to avoid distorting price signals and causing broad-based second-round effects on wages and prices, such measures should be short-term and targeted.

30. The European Council welcomes the Commission's initiative to examine the issue of restrictive regulation in the retail sector in the context of the Single Market Review. The European Council also welcomes the Commission's intention to closely monitor activities in commodity-related financial markets, including speculative trade, and their impact on price movements as well as any policy implications. It invites the Commission to report back on this issue in advance of the December 2008 European Council and to consider proposing adequate policy responses, including measures aimed at improving market transparency.

31. It is important to ensure the sustainability of bio-fuel policies, by setting sustainability criteria for the production of first-generation bio-fuels and by encouraging the development of the second-generation bio-fuels made from by-products. There is also a need to rapidly assess possible impacts on agricultural products for food and to take action, if necessary, to address shortcomings. Further assessment should also be made of the environmental and social consequences of the production and consumption of bio-fuels, both within the Union and outside. The European Council stresses the importance of fostering coordination with the EU's international partners in that respect.

32. High food prices are putting a particular strain on developing countries. They are severely affecting the situation of the world's poorest populations and are putting at risk progress towards all Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Action is therefore required from the European Union from a development and humanitarian assistance perspective. The European Council welcomes the Commission's intention to come forward with a proposal for a new fund to support agriculture in developing countries, within the framework of the current Financial Perspectives. In its efforts, the Union will work in close liaison with the United Nations and other international organisations and in the framework of partner countries' own policies and strategies.

33. The EU is already providing important food aid and humanitarian assistance in many of the most critical areas and will mobilise resources to finance, beyond food aid, safety nets for poor and vulnerable population groups.

34. The EU will promote a more coordinated and longer-term international response to the current food crisis, in particular in the UN, in international financial institutions and in the context of the G8. It accordingly welcomes the establishment by the UNSG of the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis. The EU is determined to play its full part in implementing the Declaration agreed in Rome on 5 June 2008 at the FAO High Level Conference on World Food Security.
35. The EU will use its policy dialogue with third countries in a transparent manner to discourage food export restrictions and export bans. It will also raise this issue in the WTO and other relevant international fora. Furthermore, the EU will continue to strive for a comprehensive, ambitious and balanced conclusion of the Doha Round.
36. The EU will support a strong agricultural supply response in developing countries, providing in particular the necessary financing for agricultural inputs and assistance in using market-based risk management instruments. It will significantly enhance its support to public and private investments in agriculture and more generally encourage developing countries to develop better agriculture policies, especially to support food security and reinforce regional integration. Particular attention will be paid to small-scale farmers and enhancing energy efficiency.
37. The European Council expresses concern in regard to the continued surge in **oil and gas prices** and their social and economic consequences. Measures can be considered to alleviate the impact of higher oil and gas prices on the poorer sections of the population, but should remain short-term and targeted. The European Council welcomes the Commission's intention to propose some short-term measures targeted to underpin the long-term process of restructuring the fisheries sector. Distortionary fiscal and other policy interventions should be avoided as they prevent the necessary adjustment by economic agents. The European Council invites the incoming Presidency in cooperation with the Commission to examine the feasibility and impact of measures to smooth the effects of sudden oil and gas price increases and report before the October European Council.

38. These developments underscore the need to rapidly adopt the climate change and energy package, many elements of which can help alleviate the situation. Further efforts to increase energy efficiency and energy savings and diversify the EU energy supply are essential. In particular, new technologies have an important role to play in that respect. The European Council invites Member States, the Commission and the European Investment Bank to support measures aimed at facilitating investments by households and industry in energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources as well as a more environmentally-friendly use of fossil fuels. The European Council urges the Member States and the Commission to expedite the implementation of the 2006 Action Plan on energy efficiency and consider its possible revision. It also notes that the Commission will soon bring forward proposals to revise the energy taxation and eurovignette directives.
39. Other measures should rapidly be examined, in particular to promote competition in energy markets, promote modernisation of transport systems including the development of alternative technologies, inter alia, electric cars, as well as increase the transparency of oil markets, including as regards oil stocks. The dialogue with oil and gas companies, producing countries and importing developing countries should be enhanced, both at European level and at international level, to ensure a better response of supply to market needs and to improve the framework conditions for investment in exploration, production, refining capacity and alternative energy sources. In this respect the European Council welcomes the decision by Saudi Arabia to call a meeting between oil producer and consumer countries in Jeddah on 22 June.
40. The European Council takes particular note of the Commission's intention to monitor food and oil price developments in Europe and internationally, and looks forward to the Commission's report on the evolution of the situation ahead of the December 2008 European Council. The European Council also encourages the Commission to monitor developments in other commodity-related markets. Considering the wide range of policy sectors affected by the high food and energy prices, the European Council invites the GAERC to follow closely the work conducted in the relevant Council configurations on this issue and report back by October 2008.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

41. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the historic decision to launch the euro and the creation of the European Central Bank, the European Council salutes the remarkable success of the first decade of economic and monetary union. This success must be built upon to meet the economic challenges that lie ahead. The European Council calls on the Council to reflect on ways of strengthening the implementation of the economic framework for EMU, in the light of the Commission's communication on "EMU@10", so as to ensure that the full potential and benefits of the single currency are realised.
42. The European Council congratulates Slovakia on the convergence achieved since its accession to the EU, based on sound economic and financial policies, and welcomes Slovakia's fulfilment of all the convergence criteria as set out in the Treaty. In this context, the European Council welcomes the Commission's proposal that Slovakia should adopt the euro on 1 January 2009.
43. The European Council notes that international financial markets are showing signs of stabilisation, but that overall conditions remain fragile. The updated comprehensive work plan, adopted last October in response to the financial turmoil, is being implemented as planned and should be completed by the end of 2008. The European Council invites the Council to continue to monitor the situation closely.
44. The EU remains committed to maintaining international leadership on climate change and energy. The European Council welcomes the progress made on an ambitious, global and comprehensive post-2012 agreement on climate change at the negotiations in Bangkok in April and in Bonn in June 2008. The pace of negotiations needs to accelerate in order to come to an agreement in Copenhagen in 2009 consistent with the 2°C limit. With the aim of agreeing on an EU position at the Spring 2009 European Council, the Commission is invited to present a comprehensive strategy for scaling up finance and investment flows for both mitigation and adaptation in response to the Bali Action Plan, including mechanisms for research and development in, and the dissemination and transfer of, safe and sustainable low-carbon technology.

45. In order to maintain international leadership and credibility the European Union must rapidly reach an agreement on its climate and energy package. The European Council therefore welcomes the progress achieved to date on the different proposals in the climate and energy legislative package and urges the Council to work in close cooperation with the European Parliament towards an agreement in line with the principles and time targets set at its March 2008 meeting. The European Council calls on the Commission to bring forward as soon as possible a mechanism to incentivise Member State and private sector investment to ensure the construction and operation by 2015 of up to 12 demonstration plants of commercial power generation with carbon capture and storage, as agreed by the European Council in spring 2007. In this context the European Council reaffirms the need for coherent policies and instruments exploiting the synergies relating to Energy and Climate Change, in all economic sectors concerned, i.a., the transport sector.
46. The European Council welcomes broad agreement reached on essential elements of the internal energy market legislative package, in particular on the issue of effective separation of supply and production activities from network operations in the gas and electricity sectors. The European Council urges the Council and the European Parliament to reach final agreement on the package before the end of the current legislative term.
47. The European Council welcomes the successful outcome of the 9th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity as a fundamental step towards achieving the 2010 target.
48. Further to the political agreements reached by the Council on the Directive on working time and on the Directive on working conditions for temporary workers, the European Council calls on the Council and the European Parliament to reach a balanced final agreement on both Directives before the end of the current legislative term.

49. The European Council looks forward to the results of the Commission's evaluation of existing policies and instruments aimed at improving the inclusion of the Roma population as well as to the forthcoming conference on this issue to be held in September. It invites the Council to take this into account in its examination of the revised Social Agenda. The European Council will return to this issue before the end of the year.
50. The European Council underlines the importance of closing the gap in health and in life expectancy between and within Member States and stresses the importance of prevention activities in the field of major chronic non-communicable diseases. In this respect it welcomes the Council Conclusions on reducing the burden of cancer, which can contribute to the achievement of these goals.
51. The European Council welcomes the decision to establish the EIT in Budapest. This will allow the Institute to rapidly begin its work with a view to promoting European innovation. In that context, the European Council recalls the conclusions of the Representatives of the Member States, meeting at Head of State or Government level in Brussels on 13 December 2003, that give priority to newly Acceding States in the distribution of the seats of Community offices or agencies to be set up in the future. Seats of future offices or agencies should be primarily located in the Member States that acceded to the Union in or after 2004, while appropriate priority should be given to the Member States that do not already host an EU office or agency.

WESTERN BALKANS

52. The European Council reaffirms its full support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans, as set out in the Thessaloniki Agenda and the Salzburg Declaration. Recalling its conclusions of December 2006, the European Council stresses that by making solid progress in economic and political reform and by fulfilling the necessary conditions and requirements, the remaining potential candidates in the Western Balkans should achieve candidate status, according to their own merits, with EU membership as ultimate goal. The EU perspective remains essential for the stability, reconciliation and the future of the Western Balkans.
53. The Stabilisation and Association Process remains the framework for the European course of the Western Balkans. The progress achieved in recent years in this context, in particular through the conclusion of Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs), now needs to be further consolidated.
54. The European Council welcomes the significant progress in facilitating people-to-people contacts for the countries of the region. In this regard the European Council welcomes the successful launching of the dialogue on visa liberalisation with Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on the roadmaps containing clear and realistic benchmarks. The European Council also endorses the Declaration on the Western Balkans as set out in the Annex.
55. The European Council stresses again the importance of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. It welcomes the transition from the Stability Pact to the Regional Cooperation Council and encourages the region to further enhance regional ownership as discussed at the recent South-Eastern Europe Cooperation Process ministerial meeting in Sofia and summit meeting in Pomorie.

56. The European Council underlines that further steps by the **former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** in its progress towards the EU are possible by the end of this year, provided that the conditions set out in the December 2005 European Council conclusions, the Copenhagen political criteria and the key priorities of the February 2008 accession partnership are met. In this context the European Council takes note of the conclusions of the GAERC of 16 June 2008. Maintaining good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution on the name issue, remains essential. The EU welcomes **Albania's** commitment to ensure the conditions for free, fair and democratic elections which must take place in 2009. Further efforts with regard to institutional capacities in public administration, the fight against corruption and organised crime as well as in the judiciary will be of similar importance. The European Council takes note of the progress **Montenegro** has made and encourages the country to further focus on building administrative capacity, pursuing the fight against corruption and organised crime, consolidating the institutions as well as reforms of the judiciary in accordance with the Constitution. To reach the next stage in their respective relations with the EU, Albania and Montenegro must also establish a convincing track record of successful SAA implementation. The European Council welcomes the recent signature of the SAA with **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, which constitutes an important step in that country's European course. Bosnia and Herzegovina must continue with the implementation of the reform process without delay, particularly with a view to fulfilling the objectives and conditions for the transition from the Office of the High Representative to the European Union Special Representative (EUSR). The European Council looks forward to a new Government in Belgrade with a clear European agenda to push forward with necessary reforms. Building on the recent signature of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU, **Serbia** can accelerate its progress towards the EU, including candidate status, as soon as all necessary conditions are met in accordance with the GAERC conclusions of 29 April 2008. Recalling the European Council's conclusions of December 2007 and the GAERC conclusions of 18 February 2008, the European Union remains committed to playing a leading role in ensuring the stability of **Kosovo**, also through EULEX Kosovo, EUSR and its contribution to an international civilian office as part of the international presences. The EU welcomes the UNSG's report on UNMIK and, as is described in his report, his intention to reconfigure the international civil presence in Kosovo.

This would facilitate the deployment of EULEX KOSOVO throughout Kosovo and allow for an enhanced operational role of the EU in the area of rule of law. The European Council also welcomes Kosovo's commitment to the principles of democracy and equality of all its citizens, the protection of the Serb and other minorities, the protection of religious and cultural heritage as well as international presence. The European Council expresses its support to the forthcoming Donors' Conference and encourages bilateral and multilateral donors to pledge assistance. The EU recalls its willingness to assist the economic and political development of Kosovo through a clear European perspective, in line with the European perspective of the region.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Millennium Development Goals

57. The year 2008 should mark a turning point in enhancing the collective efforts to eradicate poverty in the context of sustainable development, in order to ensure that by 2015 all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be achieved worldwide. In the light of progress made in some countries and areas, the European Council is convinced that all MDGs can still be attained in all regions of the world, provided that concerted action is taken immediately and in a sustained manner until 2015. However, it is seriously concerned about the trend in many countries and regions, in particular sub-Saharan Africa, in terms of achievement of the MDGs.

58. The EU will continue to play a leading role as the world's largest donor and will make all necessary efforts to ensure an ambitious action-oriented response before, during and after the key events to be held in the second half of this year: the third High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (Accra, 2-4 September), the UN High-Level Event on the MDGs (New York, 25 September) and the International Conference on Financing for Development (Doha, 29 November-2 December).

59. The European Council fully endorses the Council conclusions of May 2008, which provide a strong collective EU response to the global development challenge. In particular, with a view to attaining all MDGs, the EU strongly reaffirms its commitment to achieve a collective ODA target of 0,56% GNI by 2010 and 0,7% GNI by 2015, as set out in the May 2005 Council conclusions, the June 2005 European Council conclusions and the European Consensus on Development. These commitments should see annual EU ODA double to over EUR 66 billion in 2010. At least half of this collective increase will be allocated to Africa. Member States are encouraged to establish their indicative timetables illustrating how they aim to achieve their agreed ODA targets.
60. The EU will undertake radical reforms to improve aid effectiveness, building on the full implementation of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the 2005 European Consensus on Development and the 2007 EU Code of Conduct on complementarity and division of labour.
61. The EU will continue to improve policy coherence for development (PCD) in the twelve areas identified in 2005, ensuring furthermore that the PCD principles are part of the international agenda for the MDGs and aid effectiveness.
62. The EU will fully implement the 2007 EU Strategy on Aid for Trade, striving to achieve its collective target of EUR 2 billion spending on EU trade-related assistance annually by 2010 (EUR 1 billion from the Member States and EUR 1 billion from the European Community) and to increase overall Aid for Trade in coherence with the increases in overall ODA. In the range of 50% of the increase in the collective EU trade-related assistance will be available for ACP countries.
63. The European Council welcomes the EU Agenda for Action on MDGs. The EU proposes to its partners in development to share this agenda, which identifies, within time frames, specific milestones and actions in the context of pro-poor and pro-growth development in key areas, such as the reduction of poverty and hunger, education, health, environment, gender equality and the empowerment of women, water, agriculture, private sector and infrastructure, that will contribute to ensuring the achievement of the MDGs by 2015.

64. The EU is determined to provide an effective collective response to the new challenges to development posed in particular by climate change and high food prices. With regard to climate change, the EU is determined, where relevant, to help developing countries, particularly poor developing countries most vulnerable to climate change, to move towards sustainable economic growth and to adapt to climate change, in line with the agreement reached in Bali to launch negotiations aimed at securing a global agreement on climate change in Copenhagen in 2009. It will work for the effective implementation of the 2007 "Global Climate Change Alliance" and will explore ways to mobilise new financial resources to tackle climate change and combat its negative impact. In this context, the EU will work, inter alia, on the basis of the Commission proposal for a global financing mechanism.

Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean

65. The Mediterranean region is an area of vital strategic importance to the European Union in political, economic and social terms. The Barcelona Process has been the central instrument for Euro-Mediterranean relations since 1995 and has allowed the strong promotion of multilateral and bilateral cooperation. Building on and reinforcing previous successes, the "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean" will inject further momentum into the Union's relations with the Mediterranean. It will complement ongoing bilateral relations which will continue within existing policy frameworks.
66. The European Council welcomes the Commission's Communication of 20 May 2008 and, in particular, the proposals to add an enhanced political and institutional dimension to the EU's relations with Mediterranean partners through a new political impetus, notably by holding biennial summits, and to reinforce the shared ownership of the Partnership through the establishment of a co-presidency with due regard for the relevant provisions of the Treaties.
67. On this basis, the EU will conduct the necessary consultations with all Euro-Mediterranean partners with a view to preparing a joint declaration to be adopted at the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean on 13 July 2008.

Eastern Partnership

68. The European Council welcomes the proposals for developing the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which will aim at enhancing EU policy towards eastern ENP partners in bilateral and multilateral formats.

69. The European Council agrees on the need to further promote regional cooperation among the EU's eastern neighbours and between the EU and the region, as well as bilateral cooperation between the EU and each of these countries respectively, on the basis of differentiation and an individual approach, respecting the character of the ENP as a single and coherent policy framework. Furthermore, such cooperation should bring added value and be complementary to the already existing and planned multilateral cooperation under and related to the ENP, in particular the Black Sea Synergy and the Northern Dimension.

70. In line with this, the European Council invites the Commission to take the work forward and to present to the Council in Spring 2009 a proposal for modalities of the "Eastern Partnership", on the basis of relevant initiatives.

Other issues

71. The European Council welcomes the encouraging progress made in implementing the Union's Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia adopted in June 2007. It looks forward to further strengthening the Union's partnership with Central Asia.

72. The European Council remains deeply concerned by the situation in Zimbabwe and reiterates the need for the upcoming second round of presidential elections on 27 June to be held in a peaceful, free and fair environment in accordance with international norms and standards. Violence so far, intimidation and action taken against NGOs to suspend aid and international access to rural areas, heighten further the fears of the Zimbabwean people and the international community about the conditions under which this poll, crucial for the future of Zimbabwe, will be held. The European Union regrets that its offer to provide monitors has been rejected. It is vital that ordinary Zimbabweans vote on election day and their votes are counted swiftly and transparently in accordance with the Southern Africa Development Community's own rules and standards. Zimbabweans should be allowed to choose their future freely, which will open the way for delivering political stability to the country. A free and fair presidential runoff is critical to the resolution of the ongoing crisis. The European Council calls on the SADC and the African Union to deploy a significant number of election monitors as soon as possible and to ensure their continued presence until the electoral process is completed and results officially declared. The European Council reiterates its readiness to take additional measures against those responsible for violence. The EU stands ready to support and reengage with a democratic, legitimate and reform-minded government in Zimbabwe.
73. The European Council took note of the discussion by the GAERC on 16 June of the situation in Sudan. It is deeply concerned about the lack of cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC) by the Sudanese authorities and calls on the Government of Sudan to work constructively with the ICC, the EU and with the international community. The European Council called on the GAERC to continue to follow developments in Sudan closely and contemplate additional measures in case of lack of full cooperation with the UN and other institutions, including the ICC.

74. The European Union expresses its continuing deep concern about the humanitarian situation in Burma/Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis. It welcomes the efforts of the UN and ASEAN and the resulting increase in aid reaching the 2.4 million people affected by the Cyclone, but calls on the authorities of Burma/Myanmar to remove all remaining restrictions on the distribution of international aid. The European Council underlines that while the immediate priority is humanitarian relief, the need for a genuine transition to democracy in Burma/Myanmar is stronger than ever. It deeply regrets the decision of the authorities of Burma/Myanmar to renew Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest and reiterates its call for the release of all political prisoners. The European Council regrets that the way the referendum was conducted did not contribute to an inclusive and transparent process of national reconciliation, which is the only path to prosperity and stability in the country. The European Council calls on the authorities to ensure that the elections announced for 2010 will be prepared and conducted in a way that contributes to a credible and fully participative transition to democracy. In this regard, the European Council welcomes the UN Secretary-General's personal engagement and underlines its full support for his good offices mission.
75. The European Council welcomes the Lima Declaration issued at the recent EU/Latin America and Caribbean Summit and calls for the necessary efforts to be made to conclude the subregional negotiations by 2009.
76. The European Council endorses the Presidency Report on European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), which includes the mandate for the incoming Presidency. The European Council also endorses the Annual report on EU activities in the framework of conflict prevention; incoming Presidencies are invited to build on the substantial progress made so as to make the Union more coherent, capable and active in this area.

77. The European Council reaffirms that the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, in particular children affected by armed conflict, is a priority of the EU's external action. The European Council calls on the Commission and Member States to continue ensuring coherence, complementarity and coordination of human rights, security and development policies and programmes, in order to address the short, medium and long-term impacts of armed conflict on children in an effective, sustainable and comprehensive manner.
78. The European Council acknowledges efforts to promote the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. In this context it recognises the value of cultural cooperation and intercultural dialogue as an integral part of all relevant external policies, in line with the recommendations of the conference on "New Paradigms, New Models & Culture in the EU's External Relations" and the work underway within the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations. The European Council underlines the importance of cultural cooperation in addressing political processes and challenges, based on dialogue with civil society, in promoting people-to-people contacts and in fostering good neighbourly relations.
-

DECLARATION ON THE WESTERN BALKANS

Considerable efforts have been made to render the European perspective of the Western Balkans more tangible and visible to the people across the region. With reference to the Commission's Communication "Western Balkans: Enhancing the European Perspective" the European Council underlines the importance of the following three areas:

1) Extending Community policies to the Western Balkans and enhancing regional cooperation

In order to deepen the ongoing cooperation between the EU and the region, which enjoys a European perspective, and to enhance regional cooperation, the European Council:

- calls for efforts to encourage the participation of the Western Balkans countries in **Community programmes and agencies**;
- looks forward to the launching of negotiations to establish a **Transport Community Treaty with the Western Balkans** as well as to their early conclusion;
- recognises the importance of effective implementation of the **Energy Community** in South East Europe;
- Stresses the importance of **cooperation and reforms in the field of freedom, security and justice**, sharing EU experiences in combating organised crime and terrorism and recommends the preparation of the first South East European organised crime threat assessment to be coordinated by the SECI Center in Bucharest;
- recognises the importance of promoting **judicial cooperation in civil and commercial matters**;
- welcomes progress made in associating the Western Balkans with the Community **Civil Protection Mechanism** and underlines the intention of the European Commission to further strengthen cooperation, including by launching a Disaster Risk Reduction Initiative;
- acknowledges the importance of the transition from the Stability Pact to the **Regional Cooperation Council** as well as of the cooperation undertaken through the **Central European Free Trade Agreement** and pledges full support to these forms of regionally owned co-operation.

2) Facilitation of people-to-people contacts and development of civil society

Promoting people-to-people contacts between the Western Balkans and the EU is of the utmost importance, as it facilitates a better mutual understanding and reconciliation and promotes the principles upon which the EU is founded. Therefore the European Council:

- welcomes the successful launching of the dialogue on **visa liberalisation** as mentioned in paragraph 54 of the European Council conclusions;
- supports the intention of the Commission to offer more **scholarships** for students from the Western Balkans under Erasmus Mundus;
- recognises the importance of the "**Steering platform on research for the Western Balkans**". It calls for the continuation of cooperation in the area of science and research;
- supports the establishment of a new Facility under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) to promote **civil society** development and dialogue in the Western Balkans, while strengthening partnership and networking with civil society counterparts from the EU.

3) Economic and social development and strengthening of good governance

The EU will continue to work closely with the Western Balkans to strengthen socio-economic development and good governance and will support further progress and reforms in the region.

With this aim the European Council:

- welcomes the initiative to establish a comprehensive **Western Balkans Investment Framework** by 2010. It calls for swift implementation of the objectives mentioned in the ECOFIN Conclusions of 14 May 2008;
- acknowledges the work done by the **Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA)** and calls for its development into a fully fledged school;
- recognises the fundamental **contribution of cultural cooperation** in promoting European values and intercultural dialogue in the Western Balkans, and thus fostering democratisation, reconciliation and respect for human rights.