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**INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE  
LONDON, 12 MARCH 1998**

**CHAIRMAN'S CONCLUSIONS**

- The first meeting of the European Conference on 12 March 1998 marks the beginning of a new era in European cooperation.
- The successful inauguration today of the European Conference gives expression to the historic decision taken by the European Council at its meeting in Luxembourg on 12 and 13 December 1997 launching the comprehensive, inclusive and ongoing process of European Union enlargement. Its purpose is to bring together the Member States of the EU and the European States aspiring to accede to it; sharing its values and objectives; and accepting the criteria and subscribing to the principles set out at Luxembourg. The Conference of course remains open to all countries that have been invited to participate.
- For over 40 years the European Community and now the European Union has acted as a beacon of hope to those wanting to see an end to the rivalries which have been so destructive throughout this century. It has shaped an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity for its members.
- The historic changes our generation has witnessed offer us the chance, through the enlargement of the European Union, to spread these benefits to the wider Europe; to accelerate and complete the process of reconciliation; to entrench stability and prosperity across our Continent.
- We want to ensure that Europe develops for the benefit of all its citizens as a stable area where democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law and freedom of expression go hand in hand with sustainable economic growth.
- The Conference adds a new dimension to our efforts. It provides a unique forum for direct and informal exchange at the highest level. It is an inclusive and overarching framework within which we can build on the broad range of our existing, successful joint activities.
- It symbolises our determination to work together and responds to the growing range of problems which can only be tackled successfully through joint endeavour.

- We have therefore agreed that, in the first instance, we shall address:
    - ◆ Transnational Organized Crime: we are determined to continue our efforts to combat the scourge of organized crime, in particular the drugs trade, trafficking in human beings and terrorism. This demands a coordinated, international response. We agree that the UK Presidency will urgently convoke experts from countries of the European Conference, who will with the European Commission quickly consider the problems associated with organized crime and trafficking of drugs. Recommendations of this Group will be submitted to the Conference within 12 months.
    - ◆ The Environment: we affirm our determination to work actively to improve environmental protection and to promote sustainable development.
    - ◆ Foreign and Security Policy: we believe that our interests on issues of foreign and security policy will increasingly converge. We shall deepen and extend our coordination and cooperation, so strengthening Europe's voice and values in the world.
    - ◆ Competitive Economies: we shall exchange information on economic and social policies, and how best to strengthen the competitiveness of our economies, including by equipping people with the skills needed to exploit 21st century opportunities, and to foster employment.
    - ◆ Regional Cooperation: we welcome the new range of regional cooperation programmes and shall aim to ensure their momentum and coherence.
  
  - In these ways we shall together address common challenges. The process, started in London in 1998, recognizes – and celebrates – the links which bind all our countries, and which we pledge to deepen and strengthen in the interests of all our peoples. We look forward to meeting annually at Heads of State/Government level, as agreed in Luxembourg.
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