

PRESS RELEASE

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**12th QUADRIPARTITE MEETING
EUROPEAN UNION/COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

Strasbourg, 7 October 1998

The 12th European Union/Council of Europe Quadripartite meeting was held in Strasbourg on 7 October 1998, at the invitation of the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The meeting was attended by:

Mr. G. PAPANDEOU, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and Alternate Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece,

Mr. D. TARSCHYS, Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Mrs. B. FERRERO-WALDNER, President of the Council of the European Union and State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Austria;

Mr. H. VAN DEN BROEK, member of the European Commission;

The European Union participants informed the Council of Europe side of the progress of the enlargement process of the European Union, following the launching of both the accession process and negotiating process in March 1998. The participants recalled that all the States applying for membership of the European Union were already members of the Council of Europe and committed to compliance with the principles of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. The representatives of the European Union recalled that these commitments were also important in the context of the political criteria for accession to the European Union laid down in the Copenhagen European Council conclusions. They were also relevant for the European Union's relations with other European States. The European Union side emphasised again the significance of the monitoring procedures created in the Council of Europe in order to ensure compliance with the commitments entered into when joining the Council of Europe.

The participants took stock of the present state of cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Union. They recalled the Final Declaration and the Action Plan, adopted at the second Summit of Heads of State and Government of Council of Europe member States in Strasbourg on 10 and 11 October 1997. They emphasised the importance of the Action Plan for the strengthening of democratic security and stability in Europe. They also agreed that the European Commission and the Secretariat of the Council of Europe should provide for a pluri-annual planification of co-operation.

The European Union representatives confirmed their willingness, expressed notably by the President of the European Commission at the Summit, to examine to what extent the European Union could contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan.. The Council of Europe side expressed the hope that the implementation of the Action Plan would open the way for new joint activities between the Council of Europe and the European Commission, in particular as regards its social aspects, protection of youth against drug addiction and assistance for democratisation, and stated that a number of provisional proposals had recently been transmitted to the Commission.

Moreover, the Committee of Wise Persons, set up by the Committee of Ministers, was expected to deal with, among other matters, relations with the Council of Europe and the European Union in their report to the Committee of Ministers in November 1998. In this connection it was also recalled that the Amsterdam Treaty was in the process of being ratified by the member States of the European Union. Its entry into force next year should offer an occasion to review the areas of cooperation between the European Union and the Council of Europe in order to extend that cooperation further in areas such as those falling under the new Treaty.

The participants examined in detail the strengthening of cooperation on assistance to countries of central and Eastern Europe. They reviewed the situation as regards the projects being carried out jointly and the prospects of new joint programmes. In this context, they paid particular attention to their continued cooperation with regard to Albania, the Russian Federation and Ukraine with a view to developing democratic structures and practices at all levels of society and the multilateral programmes on national minorities, bio-ethics and the fight against corruption and organised crime. They noted in particular that discussions between the European Commission and the Council of Europe Secretariat were at an advanced state with regard to joint programmes for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia as well as new multilateral programmes for national minorities and the fight against corruption and organised crime. They confirmed their intention to develop their cooperation further in order to reinforce democracy, protection of human rights and observance of the rule of law in those countries. They agreed that the European Commission and the Council of Europe Secretariat should step up their efforts to find the most effective ways and means of strengthening relations in these areas.

The participants stressed the joint interest of the European Union and the Council of Europe in the political and economic stability of Russia and expressed their support for the efforts of its new government. The two sides expressed their willingness to continue their cooperation with a view to pursuing efforts towards the consolidation of economic and democratic reforms in Russia. They also expressed their intention to strengthen their joint programmes in the field of democratic institution-building and their possible extension to include the training of civil servants and political leaders.

With regard to Albania, the two sides recalled the Joint Council of Europe-EU-OSCE-WEU Declaration issued following the visit by the Chairmen-in-office of the Council of Europe and OSCE in close consultation with the Presidencies of the European Union and Western European Union. Participants looked forward to co-operating with the Friends of Albania Group, inaugurated on 30 September 1998, and declared their support for all initiatives leading to a wide political agreement consolidating democracy, stability and economic development in Albania. This should also include a training programme for young people and young political leaders in particular. The two sides confirmed that a third Joint Programme for support to the Albanian legal system, which is expected to be operational soon, should be supplemented by joint urgency measures to cope with the most pressing problems highlighted by the recent crisis. They also supported the Council of Europe's initiative with a view to taking on a prominent role in the co-ordination of support to the legal system in Albania.

Participants held an exchange of views on the latest developments in Kosovo. They called for an immediate end to violence and for early negotiations with a view to a political solution of the crisis. They condemned in the strongest terms those responsible for recent atrocities in Kosovo and called upon the authorities in Belgrade immediately to investigate, identify and punish those responsible. They also called on the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to guarantee free access of humanitarian supplies to the victims of the conflict. Participants were informed of the proposal by the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for an initiative to specifically monitor human rights violations in Kosovo.

The participants also held a brief exchange of views on Croatia. The Council of Europe side provided information on its cooperation and assistance programmes under way or envisaged with regard to Croatia in fields such as the media, local democracy, education for democratic citizenship, and democratic political leadership. It was agreed that the Council of Europe Secretariat and the Commission would explore the possibilities of carrying out joint activities in these fields.

The 1997 Council of Europe Summit called for, among other things, the universal abolition of the death penalty. In June 1998, the European Union decided to work towards the universal abolition of the death penalty as a strongly held policy agreed by all EU member States. Both sides have insisted, in the meantime, on the maintenance of existing moratoria on executions in Europe. 1998 should therefore be the first year in the history of Europe in which no death penalty is carried out. The two sides agreed to promote the universal abolition of the death penalty.

Participants took note of a Greek proposal to develop enhanced understanding and co-operation between Orthodox Churches and European Institutions.

The Council of Europe participants recalled the precious support given by the European Commission and the European Parliament to the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity in Lisbon and its activities. They expressed their concern regarding the current difficulties encountered with regard to the financial contribution from the European Union budget and their hope that a solution would rapidly be found in order to continue the support to the Centre. The representative of the European Commission undertook to explore the possibilities. In this context reference was also made to the Council of Europe Global Solidarity Campaign which was officially launched in Lisbon on 10 September 1998 and for which the European Commission had participated in preparatory meetings.
