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**14th EU-GCC JOINT COUNCIL AND MINISTERIAL MEETING
(Brussels, 17 May 2004)**

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The fourteenth session of the Joint Council established in accordance with the Co-operation Agreement between the European Community on the one hand, and the countries parties to the Charter of the Co-operation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sultanate of Oman, State of Qatar and State of Kuwait) on the other hand, was held in Brussels on 17 May 2004.

The EU delegation was led by Mr. Brian Cowen, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland and President of the Council of the European Union. The EU was also represented by its High Representative for Foreign and Security policy, Mr Javier Solana. The European Commission was represented by Commissioners Chris Patten and Pascal Lamy. The GCC delegation was led by H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait and President of the GCC Ministerial Council. The GCC Secretariat was represented by H.E. Abdulrahman Hamad Al-Attiyah, Secretary General.

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2. The meeting took place in a friendly and constructive atmosphere. In preparation of this meeting, EU and GCC officials had met in Brussels on 28 and 29 April in the Joint Co-operation Committee and for a Regional Political Directors' meeting respectively.
3. The Joint Council welcomed the opening of the EC Delegation in Riyadh as a concrete step in the strengthening of relations between both sides. The two parties welcomed steps undertaken by the Commission for the accreditation of the Head of Delegation in Saudi Arabia to the other GCC countries. Having exchanged missions, they have thereby fulfilled an important prerequisite for the further development of their friendly ties. They also expressed their satisfaction for the recent accreditation of the Bahrain Ambassador to the EC.
4. **Implementation of the Co-operation Agreement; Free Trade Agreement negotiations**

The Joint Council received a report from the 15th Joint Co-operation Committee held in Brussels on 28 April 2004 and reiterated its view that trade, energy and economic co-operation constituted critical domains on which to further develop and enhance EU-GCC economic and political relations.

The Joint Council noted with satisfaction progress achieved in the implementation of the co-operation agreement and in the negotiations for the free trade area. It welcomed the objective to continue co-operation by increasing dialogue and common understanding and expressed satisfaction with the decisions adopted at the GCC to deepen energy co-operation, to hold a new Economic Dialogue meeting in Brussels in the autumn, and to activate the Environment Expert Group created under the 1988 Co-operation Agreement to exchange views on environmental and climate change issues.

Furthermore, the Joint Council stressed its shared political will to further relations and co-operation beyond trade and economic issues. It welcomed the agreement reached at the Joint Committee to remain in close contact so as to identify the best way to move this shared objective forward. It also invited officials on both sides to discuss and agree areas and means for concrete initiatives, for example in the fields of civil society, learning mechanisms, interconnection of infrastructures and organic agriculture. The Joint Council looked forward to ensuring an enhanced relationship that sought to promote mutual understanding, security and prosperity.

Regarding the free trade area negotiations, the Joint Council noted with satisfaction that constructive discussions were held on 19 April 2004 between the current President of GCC Ministerial Council Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, the Secretary General of the GCC, and the Commissioners for External Relations and Trade. The Joint Council also noted with satisfaction that progress had been achieved, mainly on the regulatory elements, that most trade areas due to be covered in the FTA had been addressed, and that the remaining outstanding issues were progressively being tackled.

The Joint Council agreed on the importance of close and effective co-operation on human rights, migration, counter-terrorism and non-proliferation issues. It agreed to incorporate in the FTA agreement clauses on human rights and migration, and invited negotiators to conclude negotiations on these elements as soon as possible. It further assessed and exchanged views on the challenges posed by terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction threats and agreed to enhance co-operation between the parties in these fields by all possible means in accordance with international law including by entering into legally binding clauses on counter-terrorism and non-proliferation.

The Joint Council noted that all these negotiations constituted a single undertaking and a true reflection of the overall nature of their relationship, and noted with satisfaction that negotiations were now heading to their conclusion. It welcomed the fact that the parties had committed themselves to do their utmost to conclude the negotiations before the end of the year and that the next two negotiating rounds were due to take place before the summer recess.

5. Exchange of views on developments in the two regions

The Joint Council welcomed the GCC report on the GCC Kuwait Summit in December 2003 and noted progress in various fields including *inter alia* economic integration, education and judicial co-operation, as well as the steps towards political reforms undertaken by several GCC countries. It expressed its willingness to co-operate further on these relevant issues. It also welcomed progress on the implementation of the GCC Customs Union, which had entered into force on 1 January 2003. The Joint Council heard an EU report on the completion of its enlargement process on 1 May 2004 and welcomed this development. It also received an EU report on the current state-of-play regarding the proposed new EU constitutional treaty.

6. Exchange of views on political questions of common interest

The EU and the GCC reviewed a series of international and regional political issues of mutual interest and had an exchange of views on developments in the two regions with a view to supporting and enhancing regional peace, security and stability, which remain key shared foreign policy objectives. The EU and the GCC reiterated their determination to further develop this political dialogue in order to seek common solutions to the common challenges facing their respective regions and peoples.

6.1 Regional issues

6.1.1. Developments in the Middle East

The EU and the GCC expressed their deep concern at the situation in the Middle East and the deepening of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They urged an end to violence and to terrorism in all its forms as well as the resumption of a cease-fire embracing all parties and groups, and called on both sides to resume negotiations on the peace process without further delay. They stated that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace must meet the legitimate aspirations of both the Israeli and Palestinian people and must include Lebanon and Syria. They also called on all States in the region to exert every effort to promote peace and to combat terrorism in all its forms.

The EU and the GCC reaffirmed their commitment to a negotiated two-State solution agreed between the parties which would result in a viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with an Israel living within recognized and secure borders. They also reaffirmed their belief that the Quartet Roadmap, endorsed by UNSCR 1515, represented the only route to achieving such an outcome, and called on both sides to fulfil their obligations under the Roadmap. They noted with appreciation the statement issued by the Quartet after its meeting in New York on 4 May 2004.

The EU and the GCC expressed their shared position that they would not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties and that no declared views on the possible shape of a final settlement could pre-empt the negotiation of that settlement. They also noted that the refugee question and the manner in which the right of return may be realized was also a Final Status issue and that the Roadmap stated that a final and comprehensive permanent status agreement that ended the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must include an agreed, just, fair and realistic solution to this question.

They agreed that Final Status issues were a matter for negotiation and agreement between the two parties themselves and must not be prejudged. They furthermore concurred that secure and recognized borders should emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515. These and other relevant Security Council Resolutions must form the basis for a just and lasting settlement of the conflict.

The EU and the GCC recalled and reiterated their support for the constructive initiative of His Highness Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, endorsed by the Arab League Summit in Beirut in 2002. They expressed the hope that the Beirut Initiative would be re-launched at the forthcoming Arab League Summit in Tunis on 22 May 2004.

The EU and the GCC took note of the prospect of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. They agreed that a full Israeli withdrawal and complete end of occupation of Gaza could represent a step towards the implementation of the Roadmap provided that it takes place in the context of the Roadmap, that it is a step towards a two state solution, that it does not involve a transfer of settlement activity to the West Bank, that there is an organised and negotiated handover of responsibility to the Palestinian Authority, and that Israel facilitates rehabilitation and reconstruction in Gaza. The proposed withdrawal should be properly orchestrated with the international community so as to ensure that an orderly situation in Gaza results, which would permit the maintenance of security as well as rehabilitation and reconstruction.

A key issue remains Palestinian reform, particularly in the area of security as well as in the fields of economy and finance. The EU and the GCC called on the Palestinian Authority to address the issue of security and tackle the challenge of terrorism and welcomed its announcement of plans for improving Palestinian security performance, stressing the need for full and proper implementation. The EU and the GCC noted with concern the grievous humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian territories which in the end is only fuelling extremism and called on the Israeli Government to take action to alleviate the suffering of ordinary Palestinians by lifting prohibitions on movement, reversing its settlement policy and reversing the construction of the so-called security fence in the Palestinian territories, including in and around East Jerusalem. With the aim of supporting the reforms in the Palestinian territories The EU and the GCC expressed the intention to continue their financial support to the Palestinian Authority with clear objectives and conditions. In this context, they welcomed the launch by the World Bank of the Public Financial Management Trust Fund. They also called on other international donors to join this engagement with a view to ensuring coherent reconstruction efforts. The EU and the GCC called on the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to summon the political will necessary to overcome the current impasse in the peace process because it is only through peace and reconciliation that they will realize their full potential.

6.1.2. Developments in relation to “ An EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East ”

The EU and the GCC took the opportunity to review developments in relation to the interim report on an “EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East”, which was prepared by the EU Presidency, Commission and Council Secretariat earlier this year and welcomed by the European Council in March 2004. It was noted that the purpose of this interim report was to give an overview of discussions to date within the EU on the strategic partnership, to present an analysis of the EU’s current engagement with the countries concerned, and to suggest core elements for a strategic partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The EU and the GCC welcomed the importance attached to consultation with the regional partners in the current period,. They looked forward to further contact in the period ahead and also looked forward to exploring the potential which might be offered by the Strategic Partnership for strengthening relations between the European Union and GCC.

In the context of relations with the Mediterranean and the Middle East countries, the EU also briefed the GCC on the setting up of the Euro-Mediterranean Investment Facility and Partnership (FEMIP), noting its usefulness as a channel for investments aimed at enhancing the prosperity of the Mediterranean partners.

6.1.3. Iran

Both sides expressed concern at the lack of progress towards resolution of the territorial conflict between the United Arab Emirates and Iran over Abu Musa and the Tunbs Islands. They reiterated their support for a peaceful solution to the conflict in accordance with international law, either through direct negotiations or by referring the issue to the International Court of Justice.

The EU and the GCC welcomed Iran’s signature in December 2003 of the Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement and recalled that Iran has committed itself to act in accordance with its provisions, pending its entry into force, and urged its implementation and early ratification.

The EU and the GCC also welcomed the decision by Iran of 24 February 2004 to extend the scope of its suspension of enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, and its confirmation that the suspension applies to all facilities in Iran. In accordance with this decision, they expected Iran to proceed with the full suspension of all such activities, and take all necessary steps to build up confidence.

They urged Iran to provide full and proactive co-operation with the IAEA in resolving all outstanding questions in a spirit of full transparency.

6.1.4.Iraq

The EU and the GCC stated their determination to assist the Iraqi people as they enter a new era in the history of their country.

The EU and the GCC expressed concern about the security situation in Iraq, noting that this remains a major impediment to successful political and reconstruction processes. They condemned all violence and terrorist attacks, including the kidnappings and brutal murder of hostages. They deplored the taking of hostages in all circumstances and called on those responsible to release immediately and unharmed all remaining hostages and to desist from any further such activity.

The EU and the GCC expressed their abhorrence at recent evidence of mistreatment of prisoners in Iraqi prisons. The EU and the GCC condemned any instances of abuse and degradation of prisoners in Iraq, which are contrary to international law, including the Geneva Conventions. The EU and the GCC welcomed the commitment by relevant Governments to bring to justice any individuals responsible for such acts involving the abuse of Iraqi detainees, and their commitment to rectify any failure to adhere to international humanitarian law.

Calling on all parties in Iraq to work together to establish a sovereign, independent, democratic and peaceful Iraq whose territorial integrity is preserved and which lives in peace with its neighbours, the EU and the GCC committed themselves to continue to help the Iraqi people rebuild their country and regain its proper place in the regional as well as the international family.

They welcomed the consensus reached by the various parties in Iraq in signing the new Transitional Administrative Law on 8 March and expressed the hope that this encouraging development would permit the transition process to move ahead expeditiously.

Convinced that a strong UN role in this political transition process is an essential element for its success, the EU and the GCC welcomed the decision of the Iraqi Governing Council to invite the UN to help with the transfer of sovereignty at the end of June 2004 and future national elections and the acceptance of this invitation by the United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan. They looked forward to the UN playing a vital and growing role endorsed by the UN Security Council in the run-up to transition and beyond and expressed their support to UN Special Envoy Mr Lakhdar Brahimi in these endeavours.

The two sides welcomed the conclusions of the fifth conference of the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the countries neighbouring Iraq, which was held in Kuwait in February 2004. These conclusions covered various aspects relevant to helping Iraq and its people to rebuild the country and regain its full sovereignty adhering to the principle of inadmissibility of interference in Iraq's internal affairs. The Joint Council expressed its strong condemnation of the killing of thousands of Iraqi citizens, Kuwaiti prisoners and citizens of other countries as revealed by the discovery of mass graves all over Iraq. They stressed the importance of holding officials of the deposed Iraqi regime accountable and to bring them to justice for such heinous crimes.

6.2 Global issues

6.2.1 Terrorism

Since last year's meetings, both the EU and the GCC experienced major terrorist attacks in their respective regions, most recently in Madrid and Riyadh. The two parties took the opportunity to condemn these attacks unreservedly and to express their sympathy and solidarity with the victims of such terrorist attacks and their families. They pledged to strengthen co-operation in the ongoing fight against terrorism.

The EU and the GCC reiterated their strong and unequivocal condemnation of terrorism in all its forms, whatever the origin, cause or motives. At the same time, they formally rejected as both dangerous and unfounded any equating of terrorism with any civilisation, culture or religion.

They emphasised that the fight against terrorism, in full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, was an absolute priority and must be given the highest attention, both in international fora and at national level.

They underlined the crucial importance of countering the financing of terrorism, notably by preventing terrorist groups from obtaining and misappropriating funds. A concrete first step in this regard was the EU-GCC seminar on the financing of terrorism held in Brussels in November 2003. The EU and the GCC agreed to pursue regularly this dialogue, at experts' and political level. The EU and GCC reaffirmed the importance of ensuring universal adherence to, and full implementation of, all relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, UN Conventions on Terrorism and related Protocols, in particular UNSCRs 1373 and 1526 and the special recommendations on terrorist financing of the Financial Action Task Force on money laundering (FATF). Furthermore, they agreed that progress on co-operation in the fight against terrorism had to be strengthened and invited officials of both sides to consider this matter further.

6.2.2. Human rights

The EU and the GCC reaffirmed that they share the universal values of respect for human rights and democratic principles, which form an essential element of their relations. They welcomed recent developments relating to representative bodies in the region, including those related to the Shura. They recalled the commitment of all states, as expressed at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and inter-related. Both sides reiterated their continued commitment to the promotion and protection of all human rights. The two sides expressed their commitment to promote the universal values which they share, while recognising their cultural diversities. The EU and the GCC emphasised the importance of respect and tolerance among people and called on all their members to fight any kind of extremism, intolerance and discrimination and to foster better understanding between peoples, religions and cultures. They also took note of the recent initiatives leading to the Sana'a Declaration of January 2004 and the Alexandria Statement of March 2004. They expressed their shared willingness to enter into a dialogue on human rights and invited officials to exchange views on what mechanisms could be used for such a purpose.

6.2.3. Non-Proliferation

The EU and the GCC expressed deep concern about the ongoing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, biological and chemical, and their means of delivery, considering it to be one of the most serious threats to peace, security and development. They reaffirmed their determination to support all efforts to stem the proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery, by both State and non-State actors, and in that context welcomed the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1540, and to establish an effectively verifiable zone free of weapons of mass destruction, in the Middle East including the Gulf Region.

In this context, they underlined the importance of compliance with and implementation of existing disarmament and non-proliferation treaties and agreements and other relevant international obligations. Both sides attached importance to the universalisation of international instruments against the proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery through signature, accession or ratification, as appropriate, of all relevant instruments. In this respect, they called upon all countries not yet party to relevant treaties, including the Non-Proliferation treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Conventions on biological and chemical weapons, to sign and ratify them as soon as possible. Furthermore they encouraged all states in the Middle East that have not yet done so to subscribe to the Hague Code of Conduct against ballistic missile proliferation and to conclude and bring into force Additional protocols with the IAEA.

The EU and the GCC also called on all countries in the Middle East to establish effective systems of national export and transit controls of WMD-related goods and technologies, including end-use controls.

7. It was agreed that the 15th meeting of the Joint Council would be held in the United Arab Emirates in 2005.