

European Union and Iraq: a framework for engagement

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PURPOSE : to present a framework for engagement in Iraq.

CONTENT : This Communication responds to the 16-17 October 2003 European Council's request for a strategy for the EU's relations with Iraq and contributes to the EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and Middle East. It aims to provide a basis for discussions with the incoming sovereign Iraqi government and broader Iraqi society. It seeks to convey to the Iraqi people, who have suffered from years of successive wars, sanctions and brutal authoritarian rule, the European Union's desire to see the emergence of a secure, stable and prosperous Iraq, at peace with its neighbours and integrated into the international community.

The Communication analyses the EU's fundamental interest in seeking greater engagement with Iraq and sets out medium-term objectives for the development of EU-Iraq relations. It argues that the EU should offer a framework which allows for progressively closer EU-Iraq relations, at a pace determined by progress in the political transition and the security climate. In the light of the evolution of the situation on the ground, the EU should be ready to review its approach.

In addition to the involvement of a number of EU Member States in providing security in Iraq, the EU's efforts since the war in 2003 have focused on providing humanitarian relief and political and financial support to launch the reconstruction process. In early 2003, the EC set aside EUR 100 million for the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) to provide humanitarian aid to Iraq; EU Member States pledged more than EUR 731 million. Following adoption of UNSC Resolution 1483 on 22 May 2003, the EU lifted its sanctions against Iraq. The Madrid donors conference held on 23-24 October 2003 launched the multilateral effort to assist Iraq's reconstruction. At the conference the EU as a whole pledged over EUR 1.25 billion, including the EC contribution.

The paper lays down the following objectives for the development of EU-Iraq relations and discusses them:

- The development of a secure, stable and democratic Iraq, with a parliament and a government, elected on the basis of a constitution that guarantees respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Iraqi population as a whole.
- The establishment of an open, stable, sustainable and diversified market economy and society as a basis for human security, economic growth, employment generation and poverty reduction, with resources used to promote equitable economic and social development.
- Iraq's economic and political integration into its region and the open international system.

The paper goes on to present a framework for progressive engagement in three phases: immediate actions (Phase I), post-elections (phase II) and medium-term (phase III).

Phase I - This involves EU support for elections, informal political dialogue, supporting institutional capacity-building in the justice and security sectors, encouraging positive engagement on the part of Iraq's neighbours, efforts to reach a coordinated view on debt and related economic policy conditionality, GSP trade preferences and on-going implementation of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance.

Phase II - This phase will open the way for further cooperation and dialogue with Iraq in a number of fields. In addition to activities launched in Phase I, initiatives could include the following: further EU contribution to rehabilitation and reconstruction, formal political dialogue and joint working groups in sectors of mutual interest.

Phase III envisages the appointment of a democratically elected government and the adoption by Iraq of a new constitution and elections for an executive and legislature should allow for the EU to normalise relations with Iraq. In this phase, the Communication discusses negotiations for a bilateral agreement, assistance for economic diversification and poverty reduction, the creation of a regional framework, sustained assistance for the rule of law, democratisation and human rights, and European Investment Bank lending.

The paper emphasises that its recommendations will need to be kept under constant review and adapted to the circumstances as the situation evolves on the ground. The Council of Ministers is invited to consider these recommendations with a view to the European Council sending a clear signal concerning the EU's commitment to strengthening its relations with Iraq in the framework of UNSCR 1546 and to help lay the foundations for a secure, stable, democratic and prosperous Iraq, at peace with its neighbours and its region, and a full and active member of the international community.