The implementation of the European Security Strategy in the context of the European Security and Defence Policy ESPD

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The Council, in the presence of defence ministers, discussed recent progress under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and adopted the following conclusions. Firstly, it welcomed the Secretary-General/High Representative's proposals to improve the EU's ability to respond to disasters and the coordination of transport for the relief efforts, in the context of the Hampton Court follow-up. It noted the document "General Framework for the use of Member States' military or military chartered transportation assets and ESDP coordination tools in support of EU disaster response" and agreed on its way ahead. Ministers also heard a presentation from Mr Barnier on options and recommendations for possible further development of EU capabilities in responding to crises, which are set out in his report to the Presidency and the Commission.

It states that helping citizens in an emergency, crisis or disaster, whether natural or man-made, requires effective delivery of assistance where and when it is needed. In certain cases, Member States are able to offer assistance (notably through EU mechanisms) to respond to an emergency or natural disaster, but have no transport to bring it where it is needed. To this end, the Council, building on the Secretary-General /High Representative's contribution, has today taken first steps to put in place effective procedures at EU level for identifying potentially available military or military chartered transport capacities, and for coordinating their use as supplementary means when circumstances so warrant.

Bearing in mind the specific nature and the principles of humanitarian assistance, the Council, in order to complement civilian means of transport already available through existing mechanisms, notes that Member States may decide to make available on a voluntary basis:

- § military-owned strategic air and sea lift capabilities when such capabilities are available;

- § military-chartered civilian strategic lift capabilities, in particular under the Strategic Airlift Interim Solution (SALIS) as already decided by one Member State. This action, in accordance with the UN guidelines on the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief and complex emergencies respectively, needs to respect the primary responsibility of the competent authorities of the affected State as well as the overall role and responsibility of the United Nations in coordinating international relief assistance in third countries. It will take due account of the role of the Red Cross, of NGOs and of the existing Community Civil Protection Mechanism and the Commission department of humanitarian aid (DG ECHO).

Once agreed by the Council, detailed procedures to identify potential military owned or military chartered assets will ensure a more rapid match between transport needs with available military transportation capabilities. These procedures will include direct links with duty desks in Ministries of Defence manned 24/7, as well as with the main European air and sealift coordination centres in Eindhoven and Athens. This will ensure better coordination of the use of available assets. An interim capability will be ensured while this work evolves, making use of the capacity currently provided by the EU Movement Planning Cell and the coordination centres.

The Council welcomes the fact that procedures will be put in place between the Council Secretariat and the Commission (in particular the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) and DG ECHO) to exchange rapidly information on needs and available transportation means which will ensure effective mobilisation.

Operations: the Council also discussed preparations for the Operation EUFOR RD Congo for support to MONUC during the electoral period in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It was briefed on the state of play by the Operation Commander, General Karlheinz Viereck. Ministers were also briefed on the state of play regarding the ongoing Operation EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Operation Commander, General John Reith. Ministers discussed ongoing and future EU support to the African Union mission in Sudan/Darfur (AMIS) as well as prospects for a transition to a UN mission.

Appointments: the Presidency recalled that EU Chiefs of Defence, at their meeting on 11 May, had agreed to recommend that the Council should appoint General Henri Bentégeat, French Chief of Defence, as the next chairman of the EU Military Committee, to take up office at the end of the current mandate of General Rolando Mosca Moschini, which will expire on 9 April 2007. Ministers welcomed this choice and noted that the formal decision would be adopted at a future Council meeting. They also welcomed the favourable opinion given by Chiefs of Defence to High Representative Solana regarding the appointment of General David Leakey as the next Director-General of the EU Military Staff as from 1 March 2007, following the term of General Jean-Paul Perruche.