EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

SECRETARIAT WORKING PARTY
TASK-FORCE
"ENLARGEMENT"

HE COORDINATOR

JF/bo

Luxembourg, 3 April 1998

Briefing No 18

THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE AND THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

* *The views expressed in this document are not necessarily those held by the European Parliament as an institution.*

PE 167.410
Or. EN

L-2929 LUXEMBOURG ■ TEL. (352) 43.00.227.58 / 229.06 ■ FAX: (352) 43.00.290 27 ■ [illegible]
B-104 BRUX ■ TEL. (322) 284.03.81 / 66.56 ■ FAX (322) 284.49.84
[illegible] ■ TEL. [illegible] ■ FAX [illegible]

The briefings drafted by the European Parliament Secretariat's Task-Force on "Enlargement" aim to present in a systematic, summary form, the state of discussions on the various aspects of enlargement of the Union and the positions adopted by the Member States and European institutions. Briefings will be updated as the negotiations progress.

Already out:

BRIEFING
ON
THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE
AND THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

CONTENTS

I. SUMMARY

At the European Council in Luxembourg on December 12th and 13th 1997 the decisions needed to launch the overall enlargement process of the EU were adopted. This enlargement has been foreseen as a comprehensive, inclusive and ongoing process. In particular, the European Council decided to set up a European Conference which will bring together the Member States of the European Union and those European States wishing to become members and sharing its values and internal and external objectives. The 15 Member States, Cyprus, the 10 applicant States of Central and Eastern Europe, and Turkey were invited to participate, but Turkey declined to attend. The Conference is chaired by the member state holding the presidency of the Council. At the Presidency's invitation, Heads of State and Government and the President of the Commission will meet at the Conference once a year, as will the Ministers for Foreign Affairs. The initial conference was chaired by the British Prime Minister and took place in London on March 12th 1998. The President of the European Parliament took also a full part in the meeting and he expects to be invited to future meetings at this level. The meeting of the Conference to be held at foreign minister level will take place during the second half of the year. The arrangements and general aspirations for the Conference as outlined in the Presidency conclusions of the Luxembourg's European Council may be summarised as follows;

(1) The members of the Conference must share a common commitment to peace, security and good neighbourliness, respect for other countries' sovereignty, the principles upon which the European Union is founded, the integrity and inviolability of external borders, the principle of international law and a commitment to the settlement of territorial disputes by peaceful means, in particular through the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice at the Hague.

(2) The European Conference will be a multilateral forum for political consultation, intended to address questions of general concern to the participants and to broaden and deepen their cooperation on foreign and security policy, justice and home affairs and other areas of common concern, particularly economic matters and regional cooperation.

As stated in the Presidency conclusions after the first meeting in London, the Conference provides a unique forum for direct and informal exchange at the highest level, and an inclusive and overarching framework within which participants can build on the broad range of the existing, successful joint activities. At the inaugural meeting of the European Conference priorities were agreed in a certain number of areas:

- *Transnational Organised Crime*: the participants are determined to continue their efforts to combat the scourge of organised crime, in particular the drugs trade, trafficking in human beings and terrorism. The UK Presidency will urgently bring together experts from countries of the European Conference and the European Commission to consider the problems associated with organised crime and trafficking of drugs. Recommendations of this group will be submitted to the Conference within 12 months.
- Concerning the *Environment*, the participants affirmed their determination to work actively to improve environmental protection and to promote sustainable development.
- On *Foreign and Security Policy issues*, the participants recognized that their interests will increasingly converge. They will therefore deepen and extend their co-ordination and co-operation, so strengthening Europe's voice and values in the world.
- In order to get *competitive economies*, they decided to exchange information on economic and social policies, and how best to strengthen the competitiveness of their economies, by equipping

people with the skills needed to take advantage of opportunities in the 21st century, and to foster employment.

- Finally, on *regional co-operation*, the participants welcomed the new range of regional co-operation programmes and shall aim to ensure their momentum and coherence.

The European Conference also discussed the crisis in the Kosovo province of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The 26 Heads of State/Government and the Presidents of the European Parliament and of the Commission agreed a statement and confirmed their intention to align themselves with the European Union's policy towards Kosovo, and to take national action in support of the shared objectives of ending the violence and securing a political solution in the area.

II. THE POSITIONS OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

a) The Parliamentary Dimension:

The European Parliament has clearly stated in its Resolution of 4 December 1997 on the Communication from the Commission "Agenda 2000 - for a stronger and wider Union" that the European Conference is an essential instrument for political cooperation and a separate instrument of pan-European cooperation, but it must not replace the bilateral negotiations on enlargement. The Parliament should play an important role in the Conference and the Council should take the appropriate measures to guarantee its full participation in this new forum. The President of the European Parliament, Mr. Gil Robles was invited to attend the Conference and a statement was made about the Conference by the Presidency in office at the plenary session of April 1998. In fact, at the European Conference in London stress was placed on the informal nature of the meetings and no specific arrangement was established concerning the role of the European Parliament. At a meeting in Bucarest on 13-14 March 1998 the President of the European Parliament informed the Presidents of the 10 Parliaments of the Associated Countries from Central and Eastern Europe of the content of his meeting and his special role in it. This 5th meeting of Parliaments Presidents could be seen as the parliamentary dimension of the enlargement process and it was therefore agreed that at their next meeting in Vilnius in November 1998 the issue of organised crime would figure on the agenda as it is one of the priorities for action identified by the Conference. Similarly, in Bucarest a joint statement on Kosovo was adopted.

b) The Commission:

The idea of organizing the Conference came from the Commission's Agenda 2000 . For the Commission, the European Conference provides an opportunity for consultations on a broad range of issues arising in the areas of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and Justice and Home Affairs. However it was not, and is not envisaged as part of the accession strategy per se but rather a forum for the exchange of general ideas regarding the direction of the enlargement process. The President of the Commission, Jacques Santer attended the Conference.

c) The Council:

The Council adopted the Commission's proposal for the European Conference at the Luxembourg summit on December 12th and 13th. It stressed that the stipulations outlined in paragraph 5 of the

Presidency conclusions (see summary) did not constitute 'preconditions' but rather 'aspirations' to which countries wishing to attend had to adhere. When speaking in Brussels on January 26th after a discussion of the General Affairs Council on the procedure for enlargement Robin Cook, the British Foreign Secretary announced that 'March will be the month of enlargement' with three events of major importance taking place. First, the European Conference itself. Secondly, on the 30th of March by the launch of the accession process at the level of the General Affairs Council, with the Foreign Ministers of the applicant countries in attendance. Thirdly, on March 31st negotiations will start between the six countries that the European Commission has declared ready for accession (namely Estonia, Poland, The Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Cyprus) and the fifteen member states. As such the European conference is taking place very much as part of this wider enlargement process. Finally, speaking in Strasbourg on Wednesday 1 April, and opening the debate for the Council, Douglas Henderson informed MEPs of the European Conference which had taken place on 12 March. He noted that the 26 countries present had agreed the Chairman's conclusions and that those present had considered such issues as drugs, crime, the environment, foreign and security policy, and an approach to the Kosovo crisis. He also regretted Turkey's decision not to attend the conference. Mr Henderson stated that the accession partnerships had been adopted on 24 March and it was necessary to ensure that the applicant countries got the help they needed. On 31 March, he said, accession negotiations had been launched, and he stressed the need to secure public support.

III. THE POSITIONS OF THE MEMBER STATES

Belgium:
Since the initial French proposal was formulated, the Belgian government has supported the idea of the European Conference as a means of emphasising the inclusive nature of the enlargement process. However they see it not as part of the actual accession process itself but rather as a vehicle through which a better mutual understanding of the overall process may be formulated. They thus view it as a forum within which better relations may be established, particularly among the applicant states themselves, which will in turn lead to a smoother running of the accession process itself. After the initial meeting, Mr. Dehaene emphasized the necessity of keeping the Conference open to Turkey.

Denmark:
The Danish government is convinced that the Conference is a good instrument in the overall Enlargement process, but more as a forum for a general discussion of the issues involved rather than as an integral part of the accession process per se. They also see the Conference as an important aspect of EU-Turkey relations and in this respect have been very keen for the Turks to attend - if not the first Conference al least subsequent ones.

Greece:
The Greek government in a position paper on Enlargement of September 8th 1997, while supporting the idea of Enlargement itself, nonetheless criticized the idea of the European Conference. They see little reason for its existence in the first place, are critical of its proposed issues for discussion and have difficulties with the proposed participants, specifically Turkey. In particular, the Permanent Greek Representation to the EU has continuously asserted that Paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 of the Luxembourg's Conclusions were 'constraining conditions' on participation and that even if they

chose not to attend the Conference, that the strengthening of relations between Turkey and the EU were still conditional upon paragraph 35 of the European Council Conclusions, namely that Turkey reform with regard to the treatment of minorities, human rights and the establishment of satisfactory and stable relations with Greece. During the Conference at London, the Greek Prime Minister stressed the importance of strict management of justice systems.

Spain:
The Spanish government is keen to ensure that relations with Turkey do not degenerate any further and are keen that the Customs Union and indeed financial assistance to Turkey be continued. The Spanish government sees the European Conference as one avenue for keeping these links with Turkey open.

Germany:
The German government did not reject the idea of the European Conference. Klaus Kinkel, the German Foreign Minister, however, questioned whether the European Conference was the best means of bringing Turkey into the process. The German ambassador to Ankara, Hans Joachim Vergau reinforced this point in an article in the Turkish press on October 28th 1997, when he wrote that he did not feel that it would be a good idea to discuss EU-Turkey relations with 27 other partners in attendance. The German government did feel however that the idea of all the member states and applicant countries meeting was a good one. It was, however, at first unsure if there was a necessity for it to have an institutionalised status. However, after the Conference in London Mr. Kohl regretted that Turkey had missed the opportunity of being there. He also said that Turkey could join the other participants later and eventually take part in the group of experts to be set up to consider the problems associated with organised crime and drugs trafficking. In fact, Mr. Kohl was the first to launch the idea of establishing this joint expert group.

France:
The French government, as the instigator of the European Conference idea, had high hopes for the Conference. As other member states the French government does not see the Conference as part of the accession process itself but rather as a forum for general, universal discussion among each of the participants. They see it as an opportunity to create a level playing field for all participants in the process, so that certain states do not feel relegated to secondary status but see that the process is evolutive and inclusive. The French government also views the Conference as an important forum for very general discussions regarding the planning of Europe's long term future as it is the only meeting which brings together all the applicant and Member states under one umbrella. After the inaugural meeting at London, Mr. Chirac insisted that the Conference should remain open to Turkey.

Ireland:
The Irish government supports the idea of the Conference, on the basis that the Conference could provide a useful multilateral framework for closer consultations between all applicants and the Union and should serve to strengthen their ties with the Union.

Italy:
Italy, attaching as they do an importance to the evolutive and inclusive character of the Enlargement process, attach particular importance to the European Conference. They feel that the European Conference should be a permanent fixture. Mr. Dini, the Italian Foreign Minister, in the General Affairs Council of September 15th 1997 emphasised that the Conference should become the 'absolute reference point' of the entire Enlargement process and as such should convene at least once

a year at the level of the heads of State and more frequently at the level of Foreign Ministers.

The Netherlands:
The importance of the European Conference is, in the eyes of the Dutch government, greater than that assigned to it by the Commission. In a memorandum from the parliament in November 1997 they made this point by indicating that a better name for the Conference would be the 'Permanent Conference' in order to make it clear that it is a permanent forum for consultation and exchange of information.

Austria:
The Austrian government, encouraged by the idea of the European Conference in general, feel it should be transformed into a structure of 'Partnership for Europe' as a means toward integrating Switzerland, Turkey and the other members of the European Economic Area.

Finland:
The Finnish government considers that each of the countries seeking membership should be treated equally and assessed by means of the same criteria. It furthermore asserts that regular contacts must be kept open with all the applicant states to ensure that this equality of treatment is indeed being adhered to and sees the European Conference as an important vehicle in this regard.

Sweden:
The Swedish government sees the European Conference as fulfilling the role of a *steering committee* for each of the various intergovernmental conferences which constitute the accession negotiations themselves. However they do not in any way see the Conference as a substitute for the negotiations themselves but rather as a background framework to the negotiations with strong links to them. They therefore feel that it would be inappropriate to involve any countries other than the eleven for whom the accession strategy has been launched in the Conference. With respect to Turkey they feel rather that a 'customs union plus' framework should be established and that particular efforts should be paid to it.

United Kingdom:
The British Presidency intends expanding upon the guidelines given in the European Council on December 12th and 13th with particular stress upon Common Foreign and Security Policy and Justice and Home Affairs. They envisage using this first Conference to establish specific guidelines and procedures through which the various themes outlined above would be discussed at future meetings of the European Conference. When speaking to the Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Committee of the European Parliament in Brussels on January 27th, Robin Cook stated that the European Conference in London is the single most important event of the British presidency. He envisages 'more than a mere exercise in ceremony but a discussion of issues of real substance'. He then went on to outline five particular areas that they wish to concentrate upon, namely: (i) Environmental cooperation; (ii) Crime and Drugs and how to come to an adequate 'European' response; (iii) How to strengthen successfully and subsequently integrate the economies of the applicant states into the EU; (iv) To discuss methods to improve regional cooperation; (v) To come to a foreign policy consensus.

IV. THE POSITIONS OF SOME OF THE APPLICANT STATES

Not all the applicant States have given any specific opinion on European Conference. However a summary of the opinions of those that have is listed below.

Bulgaria:
The Bulgarian government does not view the European conference as an alternative to the accession negotiations and are keen that it does not slow down the negotiations themselves. They do not see it as an adequate vehicle in overcoming possible new divisions among the associated countries. They fear that it could in fact serve as an instrument in making membership prospects more remote unless the scope of the agenda is carefully managed.

Latvia:
The Latvian government expresses concern as to the lack of preconditions for attending the Conference and doubts whether the Conference will in fact be able to respond to the real needs of the candidate countries.

Poland:
The Polish government is conscious of the need for dialogue between all the countries applying for membership of the Union and as such supports the idea of the European Conference. It nonetheless stresses that it sees the Conference as a separate entity from the accession negotiations themselves and must be treated as such.

Slovenia:
The Slovene government welcomes all initiatives in the Pre- Accession Strategy and as such it welcomes the idea of the European Conference. It views it as a means of providing the necessary transparency, objectivity and flexibility to the whole process of Enlargement.

V. THE QUESTION OF TURKEY

As previously mentioned Turkey was among the countries invited to the Conference despite the fact that it has not been included in the accession process as announced at Luxembourg on December 12th and 13th. In the end, Turkey decided not to attend the Conference, feeling let down by current exclusion from the process. This was reiterated by the Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem on January 28th, when speaking at a press conference after a meeting with the German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel. He said that Turkey did not 'intend revising its initial refusal take part in the European conference'.This stance was subsequently repeated on many occasions. not least at the Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting of February 10th when Bülent Akarcali reasserted that it had to 'in the context of current Turkey-EU relations decline the invitation to attend the Conference'. The initial idea for the Conference as formulated by France was judged by many to be primarily a means to integrate Turkey into the process. Given that Turkey persists now in refusing to attend there have been voices raised as to whether the idea for the Conference still holds water. Robin Cook, the British Foreign Secretary in his address to the EP Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence made it known that the approach to Turkey during the British Presidency would be to encourage and support those 'westward looking Turks' so as to encourage Turkey down the road of increased democratisation and human rights rather than imposing preconditions upon them. If

Turkey did not take up the invitation to the Conference, he stressed that all other avenues would be kept open and that every effort would be made to keep positive and mutually beneficial relations with Turkey. He suggested that the conclusions of the European Council with regard to Turkey (namely a strengthening of the Customs Union and the Ankara Accord) could be a good way forward. Objections to Turkey's invitation to the Conference in the first place were raised at the meeting of the EP's Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy by three Greek MEPs, and then on the 28th of January by the Permanent Greek Representation to the EU. However, Robin Cook, acknowledging that the situation in Turkey 'raises some concerns regarding human rights, treatment of minorities, democratic governance and civilian control over the military', replied that the solution was not to refuse to talk to those who fall short of these values. He also made it clear that the above stipulations in paragraph 5 of the Luxembourg Council's conclusion (see Summary) of the European Council Conclusions did not constitute 'preconditions' but rather ' aspirations' to which countries wishing to attend had to adhere and that this fact had been twice reiterated by the Presidency at the Luxembourg Council when questioned on the issue (First by the Netherlands and then by Britain).

* * *

For further information please contact:
Mr. José Javier FERNÁNDEZ FERNÁNDEZ, Coordinator of the Task-Force on Enlargement, European Parliament, DG IV, Political and Institutional Affairs Division, Luxembourg,
Tel.: (352) 4300 22758 / Fax: (352) 4300 29027 (Luxembourg)
Tel.: (33) 3.88.17.44.08 / Fax: (33) 3.88.17.90.59 (Strasbourg)
e-mail: jfernandez@europarl.eu.int

ANNEX

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 12-13 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 Organised Crime: we are determined to continue our efforts to combat the scourge of organised crime, in particular the drugs trade, trafficking in human beings and terrorism. This demands a co-ordinated, 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 organised 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 co-ordination and co-operation, 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 Co-operation: we welcome the new range of regional co-operation 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, recognises - 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.