

PRESS RELEASE

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481

8TH QUADRIPARTITE MEETING
COUNCIL OF EUROPE/EUROPEAN UNION

(Strasbourg, 23 October 1996)

Press Release

At the invitation of the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, a "Quadripartite" meeting (the eighth of its kind) was held in Strasbourg on 23 October. The participants were, for the European Union: Mr Gay Mitchell, Minister of State for European Affairs at the Departments of the Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs of Ireland, for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and Mr Hans van den Broek, member of the European Commission responsible for relations with the Council of Europe; and for the Council of Europe: Mr Siim Kallas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia and Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, and Mr Daniel Tarschys, Secretary General.

The participants first took stock of the progress of work on the up-dating of the Arrangement of 16 June 1987 on cooperation between the European Community and the Council of Europe. A review of this Arrangement had been planned at the previous Quadripartite meetings in Paris in April 1995 and in Madrid in November 1995 in order to take account of institutional and political developments in the European Union and the Council of Europe since 1987. The participants were informed that the Commission had submitted a proposal to the Council of Europe for a new exchange of letters between the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the President of the European Commission with the aim of strengthening its participation in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe at Ministerial, Deputy and Working Party level. The participants welcomed the fact that discussions on the new supplementary exchange of letters had been completed and would enable the exchange of letters to be concluded shortly. They were also informed by the European Union side of the conclusions, adopted jointly by the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on 27 September 1996, with a view to stepping up cooperation with the Council of Europe and improving internal coordination with regard to the activities of the latter. From now on, cooperation with the Council of Europe will embrace all the areas covered by the Treaties, including Titles V and VI of the Treaty on European Union. Moreover, according to the Union side, particular attention would be given to the fields of education and culture and to any other field that may from time to time be identified by common agreement, such as matters relating to racism and xenophobia.

As regards education and culture, the participants welcomed the efforts being made by the Council of Europe Secretariat and the European Commission in strengthening cooperation in these fields. The Council of Europe side also expressed the wish that these efforts should be supplemented by informal contacts between the appropriate bodies of the Council of the European Union and the Council of Europe. The European Union participants confirmed that the matter was being considered. In this connection the Council of Europe participants also expressed the hope that similar contacts could be established with regard to matters of mutual interest in the field covered by Title VI of the Treaty on European Union (justice and home affairs).

Taking stock of the very positive results of their Joint Programmes for cooperation with countries of central and eastern Europe, the European Commission and the Council of Europe participants expressed their strong commitment to further intensify and develop their common endeavours for strengthening democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law in these countries.

In this context, they attached the utmost importance to the continuation and expansion of their Joint Programmes in favour of the Russian Federation and Ukraine to assist those countries in fulfilling all the commitments they entered into when joining the Council of Europe. Extremely concerned about the present political uncertainties in Belarus, they expressed their willingness to develop joint efforts with a view to strengthening democratic forces in that country. They also considered the possibility of extending their cooperation to other countries such as Moldova and the Transcaucasian Republics. The European Commission announced its intention to contribute 4 million ECUs over a two-year period to these various programmes.

Furthermore, the participants examined ways to mobilise Council of Europe expertise for the implementation of the European Union pre-accession strategy. The recent Joint Programmes between the European Commission (PHARE Programme) and the Council of Europe for national minorities and in the fight against corruption have been considered as promising examples for an increased cooperation between the two institutions in this context.

The participants also expressed interest in developing joint action through various efforts to secure stability and good neighbourly relations in central and eastern Europe.

The participants also stressed the need to cooperate in the fight against racism and xenophobia. In this respect they noted that the Council of Europe would be able to contribute its experience from its own work covering the whole of Europe to the European Year against Racism to be organised by the European Union in 1997. They also expressed their hope that arrangements would be found in order to make the best possible use of the Council of Europe's experience in the envisaged Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia to be established in accordance with the conclusions of the European Council in Florence.

The Council of Europe side indicated their willingness to put the experience of the Council of Europe in the development of democratic security in the countries of central and eastern Europe at the disposal of the participants in the follow-up to the Euro-Mediterranean Conference held in Barcelona on 27-28 November 1995.

The European Union participants informed their Council of Europe partners of the state of progress in the Intergovernmental Conference of the European Union. For their part the Council of Europe participants provided information on the preparatory discussions for the holding of a second meeting of Heads of State and Government of Council of Europe member States.
