

GENERAL AFFAIRS AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS
COUNCIL MEETING
Brussels, 21 July 2003

CONCLUSIONS ON THE MIDDLE EAST

The Council held successive meetings with the Foreign Ministers of Israel, Silvan Shalom, and the Palestinian Authority, Nabil Shaath, and adopted the following conclusions:

"1. Israeli and Palestinian Foreign Ministers, Mr. Silvan Shalom and Mr. Nabil Shaath were invited to address the Council. For the first time since 2001 both sides attended a Council meeting on the same day. This underlines the close relations of both with the EU. Israeli and Palestinian Ministers confirmed their commitments to the Quartet roadmap and hoped that quick progress in the implementation would be made.

2. In line with the conclusions of the European Council in Thessaloniki, the Council stressed that there is no alternative to a swift and full implementation, in good faith by the two sides, of the roadmap. The Council will oppose vigorously any attempt to deviate from this path and welcomed progress accomplished by the two sides especially in the fight against terrorism and in the reduction of violence. It recalled in this context the Thessaloniki conclusions regarding Hamas. The Council expressed a particular desire to see further progress made on settlements, including a reversal of settlement policy and activity, and a freeze on construction of the separation fence, on release of prisoners and on confronting those engaged in terrorism, including dismantling terrorist capabilities and infrastructure.

3. The Council urged all parties to strictly adhere to the cease-fire agreement, to refrain from any provocation and incitement to violence and to proceed with the implementation of confidence building measures. It welcomed the efforts of regional partners, namely Egypt and Jordan, who have been playing an active part in this context. The Council agreed to continue to work closely and consistently with the US and with other Quartet partners on all issues linked to the successful implementation of the roadmap by the parties and also in view of establishing an efficient third party monitoring mechanism to which the EU is ready to contribute in a substantial way.

4. The Council underlined that the Palestinian Authority and its Government deserve support by everybody. This entails remaining in contact with all interlocutors within the Palestinian Authority. The Council stressed the need for coherence in the field of security.

5. The EU strongly supports PM Mahmoud Abbas in his efforts. This includes continued support for Palestinian reforms and economy. The Council noted with satisfaction the work of the Commission to accelerate and possibly intensify assistance programs in support of these goals. In this context, they welcomed the intention of the US government to join this effort by providing direct assistance to the Palestinian Authority. The Council underlined the importance of removing obstacles and impediments to the development of the Palestinian economy and reiterated the EU's commitment to regional economic reconstruction.

6. The Council congratulated Ambassador Marc Otte, the new EU Special Representative, on his appointment and underlined its full support for his work."