

Brussels, 15 Mars 2004

*EU Council press release*

## **European Council to Focus on Fight Against Terrorism**

Speaking as President of the European Council, the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern, made the following statement today (15<sup>th</sup> March 2004) on proposals to counter terrorism in the aftermath of the 11th March terrorist attacks in Madrid.

*“The callous and cowardly attacks on 11 March served as a terrible reminder of the threat posed by terrorism to our society. We condemn utterly those who planted the bombs that wrought such destruction and cost so many lives last Thursday. The attacks in Madrid were an attack against the very values on which the Union is founded.*

*There can be no justification whatever for acts of terrorism. The European Union will not be deflected from the pursuit of democracy or justice by these desperate acts. We stand in solidarity with the Spanish people and pledge ourselves to combat all forms of terrorism within our power in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.*

*In the European Security Strategy, adopted by the European Council last December, terrorism was identified as one of the key threats to EU interests. The Irish Presidency, working in close association with the Commission and Secretary-General/High Representative Solana, is committed to combating the terrorist threat. We are committed to accelerating implementation of the European Security Strategy recommendations on terrorism.*

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*The Presidency will consult with partners and with the European Commission with a view to bringing forward a package of measures to the European Council on 25/26 March. These measures will, in the interim, be prepared by Permanent Representatives before being considered as a matter of urgency by a special early meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 19 March and the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 22 March. The meetings of both groups of Ministers will pave the way for the European Council to bring forward measures to enhance our work on combating terrorism.*

### ***Solidarity clause***

*As President of the European Council I will seek the agreement of Heads of State and Government to a political commitment to assume obligations contained in the Solidarity Clause which is included in the draft Constitution for Europe. This will reinforce the Union's efforts to combat terrorism. It provides for Member States to come to the assistance of each other in response to new threats, arising from terrorist and non-State entities, directed against civilian populations and democratic institutions in the EU.*

*Other proposals on which the Presidency will seek early action include:*

### ***Adoption of a revised Action Plan on Terrorism***

*In the context of the European Security Strategy and reviewing the 2001 Plan of Action on Terrorism, the Presidency will bring forward a revised Strategy to combat terrorism. This will identify high-level priority objectives, covering all aspects of EU activities in this area. A Comprehensive Implementation Plan will follow, which will identify key tasks under each objective, specific achievable targets and the EU bodies responsible for delivery.*

### ***Appointment of Security Coordinator***

*We will consider the appointment of a security coordinator to enhance cooperation between EU bodies and third countries and streamline activities in the fight against terrorism.*

### ***Enhanced Intelligence Cooperation***

*We will strive to improve mechanisms for cooperation between police and security services and promote effective, systematic collaboration in intelligence services between Member States.*

### ***The Guidelines for a Common Approach to the Fight Against Terrorism***

*A speedy and final agreement on the draft Guidelines for a Common Approach to the Fight against Terrorism would demonstrate the commitment of the Union to prevent and suppress terrorism in a visible and coherent manner.*

### ***Increased EU/United Nations Coordination on Terrorism***

*We will seek agreement on the draft Comprehensive Convention on Terrorism currently under discussion at the UN.*

*The Presidency is examining new initiatives aimed at improving coordination and cooperation between the EU and the UN and in particular ways to support the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee in its work.*

### ***Financing of Terrorism***

*We need to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the EU's mechanisms for the freezing of terrorist assets and to identify the movement of terrorist finances. We will give priority to taking forward work on the expected Communication on the prevention of terrorist financing and the related legislative proposal for the creation of a network for exchange of information on terrorist financing.*

### ***Measures to Reinforce Practical Cooperation***

*We will focus on measures to reinforce practical cooperation with particular reference to ensuring full recourse to the possibilities offered by the Police Chiefs Task Force, Europol and Eurojust. In addition we will continue to place emphasis on the implementation of existing measures directed to reinforcing such cooperation in the fight against terrorism.*

### ***Implementing Existing Measures***

*We will give priority to finalizing work on existing measures, which can play their part in combating terrorism. These will include, in particular, taking forward work on the Framework Decision on the Mutual recognition of Confiscation Orders, the development of the second generation Schengen Information System and the new Visa Information System and the proposed European Borders Agency.*

### ***External aspects***

*We will seek agreement on a programme for enhancing relations with Third Countries to ensure effective and practical cooperation and joint activities in combating terrorism at a global level."*

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