

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council,

1. underlines that further enhancing practical cooperation in the field of asylum is one of the key elements contributing to the establishment of a fair and efficient Common European Asylum System, as foreseen by the Hague Programme, which guarantees effective protection throughout the EU while preventing abuse of asylum procedures;
2. recalls the need for strengthening practical cooperation in the field of asylum, in order to improve convergence in asylum decision making by Member States within the framework of rules set by EC legislation in this field and emphasizes that practical co-operation leads to enhanced coordination and increased efficiency;
3. welcomes the work already undertaken for this purpose and calls on the Commission and Member States to intensify activities (such as the establishment of a Common EU Portal on Country of Origin Information, the completion of an European Asylum Curriculum, the setting up of an EU-wide Interpreters Pool, etc.) under the existing EU and other structures in this field in the near future and to allocate the necessary human and financial resources to this end, and to consult, where appropriate, with UNHCR and other relevant international organisations;
4. welcomes in that connection the feasibility study being undertaken by the Commission to look at the question of the most appropriate means to provide adequate structural support for all relevant activities in the area of practical cooperation in the field of asylum;
5. requests that the feasibility study should, in particular, examine the conditions necessary for the timely establishment of a European Support Office and outline the tasks which it might undertake (such as exchange of best practice, managing the Common EU Portal on Country of Origin Information, training, activities related to the external dimension of asylum, etc.) in order to assist Member States in their implementation of a Common European Asylum System, as well as possible financial arrangements and organisational structure, taking into account

existing forms of cooperation between Member States and avoiding unnecessary bureaucratic structures, consistent with the principle of subsidiarity;

6. invites the Commission to bring forward suggestions for further strengthening practical cooperation while awaiting for a decision on the future structure for supporting practical cooperation by the end of 2008."