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of the **special Council meeting**  
**(Justice and Home Affairs)**  
held in Luxembourg on 7 April 1999

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## **1. Adoption of the agenda**

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The Council adopted the above agenda, adding the question of the unchecked and unorganised displacement of persons from Kosovo to the territory of the European Union under item 4.

## **2. Situation of displaced persons/refugees in the region**

The Commission provided information about refugee movements in the region. Among the neighbouring countries, Albania and FYROM had had to bear most of the burden, taking in 250 000 and 140 000 refugees respectively.

To date humanitarian aid amounted to EUR 89 million, EUR 43 million of which had come from the Community and EUR 46 million from the Member States. The Commission also announced its intention of taking a further EUR 150 million out of the reserve.

## **3. Information concerning aid for the region and coordination of the aid**

A discussion involving all the delegations revealed that all the Member States had made efforts, and would continue to do so, to ensure that the refugees were cared for in the region. Emphasis was placed on the need to:

- cooperate with UNHCR;
- send in aid agency staff (to provide medical assistance and food supplies, and to set up camps);
- distribute the aid among the different countries in the region, even though the situation varied from one country to the next: Albania did not want refugees to leave the region, while FYROM advocated this.

Albania had agreed to take in another 100 000 refugees, including some from FYROM. In this context, several Member States said that they were ready immediately to make the necessary arrangements to accommodate these persons and provide them with supplies.

Several delegations stressed the need for good coordination on the ground and UNHCR's role in this connection. One delegation suggested that several Member States could jointly set up and equip refugee camps and provide refugees with supplies.

The Commission announced that, in addition to the EUR 150 million (see point 2 above), it would initiate the necessary procedures to release EUR 100 million as aid for the region.

The President concluded that:

- the delegations unanimously agreed that aid for the region was the top priority;
- all the delegations welcomed Albania's decision to take in a further 100 000 refugees and were prepared to provide Albania with sufficient support for that purpose.

#### **4. Admission of displaced persons to the territory of the Member States**

Referring to the appeal made by the High Commissioner for Refugees in her closing remarks at the Humanitarian Issues Working Group meeting held in Geneva on 6 April, and to the health risks facing the refugees at the border with FYROM, the President called for temporary protection to be granted to refugees coming from FYROM, and said that Germany was willing to take in 10 000 refugees.

While some delegations supported the idea of admitting refugees to the EU – either specifying the number of refugees they were willing to take in or accepting the principle – other delegations opposed the idea of quotas. Some delegations thought that admission of refugees should be limited to those who were particularly vulnerable, in particular the sick. Other delegations thought that the burden-sharing should be fair, taking account in particular of the number of refugees already taken in and the scale of each State's effort. One delegation said that it was first necessary to settle the questions of the temporary protection arrangements, funding, registration of refugees, and a coordinated repatriation policy when the conflict was over.

All delegations emphasised that the admission of refugees could only be on a voluntary basis (subject to the agreement of the displaced persons) and that the principle of family unity had to be observed. The role of UNHCR (prior request) was also underlined.

The Commission said that the Community budget contained a provision of EUR 15 million for taking in refugees and helping them to return home; the Commission would also be submitting, as soon as possible, an amended proposal adapting the text currently being examined by the Council to include aid on arrival in the EU Member States for refugees and displaced persons from Kosovo.

Summing up, the President concluded that, although most of the delegations were against the idea of quotas, they were all prepared to take in refugees.

A document containing the Presidency's conclusions (annexed hereto) was discussed and accepted by all the delegations.

## **5. Other business**

No points were raised under "Other business".

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1. The Council agrees that people displaced from Kosovo are in need of effective protection. It is unanimous that such protection should be provided as extensively as possible within the region.

Temporary accommodation of displaced persons within the region makes life easier for people in unfamiliar surroundings as a result of cultural and linguistic affinities, while also facilitating their subsequent return home. Long-term admission of Kosovars to countries outside the region, on the other hand, would consolidate their displacement from their homes. That would send the wrong signal to the Serbian regime, on which all forms of pressure must be stepped up to put a stop to displacement of people from Kosovo and make it possible for them to return in safety.

2. The Union welcomes the readiness of individual Member States and the European Community to provide assistance on the ground. The Council (General Affairs) will endeavour to ensure that the aid required to alleviate the needs of displaced persons in the region is provided quickly and without bureaucracy and that aid is distributed as effectively as possible as a result of adequate coordination.

The Council expressed its appreciation for the assistance already provided by the EC Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and for the further efforts undertaken by the Commission to reinforce Community aid in the region.

3. The Union thanks Albania for its readiness to take in a further 100 000 displaced Kosovars currently in FYROM. EU Member States will assist Albania in that humanitarian operation as required. This would reduce for the time being the need to create settlement possibilities outside the region.

4. The Council recognises that, with numbers of displaced persons swelling daily, it might, for humanitarian reasons and to avoid destabilising individual host countries in the region of origin, prove necessary in the future to afford displaced persons protection and assistance outside their region of origin on a temporary basis.

Any such humanitarian evacuations out of neighbouring area must be based on the voluntary choice of the refugees to be temporarily relocated. In this context, the principle of family unity should also be applied.

5. The Council requests UNHCR to provide precise and regular information on the evolution of the refugees situation, including registration, and to make the necessary recommendations.
6. It further invites the Commission to come forward with a proposal which would enable financial assistance to be provided from the Community budget, if needed, to those Member States which agree to accept refugees from the conflict region.

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