



## **European Parliament Update, AFET Committee, 17 March 2009**

**March 2009**

**Exchange of views** with Mr Jan Kohout, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and acting President-in-Office of Council, on the results of GAERC meeting of 16-17 March 2009

Mr Jan Kohout opened the exchange of views stating the GAERC had mainly focused on Bosnia and Herzegovina and the broader situation in the Western Balkans. A new EU Special Representative has been appointed, satisfying all the ministers within Council. He reiterated the Council's full support for Bosnia's European future, but underlined that politicians should refrain from using nationalistic rhetoric in their speech and policies. On Belarus, Kohout added that the EU must persevere with its policy of engagement. Visa restrictions will be sustained for another nine months while other restrictions will continue for another twelve months. In a year, these measures will be re-evaluated. Depending on how things evolve, sanctions might be reduced or ended. There have been positive developments in the area of democratisation but there are still significant violations of human rights. On the topic of Sudan, the ministers were concerned by the humanitarian situation and the fact that NGO's are pulling out of the country. There is a need to convince the Sudanese government to support its population. On the upcoming NATO summit, the Minister noted that it will be a good moment to work on deepening transatlantic links. This will be achieved by focusing on fundamental issues such as the environment and energy security. The last point approached during the GAERC meeting was Sri Lanka, the ministers reiterated their concerns about the humanitarian situation in the country.

MEP Ana Ibrisagic (PPE-DE) opened the round of questions and comments stating that the appointment of the new European Union Special Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr Inzko, took a long time. In addition to the complicated political situation and the upcoming elections, the late designation of the EUSR has not been positive for the image of the EU. The Presidency should make a significant effort to provide him support. Kohout answered that the Presidency is prepared to face the upcoming situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and will fully support the new EUSR. The EU needs to increase its presence and to improve how it is perceived by Bosnian politicians and civilians, however it is also most urgent for the Bosnian Government to fulfil the conditions of the 5 plus 2 agenda.

MEP István Szent-Ivábyi (ALDE) asked about the budget allocated to Nabucco and whether the project has been delayed or replaced. MEP Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Vert/ALE) asked if the ministers had modified the draft text for the Eastern Partnership and if Nabucco had been removed from it. She further enquired about why the Council changed its original view on the South and North Stream project. She asked whether this was a result of divisions among Member States. MEP Andrzej Wielowieyski (ALDE) added that experts deemed that the Nabucco project would be twice as expensive than the previously estimated. Kohout answered that discussions over funding are still ongoing, but that the Nabucco project was obviously linked to the South Corridor one. There are indeed divisions in Council mainly based on the geographical balance of the projects. The objective of the Czech Presidency is to diversify the EU's energy sources, and

within this work, considerations of the EP are carefully taken into account. It will be important to complete the negotiations soon.

Béguin asked what decision had been made over the situation in Sri-Lanka, and what had been planned for the population. MEP Charles Tannock (PPE-DE) demanded whether a cease fire will be put in place in Sri Lanka, and if so, would it be temporary or permanent. He also asked whether Kohout supported the Sri-Lankan President in his fight. Kohout answered that a specific proposal had been put forward during the meeting and that the focus would remain on tackling the humanitarian disaster and controlling the damage being done in the regions. The EU needs to send a strong signal to avoid further civilian casualties. There is an urgent need to organize an EU Troika trip to Sri Lanka. He added that the ceasefire should ideally be long-lasting but that a real political decision is also needed.

MEP Andrzej Wielowieyski (ALDE) stated that the report of the Council of the European Union seemed optimistic about allowing elections in Afghanistan. He further asked whether negotiating with the Taliban was a possibility. Kohout answered that the GAERC meeting of 31 March will discuss the elections and their implications for security. NATO will be in charge of security and the Commission is sending a fact finding mission for the elections. On a broader level, the EU is deciding on a possible visit of an EU Troika to Pakistan.

Wielowieyski concluded by questioning whether the Council should respect the International Criminal Court's warrant to arrest the Sudanese president. He stated that the prosecution of the President might affect even more negatively the Sudanese population. Kohout responded that the Council can only respect the ICC's decision, he believed that the reaction of the Sudanese government will not be directed towards our expatriates on the ground and hoped that it would not negatively affect the Sudanese population.



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