

Athens, 13 February 2003

The Greek Presidency has set top priority in trying to ensure a common European stance on Iraq. The GAERC conclusions of 27 January and the public demarche to Iraq of 4 February had everyone (including the acceding and candidate countries) agreeing on a considerable number of points and were welcomed by the other main players of the international community.

It is now clear that the Iraqi crisis will soon reach a new, possibly decisive, turning point. As you are aware, taking into account the seriousness of the situation and further to consultations with all partners, I have decided to convene an extraordinary informal meeting of the European Council in Brussels on 17 February 2003.

Furthermore, given the interest that you have engaged in this debate, I deem it important that we discuss the latest developments, especially in the light of the report that the UN inspectors will submit to the UN Security Council on 14 February 2003.

I suggest that the EU Troika has a meeting with the acceding and candidate countries, at the level of Head of State or Government (with the participation of Foreign Ministers), on Tuesday 18 February 2003 at 12.00 p.m., followed by a working lunch from 1.00 to 2.30 p.m. This will give the EU side the opportunity to brief you on the outcome of the extraordinary informal meeting of the European Council and exchange views on the way ahead.

I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday, as well as to a constructive debate.

Costas Simitis
President of the European Council