

Brussels, 18 February 2003

**EU TROIKA MEETING WITH ACCEDING COUNTRIES AND
CANDIDATE COUNTRIES**

COMMON STATEMENT

The President of the European Council, Costas Simitis, the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, the Secretary-General/CFSP High Representative, Javier Solana and the Heads of State or Government and the Foreign Ministers of the 13 acceding countries and candidate countries met today to discuss the crisis over Iraq. They also met with the President of the European Parliament, Pat Cox.

The input of the "13" has been and will continue to be an invaluable contribution to our common will to resolve the Iraqi crisis and support the Middle East Peace Process. The Presidency will cooperate closely with all to coordinate our steps concerning further developments.

The Heads of State or Government of the 13 acceding countries and candidates countries aligned themselves with the content of the conclusions adopted by the European Council on Iraq in its extraordinary meeting of 17 February. They also reaffirmed their alignment with the conclusions of the GAERC of 27 January and the terms of the public demarche of 4 February 2003 to Iraq which remain valid.

The message for the Greek Presidency, following the historic decisions taken at Copenhagen last December, is "Our Europe". Europe's strength lies in its set of common values. Our common wish is to make Europe the family of democracy, dialogue, tolerance, freedom, peace and progress. It is "Our Europe" that can have a strong and united voice on the world scene and that can best contribute to the international community's efforts to tackle effectively the major challenges of our times. It is "Our Europe" that cherishes its strong partnership with the US. It is for this Europe that the input of the acceding countries and candidate states will be of fundamental importance.

The European Union and the "13" reiterate their determination to ensure a common stance, to avoid new dividing lines and to promote stability and prosperity within and beyond the borders of the new Union. They will continue to work together in their joint endeavour to accomplish these goals.