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Joint Press Statement

by the NATO Secretary General and the EU Presidency
NATO-EU Ministerial Meeting

The Foreign Ministers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and of the European Union met in Brussels today to take stock of enhanced NATO-EU relations.

Since our last meeting, held in Madrid on 3 June 2003, we have made further progress in developing the strategic partnership between the two organisations. The conclusion of the « Berlin Plus » arrangements, providing for ready access by the EU to NATO's collective capabilities and assets, allowed the launch on 31 March of the EU-led Operation Concordia. In September NATO extended its support to this operation which is due to end on 15 December 2003. Following the operation's conclusion and the return of NATO capabilities and assets, we intend to compare notes and exchange views on lessons learned from this first operation under the « Berlin Plus » arrangements.

We remain determined to continue to build on our common success in working together in the Western Balkans. We share a common vision for the future of the countries concerned: self-sustained stability based on democratic and effective government structures and a viable free market economy, leading to further rapprochement towards European and Euro-Atlantic structures. The « *Framework for an enhanced NATO-EU dialogue and a concerted approach on security and stability in the Western Balkans* », agreed by the two organisations on 25 July 2003, serves as a basis for our joint endeavours. We look forward to consultations on Bosnia-Herzegovina. As a first step, NATO Allies will assess options for the future size and structure of SFOR including the possible termination of SFOR by the end of 2004 with the possible transition to a new EU mission within the framework of the « Berlin Plus » arrangements and to a new NATO HQ Sarajevo.

We successfully concluded our first ever joint crisis management exercise, CME/CMX 03, which was held from 19 to 25 November 2003. This exercise was based on our standing arrangements for consultation and cooperation in times of crises and other relevant elements of the « Berlin Plus » arrangements, concentrating on how the EU plans - at the strategic political-military level - for an envisaged EU-led operation with recourse to NATO assets and capabilities, in case NATO as a whole is not engaged.

We stand united in condemning the escalation of terrorist attacks against our countries. We discussed the fight against terrorism during today's meeting and agreed to develop closer cooperation in this area, beginning with a seminar on terrorism which will be co-sponsored by NATO and the EU. We will also examine how to improve coordination in addressing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Developing effective military capabilities is a key priority for both NATO and the EU. Ensuring consistency, transparency and mutually reinforcing development of capability requirements common to the two organisations is the main objective of the NATO-EU Capability Group. Recent discussions of this Group covered how to ensure consistency between activities under way in the European Capability Action Plan (ECAP) and the Prague Capability Commitment (PCC), and the mutual reinforcement between the NATO Response Force and the EU Rapid Reaction Elements, in full respect of the autonomy of both the EU and NATO.

NATO and the European Union share common strategic interests. Both institutions working together towards the same strategic ends will enhance security and stability in Europe and beyond. In the new strategic environment of the 21st century, a closer and trusting partnership between NATO and the EU remains as important as ever.