

PROVISIONAL VERSION

27.II.2006

REACTIONS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD TO PUBLICATIONS IN EUROPEAN AND
OTHER MEDIA - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council expresses its deep concern at the events that followed the publication of cartoons in a number of European and other media. The Council acknowledges and regrets that these cartoons were considered offensive and distressing by Muslims across the world.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right and an essential element of a democratic discourse, with an independent judiciary as a safeguard mechanism. Free media are indispensable to a free and open society and to accountable systems of government. Freedoms, however, come with responsibilities. Freedom of expression should be exercised in a spirit of respect for religious and other beliefs and convictions. Mutual tolerance and respect are universal values we should all uphold.

The Council strongly condemns all violent acts and threats against citizens and property of the European Union, of its Member States as well as of other countries. These actions cannot be justified under any circumstances. The Council welcomes the statements by those prominent Muslim scholars and religious and political leaders who have called for moderation and have spoken out against the violent actions of a minority.

The Council expresses its full solidarity with all those countries whose citizens, diplomatic or consular missions have come under attack. It recalls the special duty of states under the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic and Consular Relations to protect diplomatic agents and the premises of diplomatic and consular missions. The Council calls upon the governments that have not provided adequate protection to give a positive response to this end and to the demands for compensation made by the countries affected. The Council underlines that boycotts against individual Member States are unacceptable.

The Council welcomes the recent visit to countries in the Middle East and the Gulf by the EU High Representative and the contacts which have taken place in Vienna between the Presidency, the Foreign Minister of Denmark and Islamic leaders. These contacts, including the call for renewed dialogue in the Joint Statement by the Secretary General of the United Nations, the Secretary General of the OIC and the EU High Representative of February 7, 2006, have demonstrated how much common ground exists in this direction.

The EU and its Member States will actively promote dialogue, mutual understanding and respect through all existing mechanisms, including the Barcelona process and the Anna Lindh Foundation as well as the ASEM process. It underlines the specific need for initiatives aimed at representatives of the media as well as young people. The Council also expresses its strong support for the Alliance of Civilizations initiative launched under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey and welcomes the call for dialogue and mutual respect made at the meeting chaired by the UN Secretary-General in Doha on February 25, 2006. The Council welcomes the holding of a conference of European Imams by the Islamic Community of Austria in cooperation with the European Commission and the Presidency in Vienna on April 7, 2006.

The EU and its Member States will play an active role in the debate on these issues within the UN, the OSCE and other multilateral fora. The Council welcomes the OSCE Human Dimension meeting in Kazakhstan in June 2006 on Inter-cultural, Inter-religious and Inter-ethnic Understanding. It invites the Presidency, assisted by the HR/SG, and the Commission to continue to look into ways of working with partners and other international actors in the Muslim world, including the OIC and the Arab League, to foster tolerance as well as respect for religious and other beliefs and convictions. Particular emphasis should be given to the role that free media and NGOs can play in this regard."