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THE PRIME MINISTER

12 February 2003

Dear Costas

I welcome your decision to call an extraordinary European Council and look forward to our discussions on Monday, to which I hope you will also invite our ten new Accession Partners and the three candidate countries given the interests that they also have engaged in this debate.

The message that we send on Monday will be of crucial importance. I wanted therefore to propose elements that might form the basis for our debate and the conclusions that we draw. These will of course need to take full account of the report to the UN Security Council by Hans Blix and Mohammed El Baradei on 14 February and the report on 27 January that stated that Iraq's December declaration contains false statements and omissions that that Iraq is failing to cooperate fully.

Firstly, we should reaffirm our commitment to the common EU position agreed at the 27 January General and External Relations Council, particularly the full implementation of UNSCR 1441 to achieve the objective of Iraqi disarmament of all its WMD. Iraq must comply fully, actively, immediately and unconditionally with its international obligations.

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Secondly, we should be clear about the implications of UNSCR 1441. In the words of operative paragraph 2, UNSCR 1441 is Iraq's final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations. But Saddam has not taken that opportunity. His false statements and omissions in the December declaration and failure to cooperate fully with the inspectors are a material breach of the resolution in accordance with operative paragraph 4 of the resolution. So, as UNSCR 1441 makes explicit in operative paragraph 13, Saddam faces serious consequences.

Thirdly, while we all of course regard military action as a last resort, we must make clear that no member state rules it out if needed to uphold the authority of the Security Council. We should also be clear that in the absence of full and immediate cooperation, the UNSC should move quickly to a second resolution.

Fourthly, it is imperative that we maintain and increase the pressure on Saddam. Time is now running very short. There is still a last opportunity for Saddam to cooperate unconditionally with the international community's demands or to leave. But failing that, we should be clear that Saddam faces immediate and serious consequences.

Fifthly, we should ensure that the Union is ready to contribute on humanitarian and reconstruction issues if needed and ask the Commission to take forward contingency planning against these eventualities for discussion at the next General Affairs and External Relations Council.

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Finally, we should also discuss the wider regional implications of the crisis in Iraq and the Union's engagement with our partners in the Middle East, underlining in particular the importance we attach to early progress towards a lasting settlement between Israelis and Palestinians on the basis of the roadmap.

I am copying this letter to EU Heads of State and Government, to Romano Prodi and Javier Solana and to our colleagues in the accession and candidate countries.

With best wishes,

Tony Blair

HE Mr Costas Simitis

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