



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



14779/06 (Presse 302)

PRESS RELEASE

2760th Council Meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

General Affairs

Brussels, 13 November 2006

President **Mr Erkki Tuomioja**
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland

* The 2761st meeting on External Relations is the subject of a separate press release (14781/06).

P R E S S

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14779/06 (Presse 302)

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Main Results of the Council

*The Council started preparations for the European Council meeting on 14 and 15 December, dealing in particular with the EU's **enlargement strategy**, for which the Commission presented a communication including country reports on candidate and potential candidate countries, as well as a special report on the EU's capacity to absorb new members.*

*The Council decided to extend an embargo on exports of arms to **Uzbekistan**, as well as travel restrictions on those deemed to be responsible for the disproportionate use of force at Andijan in May 2005. It reinstated technical meetings with Uzbekistan with the aim of bringing about improvements in the human rights situation.*

*It also gave the go-ahead to negotiations with five **Western Balkan** countries on the conclusion of visa facilitation and readmission agreements, and to negotiations with **South Africa** aimed at revising the EU-South Africa agreement on trade, development and cooperation.*

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
 - The documents whose references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site <http://www.consilium.europa.eu>.
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PARTICIPANTS

The Governments of the Member States and the European Commission were represented as follows:

Belgium:

Mr Karel DE GUCHT Minister for Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Alexandr VONDRA Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark:

Mr Per Stig MØLLER Minister for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

Mr Frank-Walter STEINMEIER Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET Minister for Foreign Affairs

Greece:

Ms Dora BAKOYANNIS Minister for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr Alberto NAVARRO GONZÁLEZ State Secretary for the European Union

France:

Ms Catherine COLONNA Minister with responsibility for European Affairs

Ireland:

Mr Noel TREACY Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs (with special responsibility for European Affairs)

Italy:

Mr Famiano CRUCIANELLI State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

Mr Yiorgos LILLIKAS Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Artis PABRIKS Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Petras VAITIEKŪNAS Minister for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg:

Mr Jean ASSELBORN Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration

Mr Nicolas SCHMIT Minister with responsibility for Foreign Affairs and Immigration

Mr Jean-Louis SCHILTZ Minister for Cooperation and Humanitarian Action, Minister for Communications. Minister for Defence

Hungary:

Ms Kinga GÖNCZ Minister for Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr Michael FRENDO Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Anthony ABELA Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister

Netherlands:

Mr Bernard BOT Minister for Foreign Affairs

Austria:

Ms Ursula PLASSNIK Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

Poland:

Ms Anna Elzbieta FOTYGA Minister for Foreign Affairs

Portugal:

Mr Luís AMADO

Ministro de Estado, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:Mr Božo CERAR
Mr Janez LENARČIČState Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
State Secretary at the Government Office for European
Affairs**Slovakia:**

Mr Ján KUBIŠ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:Mr Erkki TUOMIOJA
Ms Paula LEHTOMÄKIMinister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Foreign Trade and Development**Sweden:**Mr Carl BILDT
Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖMMinister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for European Affairs**United Kingdom:**

Ms Margaret BECKETT

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Commission:Ms Margot WALLSTRÖM
Mr Olli REHNVice-President
Member**General Secretariat of the Council:**

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

The Governments of the Acceding States were represented as follows:

Bulgaria:

Mr Ivailo KALFIN

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Romania:

Mr Mihai-Răzvan UNGUREANU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

ITEMS DEBATED**COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2007**

The Council took note of the presentation by the Commission of its legislative work programme for 2007 and held a policy debate.

The Commission's work programme highlights the following main priorities:

- Modernising the European economy;
- Addressing the challenges of European society;
- A better management of migration flows;
- Secure, competitive and sustainable energy;
- Making Europe a better place to live;
- Europe as a world partner.

PREPARATION OF THE DECEMBER EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The Council took note of an annotated draft agenda prepared by the presidency for the European Council meeting to be held in Brussels on 14 and 15 December (14782/06). It will prepare the meeting in greater detail at its meeting on 11 December.

The issues to be addressed by the European Council are:

- EU enlargement;
- Justice and home affairs;
- Innovation and energy;
- External relations.

The annotated draft agenda will serve as the basis for draft European Council conclusions to be prepared by the presidency and submitted to the permanent representatives committee.

ENLARGEMENT - OVERALL STRATEGY AND COUNTRY REPORTS

Ministers, over lunch, took note of the presentation by the Commission of a communication on the European Union's enlargement strategy and main challenges for 2006 and 2007, including a special report on the EU's capacity to integrate new members, as well as progress reports on candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the other Western Balkans. They held an exchange of views.

The Commission's communication will be used as input for debate on the EU's enlargement strategy at the European Council's meeting on 14 and 15 December, as well as for work on draft European Council conclusions.

A number of delegations highlighted the need for thorough preparation by the permanent representatives committee and the Council ahead of the European Council's meeting.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY****EU concept for strengthening African capabilities - *Council conclusions***

The Council took note of an EU concept for strengthening African capabilities for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

The EU strategy for Africa was agreed by the European Council in December 2005 as a basis for closer cooperation between the EU and Africa. Cooperation is based on a strategic partnership between the EU and the regional organisations on the continent, and in particular the African Union (AU), covering a whole range of policy issues, including governance, migration, peace and security, agriculture, research, health and education.

Key to the strengthening of the relationship is the provision of support for the capacity-building of the AU Commission and the sub-regional organisations to enable them to implement their agenda.

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council welcomes that the Council General Secretariat and the Commission have jointly prepared a European Union concept for strengthening African capabilities for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. The concept is intended to provide a coherent and comprehensive EU framework for the implementation of key aspects of the Peace and Security cluster of the EU Strategy for Africa, adopted by the European Council on 15 and 16 December 2005 ("The EU and Africa: towards a strategic partnership", 15961/05).
2. The Council confirms that the EU stands ready to step up its support for the efforts of the African Union (AU) and African sub-regional organisations to promote security and development on the African continent. The Council stresses that this needs to be a demand-driven process, based on intensified dialogue with African partners, in full respect of African ownership. Measures and initiatives proposed in the concept would directly support the AU's ongoing establishment of an African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), including the creation of the African Stand-by Force (ASF).

3. The Council underlines the importance of strengthening the consistency of EU policies and actions in this field in order to provide more effective and comprehensive support for African programmes and priorities and to develop a stronger partnership with African partners, including through reinforced dialogue and interaction.
4. The Council notes that the EU, collectively and through individual Member States, has already made a substantial contribution in this area through capacity-building, support for the AU's APSA policy development process, training and material assistance. The EU is also currently supporting the AU and African sub-regional organisations in undertaking a comprehensive long-term needs assessment.
5. The Council draws in this context particular attention to the Union's ongoing engagement in support of AU/AMIS in Sudan/Darfur, EU missions in the DRC, as well as its assistance so far in the establishment of the ASF. The Council underlines the need to draw lessons learned from these activities.
6. The Council recalls the recent EU decision to strengthen and replenish the African Peace Facility (APF) with substantial, long-term, flexible, sustainable funding. APF support has already made a key contribution to the development of African capabilities. There is a continuing need for activities financed under the APF to be complemented by and coherent with activities undertaken under other appropriate EU instruments, including the EU's CFSP/ESDP instruments. Member States' bilateral contributions should also be taken into account.
7. The Council recognises that the broader international community is also committed to the development of African capabilities for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts and underlines the importance of co-operation in this respect.
8. The Council looks forward to proposals by the Council General Secretariat and the Commission for the speedy implementation of the concept, in light of the recommendations given by the relevant Council bodies and taking into account consultations with African partners and the Member States, as well as with other relevant international actors. In this context, the Council also encourages further progress towards the holding of the second Europe-Africa Summit in Lisbon in 2007, where a Joint EU-Africa Strategy should be adopted."

Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in crisis management

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council underlines the importance of promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the context of CFSP/ESDP at all levels. The Council expresses its determination to put in practice the decisions taken to promote gender equality in the context of ESDP and the related checklist, which seek to ensure gender mainstreaming and implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) from the early planning to the conduct and evaluation of ESDP missions and operations.
2. The Council emphasises the importance of effective monitoring to ensure a systematic follow-up of the commitments made. Also the Generic Standards of Behaviour, inter alia, against sexual exploitation and prostitution should continue to be fully implemented by all ESDP missions and operations. Where not already in place, national measures, such as action plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 by Member States as well as third states participating in ESDP operations, should also be encouraged.
3. The Council underscores the importance of improving gender balance in the ESDP operations, also at the senior-management level. The Council therefore invites the Member States to ensure that they nominate more female candidates for upcoming CFSP/ESDP assignments, including the posts of EU Special Representative and Head of Mission. The Member States are also invited to pursue active recruitment strategies and to identify and address specific obstacles limiting women's participation. Mission reports should include relevant statistics in this respect.
4. The Council stresses that gender equality and human rights should be fully integrated in the planning and conduct of all ESDP missions and operations, including fact-finding missions. Gender awareness and sensitivity contribute generally to the operational effectiveness and situational awareness in standard assignments. Regarding certain tasks, such as checkpoints and outreach activities, it is of particular importance to include in the mission personnel both men and women. A gender adviser or a gender focal point should be appointed for all ESDP missions and operations. In this context, the Council welcomes the work of the gender adviser appointed to the EU's military operation EUFOR RD Congo. The Council notes that support for improved gender sensitivity must be assured throughout the chain of command.

5. The Council emphasizes the importance of training activities, tailored to the needs of the military and civilian personnel taking part in the ESDP operations, in particular on gender equality and human rights as well as gender-based violence, and encourages the Member States to intensify these training efforts. Such training should include those highest in command. A particular emphasis should be put on mission-specific training. The Council encourages the development of public information campaigns and public material on women's and men's involvement in the security sector, including the military and police, in order to change stereotypes regarding women's participation, assignments and tasks.
6. Gender perspective needs to be fully integrated in peace building. All reconstruction efforts should draw on the knowledge and expertise of women's groups and networks within the community. The Council encourages the development of targeted EU activities to promote gender equality and the role of women in post-conflict situations. In this context, the Council stresses the importance of actively supporting women's participation in civic education and political processes, including right to vote and stand as candidates in elections.
7. The Council underlines that policies aimed at the protection and reintegration of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) / refugees should take gender issues into account.
8. The Council emphasises that gender perspective should be incorporated in the EU's policies and activities on Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). DDR programmes should ensure that female combatants are identified and registered early and that both sexes can participate equally in these programmes. Women need to be ensured equal access to the assistance package to which they are eligible under the DDR programme and to be involved in economic reintegration activities.
9. The Council underlines the importance of addressing gender perspective in the context of rule of law activities. Gender equality could also be promoted in post conflict situations through legal reforms in the justice sector, *inter alia* through revising discriminatory laws, such as laws concerning inheritance, family relations, property and employment, and through empowering women to access rule of law and economic and social justice institutions.

10. The Council emphasises the importance of including measures against sexual and gender based violence in transitional justice mechanisms. All peace building and reconstruction plans should include comprehensive victim-protection and support mechanisms. The Council notes that the mandates of ESDP missions and operations could also address the possibilities to assist, if so requested, the ICC or other specialised courts and accountability mechanisms (e.g. truth commissions) in carrying out their work, including in cases relating to systematic sexual exploitation and gender based violence. In this context, the Council recalls that on 10 April 2006 the EU and the International Criminal Court (ICC) concluded an agreement on cooperation and assistance. The Council also highlights the responsibility of all states to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for sexual and gender based violence."

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Uzbekistan - Restrictive measures - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted a common position renewing restrictive measures against Uzbekistan adopted in the light of the excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Uzbek security forces during events at Andijan in May 2005 and following the refusal of the Uzbek authorities to allow an independent international inquiry into the events (14402/1/06).

The common position extends measures adopted in common position 2005/792/CFSP (OJ L 299, 16.11.2005, p. 72) as follows:

- the embargo on exports to Uzbekistan of arms, military equipment and other equipment that might be used for internal repression is extended for a period of 12 months;
- restrictions on admission to the EU aimed at those individuals deemed to be directly responsible for the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force in Andijan and for the obstruction of an independent inquiry are extended for 6 months.

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council has followed closely the developments in Uzbekistan and remains profoundly concerned by the human rights situation in the country. The Council urges Uzbekistan to implement fully its international obligations related to human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Recalling the Council Conclusions of 3 October 2005 and 15 May 2006, the EU reiterates its preparedness for a comprehensive dialogue with Uzbekistan on human rights. The EU thus welcomes the Uzbek proposal to organise in Tashkent, in the course of this year, a meeting between EU and Uzbek experts to discuss the Andijan events. The EU further notes the Uzbek proposal to start a regular dialogue between the EU and Uzbekistan on human rights in the framework of the PCA sub-committee on JHA issues.

The Council considers that this statement of renewed commitment on the part of the Uzbek government offers the opportunity for a more structured and regular dialogue. The Council has therefore decided to reinstate the technical meetings within the PCA, referred to in Article 4 of Common Position 2005/792/CFSP, with the aim of bringing about, through dialogue, the compliance of Uzbekistan with the principles of respect for human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

However, considering the lack of progress with regard to the human rights situation in Uzbekistan, the Council has decided to extend for a further 12 months the arms embargo. The Council also decided to extend for a further 6 months visa restrictions imposed in connection with the Andijan events.

These measures will be reviewed after 3 months on the basis of Council Conclusions, taking into account the actions of the Uzbek government in the area of human rights. We look to the Uzbek government to make progress in this regard."

European neighbourhood policy - Joint action plans with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

The Council approved draft action plans under the European neighbourhood policy to be forwarded for adoption by the EU-Armenia, EU-Azerbaijan and EU-Georgia cooperation councils on 14 November.

Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference on the environment

The Council approved EU guidelines for a draft "Cairo Declaration" prepared for the 3rd Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference on the environment, to be held in Cairo on 20 November.

The texts will be forwarded to the Mediterranean partner countries and will be finalised after negotiations with them.

Northern Uganda - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council reaffirms its support to the peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army, which are currently being held in Juba under the auspices of the Government of Southern Sudan.
2. The Council congratulates the mediator, the Vice-President of Southern Sudan, Dr. Riek Machar and all the other actors supporting the negotiations on the achievements made so far, in particular on the signature on 26 August of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, and the further signature on 1 November of the Addendum to that Agreement, and on all subsequent efforts to keep the negotiations alive.
3. The Council notes that these peace talks provide a historic opportunity to bring an end to a protracted conflict which has taken an appalling toll on the lives of the people for more than twenty years and which has undermined security in the region and displaced up to 2 million people, of whom up to 1,5 million still live in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).
4. The Council urges the Government of Uganda to increase further the protection of its citizens, in particular all the children affected by the armed conflict, in Northern Uganda, and to facilitate a properly managed, voluntary repatriation of all IDPs, thus alleviating the humanitarian crisis and promoting the economic and social development of the region.
5. The Council therefore welcomes the co-operative approach of the Government of Uganda towards the international community, including the Core Group on Northern Uganda, and the Joint Monitoring Committee. Strengthened implementation of the Emergency Action Plan will contribute to improving the living conditions of the people and enhancing development in Northern Uganda.
6. The Council urges the parties to remain fully and constructively engaged in the peace talks and to implement in full their respective obligations under the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement and the Addendum thereto. The Council strongly encourages the parties to continue their joint efforts to reach a sustainable peace agreement, which provides both peace and justice, and is compatible with the rights and the aspirations for peace of the local communities and with national and international law including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

7. The Council also urges all stakeholders in the region to maintain a supportive attitude towards the peace negotiations and to work to promote peace and stability in the Great Lakes in general, including through full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries in the Great Lakes region. In particular, the Council notes that a successful outcome to the political transition in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) will have far-reaching consequences for the stability of the entire region, and therefore encourages the Government of Uganda to continue supporting the transition and to cooperate with the newly elected government in the DRC, once it is in place.
8. The Council stands ready to provide technical, logistical and financial support for the peace process, as appropriate, and to sustain the efforts of the parties to achieve reconciliation, as well as social and economic development, in Northern Uganda."

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Togo - Restoration of democracy

The Council adopted a decision extending for 12 months, until 15 November 2007, the validity of decision 2004/793/EC on the conclusion of consultations with Togo, adopted in 2004 following the violation of essential principles regarding human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law. A letter will be sent to the Togolese government indicating modified measures to be taken, in view of progress made in the fulfilment of 22 undertakings it made in 2004 in the framework of the consultations (13883/06).

Decision 2004/793/EC (OJ L 349, 25.11.2004, p.17) set out a number of conditions under which financial contributions to Togo under the ACP-EU partnership agreement may continue, with an initial 24-month monitoring period.

Since June 2005, a policy of openness has been established, and reports show a considerable and sustained improvement in the situation, as exemplified by a recent comprehensive political agreement, for which the EU congratulates the authorities and all stakeholders in Togo. Given that an electoral framework has been laid down and a date has been set for elections, it is now possible to proceed with the notification and implementation of funding to Togo under the 9th European development fund.

An in-depth dialogue will continue on the outstanding issues, including preparations for free and transparent parliamentary elections to be held in June 2007.

Agreement with South Africa on trade, development and cooperation

The Council reached political agreement on the following draft decisions:

- a decision authorising the opening of negotiations with South Africa in order to revise the EU-South Africa agreement on trade, development and cooperation;
- a decision giving guidance to the Commission for the revision of the agreement on trade, development and cooperation.

Both decisions will be formally adopted at a forthcoming Council meeting.

TRADE POLICY

Trade in steel products - Agreements with Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan

The Council authorised the Commission to open negotiations with a view to renewing agreements on trade in certain steel products concluded with Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

Global Europe: Competing in the world - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council:

Welcomes the Commission's Communication "Global Europe: Competing in the World", discussing the external aspects of Europe's competitiveness and linking external policies to the EU's broader competitiveness agenda, as presented in the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs.

Shares the Commission's analysis on the changing context of the EU's trade and competitiveness policy, and on the challenges posed by globalisation. The ongoing transformations in the global economic order create significant opportunities for growth and development, but also necessitate rapid and deep-going adjustments. For the EU to maintain its competitive position, it must constantly strive to improve upon its policy and regulatory framework.

Acknowledges that an effective policy to foster competitiveness must cover both internal and external measures. Trade policy can make a significant contribution to growth and jobs, and must therefore be considered an essential element of a European policy of competitiveness. Internal and external policies should work in tandem, in a coherent and mutually supporting way.

Shares the Commission's view on the basic parameters concerning the future development of the external aspects of the EU's competitiveness and its recognition of the need for an integrated, coherent approach to domestic and global challenges.

Therefore considers that:

1. trade policy must build upon the premise that Europe's economic prosperity is inextricably linked to that of other regions of the world. Hence, the answer to growing global competition is not to protect the EU from fair competition, but to adopt an increasingly active policy of openness at home and abroad.
2. addressing barriers to trade, investment and business activity in third countries plays a key role in improving the competitive position of European industries. Our work on trade barriers must be increasingly broadly based so that it looks at the whole operating environment of European firms in third markets and places more emphasis on non-transparent and discriminatory regulatory obstacles, and restrictions to competition. This is particularly important for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).
3. it is equally important to guarantee an effective, secure and non-discriminatory access of European companies to raw materials, including energy, and to other inputs to the production process. This underlines the need to promote open trading regimes in the EU and in third countries, and to tackle any foreign restrictions to exports that are likely to harm EU competitiveness.
4. the completion of the internal market and effective innovation policies at the European level are cornerstones of European competitiveness and a critical platform for the EU's success. A well functioning internal market based on clear and consistent rules is a precondition for the development of successful global firms. It also serves as a solid demonstration of how barriers to trade and investment can be eliminated for increasing productivity and growth. External aspects of competitiveness will have to be factored in the forthcoming Single Market review, and should be an integral part of the annual report on the implementation of the Lisbon strategy.

5. it is important to ensure that external considerations, including the global position of the EU and the policies of other countries, are taken into account when setting key internal policies. The goal must generally be to avoid provisions in the EU that impose undue burdens on European companies. The EU must play a leading role in sharing best practice and developing high quality global rules and standards. To do so effectively it must actively look for means to improve the compatibility between its regulations and those of its main trading partners. Progress in regulatory cooperation can bring about considerable benefits to all parties and lessen the risks of unnecessary compliance costs for businesses.
6. in current conditions where innovation is a key factor in the success of new business, IPR violations and counterfeiting deprive innovators of rewards for their investment and risk-taking. An effective protection of intellectual property is therefore an important priority in global competitive markets.
7. the EU will ensure that the WTO remains centre stage in the international trading system and the cornerstone of a strong and rules-based multilateral trading system. Achieving an ambitious outcome in the Doha Development agenda remains our first priority and the EU will work intensively to restart the negotiations as soon as possible.
8. building on the platform of the WTO and in parallel to our efforts to resume the DDA negotiations, there is a need for complementary mechanisms that allow us to continue to achieve additional improvements in market access and business environment, particularly with our future major trading partners. IPR enforcement, public procurement, regulatory cooperation, competition (including state aid) and investment are all key issues in this respect.
9. as one of the policy initiatives, the EU should aim at a new generation of WTO-compatible FTAs that extend beyond present agreements and build towards future multilateral negotiations. The agreements should strive for the highest possible degree of trade liberalisation, taking into account their positive contribution to the EU's competitiveness and their impact on internal European policies. The agreements, which should be part of a coherent framework of the EU's relations with each partner, should include far-reaching liberalisation of services and investment and should place special emphasis on the elimination of non-tariff barriers and on regulatory issues. In setting geographical priorities for these agreements, economic considerations should play a primary role, notwithstanding other, political considerations.

10. based on these criteria, the Council supports the early launch of negotiations with ASEAN countries, India and South Korea. For economic reasons but also given their role in the EU's neighbourhood, negotiations with Russia and Ukraine would be justified as soon as their WTO accession processes have been completed. Special attention should be paid to finalising the EU's ongoing negotiating processes, fulfilling the EU's existing commitments and to the development of the Transatlantic trading relationship.
11. in the context of globalisation and increasing openness, special attention must be paid to policy measures that help European citizens and businesses adapt to these changes. It is also important to ensure that the positive effects of trade opening benefit all citizens and are not captured by specific interests. A broad distribution of benefits through competitive markets is essential for winning the political argument for change.
12. all future initiatives will have to take into account the needs of developing countries and the potential impact of any new policies on them, in particular as concerns poor countries' access to EU markets, sustainable and economic development of these countries, and the goal of poverty reduction. We must work together with our trading partners to improve social and environmental standards.

Invites the Commission, as appropriate and without undue delay, to submit proposals on the different new initiatives to the Council for further discussion. These include the strategy on China, published on 24.10.2006, a new generation of carefully selected and prioritised FTAs, proposals on IPR enforcement and public procurement, a renewed market access strategy and a Green Paper on trade defence instruments.

Stresses the need for transparency throughout the whole process and in particular for all initiatives and proposals for negotiating directives to be thoroughly discussed with Members States. Each FTA negotiation will need a separate proposal for negotiating directives.

Underlines the importance, for internal and external competitiveness, of prompt and comprehensive implementation of the renewed Lisbon strategy.

Invites future presidencies to work across individual policy domains and beyond the agenda set out in the Commission's communication, in order to deal comprehensively with globalisation and its effects.

In light of the significance of issues concerning the external aspects of Europe's competitiveness, agrees to revert to the matter at its forthcoming meetings."

GENERAL AFFAIRS**Proceedings in the Council's other configurations**

The Council took note of a presidency report on proceedings in the Council's other configurations (14775/06).

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS**Western Balkans - Visa facilitation and readmission agreements**

The Council adopted decisions authorising the Commission to open negotiations for the conclusion of:

- agreements on the facilitation of issuance of short-stay visas with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- readmission agreements with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (*see also Council conclusions on the Western Balkans in the "External relations" press release 14781/06*).

Agreement with Norway - European Monitoring Centre for Drugs

The Council adopted a decision on the conclusion of an agreement with Norway on the revision of the amount of the financial contribution from Norway to the work of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) (7815/06).

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Committee on monetary, financial and balance of payment statistics

The Council adopted a decision establishing a committee on monetary, financial and balance of payment statistics (codified version) (12869/1/06).

The decision codifies and repeals decision 91/115/EEC, substituting the various acts incorporated in it by bringing them together with only such amendments as are required by the codification exercise itself.

Information procedures in credit insurance

The Council adopted a decision on consultation and information procedures in matters of credit insurance, credit guarantees and financial credits (codified version) (12871/1/06).

The decision codifies and repeals Council decision 73/391/EEC, substituting the various acts incorporated in it by bringing them together with only such amendments as are required by the codification exercise itself.

AGRICULTURE

Imports of sugar from Croatia *

The Council approved the conclusion of a protocol amending the stabilisation and association agreement with Croatia as regards tariff quotas for sugar and sugar products.

The protocol replaces the current duty-free access for unlimited quantities with an annual duty-free tariff quota of 180 000 tonnes for imports of sugar from Croatia, and gives, as a reciprocal concession, preferential access to the Croatian market for 80 000 tonnes (14230/06, 14650/06).