



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



16327/07 (Presse 289)

PRESS RELEASE

2840th Council meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Brussels, 10 December 2007

President **Mr Luís AMADO**
Minister of State, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal

* Some external relations items were adopted without debate at the 2839th meeting on General Affairs (16326/07).

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Main results of the Council

*The Council reviewed progress in negotiations on **economic partnership agreements (EPAs)** with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions and states, in the run-up to the 31 December deadline for completion of these agreements. It reached a political agreement on a draft regulation on market access, aimed at enacting the provisions of interim EPAs with certain ACP regions and states. The market access regulation opens duty- and quota-free access to the Community market, with improvements to the previous rules of origin provided for by the ACP-EU Cotonou partnership agreement, to those ACP states that have initialled agreements with the Community that are compatible with WTO rules.*

*The Council welcomed the holding of the Annapolis Conference on the **Middle East** peace process and the joint understanding reached between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to immediately launch good-faith bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty before the end of 2008. It underlined the EU's determination to accompany this new momentum by supporting the parties in their negotiations in a sustained and active manner and through working closely with international partners. The Council had an exchange of views with the Palestinian Prime Minister Salam FAYYAD.*

*The Council reaffirmed its strong support for African Union and UN efforts towards solving the conflict in **Darfur**. It underlined its full commitment to contribute to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1778 which authorizes the deployment in Chad and the Central African Republic of a multidimensional presence, including the EU providing the military element of it, and looked forward to soon finalising the current process of force generation and making all necessary resources available in order to conduct this operation.*

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OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

none

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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.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

PARTICIPANTS

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

Belgium:

Mr Karel DE GUCHT
Mr Didier DONFUT

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary for European Affairs, attached to the
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Bulgaria:

Mr Ivailo KALFIN

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Alexandr VONDRA

Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for European
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Mr Karel SCHWARZENBERG

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark:

Mr. Per Stig MØLLER

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

Mr Frank-Walter STEINMEIER
Mr Günter GLOSER

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ireland:

Mr Dermot AHERN
Mr Tom KITT

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Government Chief Whip and Minister of State at the
Department of Defence

Greece:

Ms Dora BAKOYANNI
Mr Ioannis VALINAKIS

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr Miguel Ángel MORATINOS

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

France:

Mr Bernard KOUCHNER
Mr Jean-Pierre JOUYET

Minister of Foreign and European Affairs
Minister of State for European Affairs

Italy:

Mr Massimo D'ALEMA

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

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Latvia:

Mr Māris RIEKSTIŅŠ

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Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with
responsibility for EU affairs

Luxembourg:

Mr Jean ASSELBORN

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister with responsibility for
Foreign Affairs and Immigration

Mr Nicolas SCHMIT

Minister with responsibility for Foreign Affairs and
Immigration

Hungary:

Ms Kinga GÖNCZ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr Michael FRENDO

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Netherlands:

Mr Franciscus TIMMERMANS

Minister for European Affairs

Austria:

Ms Ursula PLASSNIK

Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Poland:

Ms Grazyna BERNATOWICZ

Under-Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs

Portugal:Mr Luís AMADO
Mr Manuel LOBO ANTUNESMinistro de Estado, Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary for European Affairs, attached to the
Minister for Foreign Affairs**Romania:**

Mr Adrian CIOROIANU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:Mr Dimitrij RUPEL
Mr Janez LENARČIČMinister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary at the Government Office for European
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Mr Ján KUBIŠ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:Mr Ilkka KANERVA
Ms Astrid THORSMinister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Migration and European Affairs**Sweden:**Mr Carl BILD
Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖMMinistry for Foreign Affairs
Minister for European Affairs**United Kingdom:**Mr David MILIBAND
Mr Gareth THOMASSecretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and
Consumer Affairs; Parliamentary Under-Secretary of
State, Department for International Development**Commission:**Mr Olli REHN
Mr Louis MICHEL
Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER
Mr Peter MANDELSONMember
Member
Member
Member**General Secretariat of the Council:**

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

ITEMS DEBATED

EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

The Council was briefed by the Commission on progress achieved in further developing the EU's European neighbourhood policy. It held an exchange of views.

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

The Council was briefed by the Commission on progress in negotiations on economic partnership agreements (EPAs) with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions and states, in the run-up to the 31 December deadline for completion of these agreements.

It reached a political agreement on a draft regulation on market access, aimed at enacting the provisions of interim EPAs with certain ACP regions and states.

The regulation will be adopted without further discussion by the Council at its meeting on 20 December, after completion of the text.

The market access regulation opens duty- and quota-free access to the Community market, with improvements to the previous rules of origin provided for by the ACP-EU Cotonou partnership agreement, to those ACP states that have initialled agreements with the Community that are compatible with WTO rules.

Least developed countries (LDCs) already benefit from duty- and quota-free access to the Community under provisions introduced in 2001; the regulation, however, brings them the benefit of improved rules of origin. Non-LDCs will benefit from better market access than before, as well as from the improved rules of origin. For non-LDCs, the danger of increased customs duties resulting from the expiry of the Cotonou trade preferences on 31 December will thus have been avoided.

The regulation enacts into EU law commitments that the Community has made with many ACP states in recent months. These improved arrangements will apply from 1 January, with transition periods for rice and sugar.

It is agreed that any ACP state that initials an agreement with the Community before 20 December can be included by the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, in the list of countries benefiting from the market access regulation.

BURMA/MYANMAR

The Council discussed the situation in Burma/Myanmar, against the background of ongoing UN work by special envoy Ibrahim Gambari and special rapporteur on human rights Sergio Pinheiro following the recent arrests, detentions and disappearances in the country. It was noted that the appointment on 6 November of Piero Fassino as EU special envoy for Burma/Myanmar to support the UN's good offices mission highlighted the importance the EU attaches to the improvement of the situation, and that Mr Fassino had been actively engaged in contacts with key partners towards that objective.

SUDAN/CHAD - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council reaffirms its strong support for the African Union's (AU) and the United Nations' (UN) ongoing efforts to solving the conflict in Darfur and reiterated its firmly held view that a lasting and inclusive peace will be best secured through a comprehensive and regional approach to the conflict.
2. The Council is deeply concerned about the prospects for the AU-UN hybrid peacekeeping mission in Darfur (UNAMID) following the briefing provided to the UN Security Council by Under Secretary General (USG) Jean-Marie Guéhenno on 27 November 2007.
3. The Council draws attention to the lack of cooperation by the Government of Sudan concerning the deployment of an effective force. The Council underlines that the UNAMID mission is operating under a UN Security Council Resolution and that any obstruction by the Government of Sudan or by other parties will be in direct opposition to the will of the Security Council. The Council reiterates its readiness to consider further measures, notably in the UN framework, against any party that obstructs a prompt deployment of an effective force.
4. The Council recognises the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) as the bedrock of long-term stability and the way forward for democracy in Sudan and urges both the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) to resolve points of contention in CPA implementation as soon as possible, notably the demarcation of the Abyei border and the re-deployment of troops.
5. The Council welcomes the start of the political talks in Sirte, Libya, on 27 October, as the beginning of a process to ensure lasting peace in Darfur. The Council reiterates its support for the mediation under the auspices of the UN and the AU, welcomes the involvement of civil society, and urges rebel movements to continue their efforts to unify further and prepare for the start of negotiations. The Council reconfirms its readiness to provide all possible support to the talks and welcomes the efforts made by Member States, the European Commission and the EUSR for Sudan, including through their various contributions to the AU/UN trust fund established for that purpose. The Council stresses that the talks must be underpinned by improved security, in particular through an early commitment by all parties to a verifiable cessation of hostilities. The Council recalls its position that any party failing to engage constructively in the peace process is to be considered as an obstacle to peace and that it will promote appropriate further measures against it, notably in the UN framework, in line with Security Council Resolution 1591.

6. The Council remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis in the region and notably in Darfur and condemns the increasing levels of violence, in particular against humanitarian workers. The Council will continue to monitor these developments very closely. The Council urges the Government of Sudan to respect their commitments under the Joint Communiqué and to review issues of concern through established channels (for example the High Level Committee). As part of this, the Government of Sudan should issue an early announcement on the extension of the moratorium on humanitarian access. The Council confirms its readiness to consider further measures, notably in the UN framework, against any party that undermines peace and security in Darfur or the region through committing acts of violence, especially against any party that obstructs humanitarian access.
7. In line with the UNSC-Resolution 1593 (2005) the Council calls on the Government of Sudan to cooperate unconditionally with the International Criminal Court and to surrender the two individuals for whom the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants on 27 April 2007 in connection with alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur.
8. The Council deplores the recent attacks by Chadian rebel groups operating partly from Darfur and expresses its serious concerns regarding the renewed military clashes between rebel groups and Chadian armed forces in Eastern Chad. It urges Chad, in cooperation with Sudan and Libya, to create the necessary conditions for a lasting political solution in implementation of the Sirte peace accord. The Council further urges the Governments of Sudan and Chad to fulfil their obligations under the Tripoli and Sirte agreements, notably to put an end to support for armed movements destabilising the region. It recalls in particular the responsibility of the Government of Sudan to prevent armed groups from crossing the borders into Chad.
9. The Council underlines its full commitment to contribute to the implementation of the UNSC-Resolution 1778 (2007) which authorizes the deployment in Chad and Central African Republic of a multidimensional presence including the European Union providing the military element of it. In light of recent tensions in the border region of Chad and Sudan, it reiterates the importance of addressing the conflict in Darfur within a comprehensive and regional approach. In this context, the deployment of EUFOR TCHAD/RCA and related EC actions, together with the UN mission MINURCAT, remains crucial.

10. The planning of the operation is taking place in full coordination with the UN and in consultation with African partners, and its deployment has been welcomed by the governments of Chad and the Central African Republic. The deployment of EUFOR Tchad/RCA is to actively work for the improvement of the security situation in Eastern Chad and North-Eastern Central African Republic, as well as contributing to ensure MINURCAT's security and freedom to operate.

Following its decision in October 2007 to conduct a one year bridging military operation in Eastern Chad and North Eastern Central African Republic, which was reconfirmed in November 2007, the Council takes note of the state of preparations for launching the operation. The Council is looking forward finalizing soon the current process of force generation and making all necessary resources available in order to conduct this operation."

WESTERN BALKANS - Council conclusions

At lunch, ministers discussed the situation in the Western Balkans, with particular focus on Kosovo against the background of the conclusion of the Contact Group troika process.

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council had an exchange of views on the Commission's communication on "Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2007-2008" and the accompanying Progress Reports on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo as defined by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244. The Council broadly shared the assessment made by the European Commission.

Aware that the year ahead will be an important one in consolidating the transition process in the Western Balkans, the Council reaffirmed that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union and reconfirmed its continued support to the region's course towards the EU. The EU engagement through the Stabilisation and Association process has made a significant contribution to the progress achieved in recent years by the countries of the region. These achievements now need to be built on and made irreversible. Recalling the European Council Conclusions of December 2006, the Council reiterated that each country progresses from one stage to the next, when it has fulfilled the established conditions. Provided the conditions are fulfilled, Stabilisation and Associations Agreements could be signed with the remaining Western Balkans countries at the earliest opportunity.

The Council considered that the challenges faced by the countries of the Western Balkan region warrant greater focus on key reform priorities, which relate to state-building, rule of law, reconciliation, administrative and judicial reform, and to fight against corruption and organised crime. Strong progress on these issues, hand in hand with sustainable economic and social development, will enable the countries of the region to move forward in building modern democracies and in developing a political culture of dialogue and tolerance.

The Council recalled the importance of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations and of the need to find mutually acceptable solutions on outstanding issues with neighbouring countries. It welcomed good progress made in regional cooperation, in areas like trade, energy, transport and environment and expressed the hope that this would continue, including in the relevant regional fora and initiatives. The Council noted with satisfaction that the Western Balkan countries will take increased responsibility for regional cooperation with the transition from the Stability Pact to the Regional Cooperation Council.

The Council welcomed the Commission's intention to present a communication early in 2008, in which it takes stock of developments and points the way forward in following up the Thessaloniki Agenda, as well as the Salzburg communication, on promoting the course of the countries of the Western Balkans towards the EU. In this context, the Council invited the Commission to further explore possibilities to promote people-to-people contacts as well as civil society development. Recalling its 18 June conclusions, the Council expressed its readiness to hold a discussion during the first half of 2008 on these issues, based on the Commission's communication, as well as on Member States' contributions.

Albania

The Council noted that Albania has made progress in a number of areas, but underlined that good governance and rule of law, in particular the fight against corruption and organised crime, remain major challenges requiring sustained efforts. Noting progress made in the areas of the protection of minorities and freedom of expression, the Council stressed the importance of Albania continuing to make progress in these areas. The Council encouraged all political forces to contribute to a constructive dialogue in moving reforms forward, notably in the electoral and judicial fields. The Council noted that Albania is implementing its trade commitments under the Interim Agreement smoothly and pointed out that a sustained and effective track record of implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement is essential for further progress towards the European Union. The Council also underlined the importance of Albania's continued constructive and stabilizing role in the region.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Council welcomed the latest positive developments, including renewed commitment to police reform. However, the Council reiterated its concern over the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and slowdown in reform process over the last year. It underlined the responsibility of the political leaders to ensure the full functioning of State institutions and to advance reforms which are essential for Bosnia and Herzegovina to move forward and assume full ownership of its governance. The Council reiterated its full support to HR/EUSR Miroslav Lajcak and his efforts to advance the reform agenda.

The Council noted the initialling of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement as an important step. The Council reaffirmed its readiness, as soon as the four conditions are met, including full cooperation with ICTY, to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The Council noted that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia achieved some progress but regrets the delays in reform because of internal political tensions, which diverted the focus of the country's political institutions away from the priorities of European integration. The Council encouraged all political parties to deepen political dialogue and cooperation, including on inter-ethnic relations, in order to move ahead in the accession process. It called for acceleration of the pace of reforms in key areas such as judicial and public administration reform, implementation of the police reform and the fight against corruption, as well as in addressing unemployment and enhancing the general business environment. However, the Council noted that there has still been no solution to the name issue. It called on the Government to make renewed efforts, with a constructive approach, to find a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution on the name issue with Greece, under the auspices of the UN, thereby contributing to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations.

Montenegro

The Council noted the progress Montenegro has made in a number of areas, including adopting a Constitution and in establishing the necessary legal framework and institutions following independence. The Council stressed the need for Montenegro to implement the new Constitution in line with European standards and to continue efforts in broadening consensus on basic features of state building. It encouraged Montenegro to continue enhancing its administrative capacity, as well as to achieve significant reform results notably in strengthening the rule of law and fighting corruption and organised crime.

Serbia

The Council noted the initialling of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement as an important step and recalled that its signature remains conditional upon Serbia achieving full cooperation with the ICTY. The Council called for further efforts in reform, in particular of the judiciary and of the security sector, as well as the fight against corruption and structural economic reforms. In view of Serbia's institutional capacity, the Council was confident that Serbia would be capable of accelerating its preparations on the road towards the European Union.

Serbia/Kosovo

While noting progress made by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in addressing certain priorities, the Council stressed the need for major efforts to strengthen the rule of law, anti-corruption policy and the fight against organised crime, as well as to enhance the dialogue between the communities. The Council recalled the crucial importance of further effective implementation of the Kosovo Standards, including the protection of minorities, historical and religious sites. The Council stressed that resolving the status of Kosovo will facilitate progress in the reform agenda. The Council confirmed that the European Union will continue to assume its responsibilities in Kosovo."

IRAN

At lunch, ministers discussed developments regarding the Iranian nuclear issue. High representative Javier Solana briefed ministers on his latest contacts with the Iranian negotiator, Said Jalili, on 30 November. Ministers also assessed developments in the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency. They noted that EU heads of state and government are expected to adopt conclusions on Iran at the European Council meeting on 14 December.

MIDDLE EAST

Middle East Peace Process - *Council conclusions*

The Council had an exchange of views with the Palestinian Prime Minister, Salam FAYYAD, on prospects after the Annapolis meeting.

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. "The EU welcomes the holding of the Annapolis Conference and the joint understanding reached between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to immediately launch good-faith bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty before the end of 2008. This should lead to the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza that will unite all Palestinians, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its neighbours. It is also important that the parties implement their Road Map obligations in parallel to their negotiations. The EU welcomes the wide participation of Arab partners at the conference and calls for their continued and positive involvement.
2. The EU is determined to accompany this new momentum by supporting the parties in their negotiations in a sustained and active manner and through working closely with other members of the Quartet and partners in the region to keep the negotiations on track. As set out in the EU Action Strategy: "State-building for Peace in the Middle East" the EU stands ready to adapt and enhance its activities in support of a new, substantive and credible process. Amongst its immediate priorities the EU aims to further strengthen security and law and order. In this context, the re-engagement and expansion of EUPOL COPPS is an important element in the improvement of security. To this end, the Council expects Israel to engage constructively in providing accreditation to the mission without further delay. The EU will also further strengthen its programmes to foster institution building, good governance, civil society contributions and support for growth of the Palestinian economy working in close cooperation with the Quartet Representative. The Council welcomes the work of Tony Blair and in particular, his recent announcement of a number of quick impact projects.
3. The Paris Donors' conference in December will be an important opportunity for the whole international community to back up its commitment to assist in the economic and financial development of a future viable Palestinian State and to provide the necessary support to the post-Annapolis process. In this context, the EU looks forward to the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan. In order to allow for the establishment of a new support mechanism the EU endorses the further extension of the TIM for three months.

4. The Council reiterates its grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and calls for the continued provision of essential services. All parties must work urgently for the opening of the crossings in and out of Gaza for both humanitarian reasons and commercial flows. As a first step the EU welcomes the recent opening of crossing for the export of agricultural products. Such moves will support progress on the political track.
5. The Council recalls that peace in the Middle East requires a comprehensive solution through a lasting and just settlement of the conflict in all its tracks based on the principles of land for peace, the relevant UNSC resolutions, the Road Map, and previous agreements reached between the parties. The Council emphasises again the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative as a major element in moving the Middle East Peace Process forward. "

Lebanon - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council is strongly concerned at the current absence of a Head of State in Lebanon. It regrets that it has not yet been possible to elect a new President, and that the parliamentary session has been postponed yet another time until 11 December. The Council hopes that a solution can now be reached and reiterates the importance that such a solution be achieved through dialogue and in spirit of consensus and in full respect of the Lebanese democratic institutions and constitutional norms.
2. The Council remains hopeful that all sides can work flexibly and responsibly towards a solution that is acceptable to all the parties. It encourages all concerned Lebanese actors to attempt to resolve the current impasse and welcomes recent signs of progress towards agreement.
3. The EU has been an active player in encouraging constructive dialogue between the parties and will continue to do so.
4. The Council calls on all parties concerned to respect the election process and to refrain from all actions that could upset public order and the security of the citizens. The Council recalls the importance of stability in Lebanon for the whole region.
5. The Council recalls previous statements and remains determined to reinforce Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, unity and stability, according notably to UNSC Resolutions 1559, 1680, 1701 and 1757."

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

See press release *16326/07*.
