



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



6728/09 (Presse 47)

PRESS RELEASE

2925th Council meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

General Affairs

Brussels, 23 February 2009

President **Alexandr VONDRA**
Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for European
Affairs of the Czech Republic

* The 2926th meeting on External Relations is the subject of a separate press release (6729/09).

P R E S S

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Main results of the Council

*The Council examined proposals aimed at providing additional support, under the European **economic recovery plan**, for investments in the field of energy and infrastructure. It acknowledged the need to reach an agreement on the proposals as soon as possible and before the parliamentary recess in the run-up to the European elections in June.*

The proposals provide for an additional EUR 5 billion investment in energy and infrastructure.

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¹ 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 Olivier CHASTEL

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary for Foreign Affairs with responsibility for preparing for the EU Presidency, attached to the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Bulgaria:

Mr Ivailo Georgiev KALFIN

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Alexandr VONDRA

Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for European Affairs

Mr Karel SCHWARZENBERG

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

Ireland:

Mr Michael MARTIN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Greece:

Mr Ioannis VALINAKIS

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr Diego LÓPEZ GARRIDO

State Secretary for the European Union

France:

Mr Bernard KOUCHNER
Mr Bruno LE MAIRE

Minister for Foreign and European Affairs
Minister of State with responsibility for European affairs

Italy:

Mr Franco FRATTINI

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

Mr Nicholas EMILIOU

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Māris RIEKSTIŅŠ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Vygaudas UŠACKAS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg:

Mr Jean ASSELBORN

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration

Hungary:

Ms Kinga GÖNCZ

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr Richard CACHIA CARUANA

Permanent Representative

Netherlands:

Mr Frans TIMMERMANS

Minister for European Affairs

Austria:

Mr Michael SPINDELEGGER

Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Poland:

Mr Radosław SIKORSKI

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Portugal:

Mr Luis AMADO

Ministro de Estado, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Romania:

Mr Cristian DIACONESCU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Samuel ŽBOGAR

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Mitja GASPARI

Minister without Portfolio responsible for Development and European Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Miroslav LAJČÁK

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Alexander STUBB

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ms Astrid THORS

Minister for Migration and European Affairs

Sweden:

Mr Carl BILDT

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖM

Minister for European Affairs

United Kingdom:

Ms Caroline FLINT

Minister of State for Europe

Commission:

Mr Olli REHN

Member

Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER

Member

Mr Andris PIEBALGS

Member

General Secretariat of the Council:

Mr Javier SOLANA

Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP

ITEMS DEBATED

PREPARATION OF THE SPRING EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The Council examined an annotated draft agenda prepared by the presidency for the spring meeting of the European Council, to be held in Brussels on 19 and 20 March. ([6259/08](#))

The European Council is due to focus on the following issues:

- the economic and financial situation;
- energy and climate change;
- external relations, in particular the Eastern Partnership;
- the Treaty of Lisbon.

As concerns the economic and financial situation, it will focus on progress achieved in ensuring greater stability and better supervision and transparency in financial markets, implementation of the European economic recovery plan approved in December, progress on the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs, the functioning of the EU's internal market and preparations for the G20 summit in London on 2 April.

On energy and climate change, it is due to discuss means of ensuring the EU's energy security in the medium and longer term, as well as preparations for the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen in December.

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. The draft conclusions will draw on the work of the Council configurations involved, as well as the outcome of an informal meeting of heads of state and government in Brussels on 1 March.

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN

The Council examined proposals aimed at providing additional support, under the European economic recovery plan, for investments in the field of energy and infrastructure.

It acknowledged the need to reach an agreement on the proposals, which require a joint decision of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, as soon as possible and before the parliamentary recess in the run-up to the European elections in June.

The economic recovery plan, approved by the European Council in December, provides a framework for measures taken by each member state in response to the global financial crisis and economic slowdown, and identifies a number of actions to be undertaken at EU level.

The Commission's proposals, which provide for an additional EUR 5 billion investment in energy and infrastructure, consist of:

- a draft regulation with a list of energy projects totalling EUR 3.75 billion, including EUR 2.1 billion for gas and electricity interconnection projects, EUR 1.15 billion for carbon capture and storage and EUR 500 million for offshore wind projects;
- a total of EUR 1,25 billion for rural development, of which two thirds are for broadband internet infrastructure and one third for tackling challenges such as climate change, renewable energies, water management, biodiversity and measures to accompany the restructuring of the dairy sector.

The president of the Council concluded the debate in the following terms:

- as regards the list of projects, many delegations expressed support for the Commission's latest proposals, although further adjustments of certain aspects would still be necessary;
- on financing, use of the margin under the 2008 ceilings of the EU's 2007-13 financial framework could not be envisaged. The Permanent Representatives Committee was therefore requested to examine the options available under the EU's budgets for 2009 and 2010.

OTHER BUSINESS***Informal meeting of heads of state and government***

The Council was informed of the presidency's intentions regarding the informal meeting of heads of state and government that will be held in Brussels on 1 March to discuss the economic and financial situation.

The presidency intends discussions to focus on the financial sector; coordinated implementation of the European economic recovery plan, including the means for supporting industry and preserving the role of the EU's internal market; employment; and preparations for the G20 summit on global financial governance, to be held in London on 2 April.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**EXTERNAL RELATIONS*****Iraq - Council conclusions***

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council welcomes the holding of provincial elections in Iraq on 31 January 2009 and congratulates the people of Iraq for having successfully expressed their democratic will. The elections were well organized and conducted in a competitive and generally peaceful environment with freedom of expression widely respected across the country. The elections are an important step towards a consolidation of the democratisation process and reconciliation.
2. In this context, the Council commends the work by the Independent High Electoral Commission supported by UNAMI, with technical and financial support from the European Community, in organising these elections with a challenging timetable. The EU will examine the possibility of providing similar support for future elections.
3. The Council underlines the importance of using the outcome of these elections to make further progress on improving the lives of the Iraqi people as well as on national reconciliation in Iraq. In this context, it encourages the new Provincial Councils to respond to the expectations of the Iraqi people by delivering inter alia much needed basic services and related investment.
4. The experience gained from these elections will hopefully contribute to further consolidation of the democratisation process, including the country's legislative and constitutional framework, and to laying a solid foundation for Iraq's next set of elections. The EU, in cooperation with its international partners, will continue to support Iraq in its efforts to build a secure, stable, democratic, unified and prosperous country where human rights are respected and reiterates its commitment to the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq."

Sri Lanka - Council conclusions

The Council condemned the attack by two Tamil Tigers planes on Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, on 20 February, which caused many casualties.

It also adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The EU has been following closely developments in Sri Lanka. The EU is deeply concerned about the evolving humanitarian crisis and vast number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) trapped by the fighting in northern Sri Lanka, as well as the continuing reports of high civilian casualties. To prevent the loss of civilian life, the EU stresses the need for the provisions of international humanitarian law and the principles of the laws of war to be respected by parties to a conflict. The EU calls on the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to comply with these laws.
2. The EU calls for an immediate cease-fire thereby providing for the establishment of full and unrestricted access, allowing humanitarian aid to be safely delivered and allowing civilians to leave the conflict area. The EU condemns the LTTE's use of violence and intimidation to prevent civilians from leaving the conflict area.
3. The EU urges the Sri Lankan Government to ensure that the temporary camps for IDPs and the screening process for access to them are in compliance with international standards and that independent monitoring be allowed. The UN, the ICRC, and other humanitarian organizations need to have full access to these camps. These above conditions must be met for the EU to be in a position to provide the required humanitarian assistance.
4. The EU remains convinced that the long standing conflict in Sri Lanka cannot be resolved by military means. A military defeat of the LTTE will only reemphasize the need to find a political solution in order to ensure a lasting peace. The EU recalls the Co-Chairs Statement issued on 03/02/09 and reiterates its intention to send a Troika as soon as possible.
5. The EU calls on the LTTE to lay down its arms and to renounce terrorism and violence once and for all, end the inhuman use of child soldiers and forced recruitment, and participate in a political process to achieve a just and lasting solution. The EU calls on the authorities of Sri Lanka to engage in an inclusive political process, which addresses the legitimate concerns of all communities.

6. The EU remains deeply concerned about grave violations of human rights, in particular the cases of enforced disappearances, extra-judicial killings as well as harassments, intimidations, attacks on the media and human rights defenders and the climate of impunity. The EU calls on the Sri Lankan authorities to take decisive action to tackle human rights abuses, to guarantee press freedom and to disarm paramilitary groups in Government controlled areas. The EU views with concern the draft 'Prohibition of Forcible Conversions' bill.
7. The EU underlines the importance of the Sri Lankan authorities to cooperate in the GSP+ investigation into the effective implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and the Convention on the Rights of the Child."

Restrictive measures against Uzbekistan

The Council adopted a regulation amending regulation 1859/2005 on restrictive measures against Uzbekistan ([5272/09](#)).

Regulation 1859/2005 prohibits the sale, supply, transfer and export to Uzbekistan of equipment which might be used for internal repression. The new regulation amends the list of equipment cited in annex to that regulation.

EU code of conduct on arms exports

The Council adopted an updated version of the common list of military equipment covered by the EU code of conduct on arms exports ([6432/09](#)).

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Revision of the partnership agreement with the ACP group of countries

The Council approved a letter to be sent to the president of the Council of ACP ministers suggesting updating of the EU's partnership agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries.

The provisions that the EU wishes to review include those involving the regional dimension, development cooperation, the political dimension, institutional clarifications, promoting the millennium development goals, the mandate and activities of the European Investment Bank, participatory approaches, humanitarian aid and disaster prevention, programming and implementation of aid, and updates, inconsistencies and formal rectifications (6383/09).

The Council also adopted negotiating directives for the revision of the partnership agreement.

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Mechanism on cooperation and verification for Bulgaria and Romania - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"Reaffirming its earlier conclusions, in particular those of 15 September 2008, the Council welcomes the Interim reports from the Commission on Progress in Romania and Bulgaria under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism and fully shares the analysis of the Commission contained therein. The Council notes the continued good level of co-operation of Bulgaria and Romania with the Commission and the other Member States.

Recalling the importance of the political will to take the necessary steps, the Council welcomes the reaffirmed commitment expressed by Bulgaria and Romania and acknowledges the efforts made by these two Member States to make the progress needed to meet the objectives set under the mechanism.

The Council encourages Bulgaria and Romania to intensify their efforts in the coming months by taking all necessary steps without delay, in particular with regard to areas highlighted in the conclusions of the Interim reports, in order to consolidate progress already made and calls upon them to achieve substantial and lasting results. In the light of the above, the Council looks forward to the Commission reports to be tabled in the summer 2009. The Council will continue to pay careful attention to developments in this area."

Work in the Council's different configurations

The Council took note of a report on proceedings in its different configurations ([6387/09](#)).