



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



6044/07 (Presse 19)

PRESS RELEASE

2784th Council Meeting

Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry and Research)

Brussels, 19 February 2007

President

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Federal Minister of Economics and Technology of Germany

P R E S S

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Main Results of the Council

*The Council adopted a contribution entitled "**Strengthening Europe's Competitiveness**", to be submitted to the Spring European Council 2007 as part of the EU's Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs.*

It also adopted conclusions on the contribution of the transport sector to the Lisbon strategy.

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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.

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PARTICIPANTS

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

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Minister for Economic Affairs, Energy, Foreign Trade and Scientific Policy

Mr Benoit CEREXHE

Minister of the Brussels Capital Regional Government, with responsibility for Employment, Economic Affairs, Scientific Research, Fire Prevention and Emergency Medical Aid

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Deputy Minister for Economy and Energy

Czech Republic:

Mr Karel TUREČEK

Deputy Minister for Industry and Trade

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Mr Ivan RYBÁRIK

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Sweden:

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United Kingdom:

Ms Anne LAMBERT

Deputy Permanent Representative

Commission:

Mr Günter VERHEUGEN

Vice-President

Mr Charlie McCREEVY

Member

Ms Meglena KUNEVA

Member

ITEMS DEBATED

PREPARATION OF THE SPRING EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The Council held an orientation debate on the implementation and the state of play of the revised Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs on the basis of the Commission's annual progress report (5074/07). Ministers agreed with the findings of the document that implementation of the Lisbon strategy has allowed visible signs of recovery, including improved economic growth, reduction of unemployment, creation of new jobs, and the fostering of innovation and sustainability in a wide range of policy areas. At the same time, further work is needed to ensure that Europe continues on a path towards sustainable growth and full employment.

Consequently, the Council adopted a "key issues paper" in order to provide input to the European Council meeting on 8-9 March (6560/07).

The key issues paper contains a set of policy recommendations in key areas in which further measures are needed at EU level for improving European competitiveness. It concentrates on the following areas of action falling within the scope of the Competitiveness Council:

- the completion of the internal market: in particular, the Council agreed to progressively reduce the transposition deficit target for internal market directives from 1.5% to 1.0% by 2009;
- better regulation and reduction of administrative burdens for enterprises; in particular, the Council agreed on a reduction target of 25% for administrative burdens arising from EU legislation by 2012, with EU member states to set their own national targets by 2008; the Council also welcomed the Commission's setting up of an "Impact Assessment Board" as well as the Commission's intention to review their functioning in good time for the 2008 Spring European Council, expressing its wish to consider, on the basis of this review, whether further action for improving impact assessment was needed, taking into consideration different options, including a group of independent experts due to advise the institutions on their work towards Better Regulation;

- investments in research, knowledge and innovation; in particular, the Council invited the Commission to present proposals for Joint Technology Initiatives¹ and "article 169"² initiatives with a view to launching the most advanced ones in 2007; furthermore, the Council committed itself to taking in 2007 a decision to set up a European Institute of Technology; the Council also invited the Commission to present a proposal for a European strategic energy technology plan in autumn 2007;
- industrial policy and Europe's business potential: in particular, improve the framework for the European automotive industry;
- strengthening Europe's external competitiveness by trying to achieve an ambitious and balanced result in the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations; intensifying bilateral trade relations to important third markets; and strengthening protection against counterfeiting and product piracy.

¹ Joint Technology Initiatives are long-term public/private partnerships in the field of research and technological development.

² Article 169 of the EC treaty allows the participation of the Community in research programmes undertaken by several EU member states apart from any Community framework.

ACTION PLAN FOR REDUCING ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS

In a public debate, the Council took note of the presentation by Günter Verheugen, Vice-president of the Commission, of the Action Plan for reducing administrative burdens (5924/07) and held an exchange of views. The Council stressed the importance of reducing administrative burdens stemming from EU legislation for companies in order to enhance their competitiveness and considered that the Commission's Action Plan was a good basis in preparation for the next Spring European Council.

The issue of reducing administrative burdens for business forms part of the Better Regulation agenda and it is also dealt with in the key issues paper adopted by the Competitiveness Council as its contribution to the next European Council (8/9 March).

In November 2006, the Commission proposed launching an ambitious Action Programme to reduce the administrative burden of existing regulation in the EU. As part of this, the Commission proposed that the 2007 Spring European Council fix a reduction target of 25 %, to be achieved jointly by the EU and Member States by 2012¹.

The Commission's Action Programme sets out how the Commission proposes that the information obligations (IOs) should be identified, measured and reduced. The programme will measure administrative costs, take a judgement on which of these costs constitute unnecessary burdens and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens. The Commission will analyse the results that the measurement exercise delivers and take the required initiatives towards reduction of the burdens that are unnecessary. It is clear that these measures should not compromise the underlying purpose of the legislation and there are clearly cases where, inter alia, for reasons to do with the protection of public health, workers' rights or the environment, or the need to protect the Community's financial interests and ensure sound financial management, information obligations will remain necessary.

¹ Commission working document COM(2006) 691: "Measuring administrative costs and reducing administrative burdens in the European Union"; Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions COM(2006) 689 : "A strategic review of Better Regulation in the European Union".

The Programme will commence in May 2007 and will aim to provide, by November 2008, an assessment of administrative costs imposed by the selected Community legislation. This will contribute to the reduction of administrative burdens on businesses by 25% by 2012.

Alongside the reduction target and priority areas, the Action Programme includes a list of fast track actions to be launched during the German Presidency. These items constitute a first contribution to reaching the reduction target by producing quick short-term results.

EU'S MOTOR VEHICLE INDUSTRY ("CARS 21")

The Council held a first exchange of views on a Commission communication regarding the future conditions for the automotive industry in the EU.

The discussion took place on the basis of a questionnaire drawn up by the Presidency (5747/07) and followed a presentation by the Commission of its communication "A Competitive Automotive Regulatory Framework for the 21st Century (CARS 21)", issued on 7 February (5746/07).

EU ministers agreed on the need to improve the framework conditions for the EU automotive industry, a key manufacturing sector of the European economy. They also exchanged views on possible ways to reach the Community CO₂ emission reduction target while preserving competitiveness at international level.

The communication, which fits into the context of the revised Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs, is also part of a broader integrated strategy on future policy options for the car industry. It covers the following areas:

- Internal market: type-approval of vehicles;
- Regulatory simplification and internationalisation;
- Environmentally sustainable road transport;
- Safety on European roads;
- Trade and overseas markets;
- Research and development;
- Taxation, fiscal incentives, intellectual property and competition.

OTHER BUSINESS

Free Movement of Goods

The Council took note of information provided by Vice-President Günter Verheugen on a broad package of measures concerning the free movement of goods adopted on 14 February (6312/07, 6313/07, 6377/07, 6378/07).

The Commission's package includes:

- a Communication on "The Internal Market of Goods: a cornerstone of Europe's competitiveness"
- a proposal for a Regulation laying down procedures relating to the application of certain national technical rules to products lawfully marketed in another Member State and repealing Decision 3052/95/EC;
- a proposal for a Regulation on accreditation and market surveillance activities;
- a proposal for a Decision on a common legal framework for industrial products.

Green Paper on the review of the Community "acquis" in the area of consumer protection

With Ms Brigitte Zypries, Federal Minister for Justice of Germany in the chair, the Council took note of information provided by Commissioner Meglena Kuneva on the recently adopted Green Paper on the review of the Community consumer protection acquis. (6307/07).

This Commission Green Paper concludes the diagnostic phase of the review, sums up the Commission's initial findings and calls for views on some options to review the consumer acquis. The review covers eight directives aiming at protecting consumers.

Directive on the exercise of voting rights by shareholders of companies having their registered office in a Member State

The Council took note of information provided by Ms Brigitte Zypries, Federal Minister for Justice of Germany on behalf of the Presidency on the state of play concerning a draft directive aimed at removing the key obstacles to the cross-border voting process in listed companies having their registered office in a Member State, by introducing specific requirements with respect to selected rights of shareholders in relation to general meetings.

The Presidency stressed the importance of rapid adoption by the Council of the final text of the Directive. Following negotiations between the Council and the European Parliament, an agreement has been reached at first reading by both legislators. The result of these negotiations is reflected in the European Parliament's first reading opinion adopted on 15 February 2007.

Internal Market Scoreboard

The Council took note of the information provided by Commissioner Charles McCreevy on the Internal Market Scoreboard 15 bis (5990/07).

The Scoreboard examines the records of Member States in ensuring that the conditions are there for the internal market to function well. It does so by first examining how quickly and how well each of the Member States transposes internal market directives into national law and highlighting the number of infringement proceedings initiated by the Commission against each Member State.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY****Zimbabwe - Restrictive measures**

The Council adopted a common position renewing restrictive measures against Zimbabwe for a further year and updating the list of persons subject to these measures.

The restrictive measures, first introduced in February 2002, consist of a ban on entry into the EU and a freeze on financial assets for individuals who engage in activities that seriously undermine democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe. An embargo on the supply of arms and equipment intended for military operations is also in force.

The common position is published in the EU Official Journal L 51 of 20 February.

Transnistrian region of Moldova - Restrictive measures

The Council adopted a common position extending and amending common position 2004/179/CFSP on restrictive measures, in the form of restrictions on admission, against the leadership of the Transnistrian region of Moldova. The measures are renewed for a further period of 12 months, until 27 February 2008.

The list of 17 persons covered by these measures remains unchanged, only identifiers of certain persons have been updated.

The common position is published in the EU Official Journal L 51 of 20 February.

DEVELOPMENT POLICY**Zimbabwe - Consultations under the ACP -EU agreement**

The Council adopted a decision extending by 12 months the period of application of measures under the ACP-EC Partnership Agreement (5724/07).

The measures are renewed as the essential elements of Article 9 of the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement continue to be violated by the government of Zimbabwe and the current conditions in Zimbabwe do not ensure respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law.

These measures include the suspension of support under the European Development Fund (EDF) in all areas except those in direct support of the Zimbabwean population, reorientation of support in favour of social sectors, democratisation, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and suspension of the signature of new EDF funding.

These measures, introduced for the first time in 2002, have been extended on four occasions, lastly on 14 February 2006.

TRANSPORT

Lisbon Strategy - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"Having regard to the Communication from the Commission concerning the second annual progress report of the Commission on the new Lisbon Strategy, the Council, from the side of transport, points out that efficient, sustainable, accessible and safe transport systems are of key importance for achieving the Lisbon goals. The transport industry, accounting for around 7% of European GDP, is an important economic sector in itself and makes an essential contribution to the European economy as a whole and the well-functioning of the internal market.

In the light of the renewed Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the reviewed Sustainable Development Strategy, there is a continuing need for an EU sustainable transport policy that aims at transport systems meeting Europe's economic, social and environmental interests. Therefore, Europe's transport system must be optimised with a co-modal approach - i.e. the efficient use of different modes of transport on their own and in combination. At the same time, more environmentally-friendly transport, including, where appropriate, the achievement of shifts to more environmentally-friendly transport modes, must continue to be pursued. In this respect, innovation in transport plays a major role in increasing Europe's competitiveness and sustainable development.

The contribution from the side of transport to achieving a dynamic, competitive and sustainable knowledge-intensive EU necessitates efforts both at Community and at national level. In this context the Transport Council welcomes the progress made concerning the Community Lisbon Programme and the Lisbon National Reform Programmes. In order to enable the transport sector to contribute fully to growth within the European Union and to Europe's competitive position in the global economy, and acknowledging the challenges this presents in particular for the Community's peripheral regions, further improvement of the functioning of the internal market and the development of an infrastructure free of interoperability and logistical constraints is needed.

The Council fully assumes its responsibility in the policy area of transport in relation to the renewed Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and regards the following measures as of paramount importance in the light of the four priority areas defined by the European Council in March 2006:

1. Investing more in knowledge and innovation

Innovation and Research & Development are essential for strengthening the competitiveness and effectiveness of transport and for helping to offset the adverse effects of the increase in traffic in Europe. In that context, the COUNCIL:

- REITERATES the importance of advancing GALILEO, the European satellite navigation system. This innovative industrial programme is of prime importance for performing transport services and for Europe's technological position in international competition. THE COUNCIL EMPHASIZES the need to bring the concession contract negotiations with the private consortium to a successful conclusion.
- UNDERLINES the need for a timely start of the Joint Undertaking preparing SESAR, the programme which aims at modernising the infrastructure of air navigation systems. SESAR will enable the air navigation services to meet the capacity requirements resulting from the growing volume of air traffic, while increasing safety levels, reducing the unit cost of air navigation services and reducing impact on the environment per flight through the optimisation of air movements.

- HIGHLIGHTS the importance of intelligent transport systems for improving the efficiency of all modes of transport. THE COUNCIL ENCOURAGES the use of these systems as a matter of priority, where appropriate paying particular attention to their interoperability. With regard to road transport, THE COUNCIL SUPPORTS the development of policy initiatives for systems, such as driver assistance systems, with a view to improving sustainable mobility and infrastructure use and increasing road safety. The development of intelligent transport systems will further boost the motor and supplier industry as electronics now account for nearly 50% of a vehicle's added value.

2. Unlocking the business potential, especially of SMEs

The competitiveness of the transport sector benefits from open markets and from a business environment that encourages private initiative through better regulation. In that context, the COUNCIL:

- in line with the principles of Better Regulation, EMPHASIZES that the Community should only legislate where it is necessary and use alternative instruments in suitable cases; UNDERLINES the need to strengthen the quality and use of impact assessments; WELCOMES the Commission's strategic review of previous initiatives and ACKNOWLEDGES the importance of reducing administrative burdens where appropriate while not compromising necessary standards, particularly in the area of the environment, safety and security. THE COUNCIL CALLS ON the Member States and the Commission to effectively implement and enforce existing EU legislation in the field of transport.
- RECOGNISES that an adequate infrastructure, including flanking technological measures, connecting the internal market is a crucial condition for the development of a knowledge-based economy. In that light, the Council underlines the need for an effective and coherent approach mobilising all relevant sources of finance for new and improved infrastructure of European interest, in particular with regard to the Trans European Networks for transport. In order to create adequate conditions for trade between the EU and its neighbouring countries, the infrastructure at external border-crossings and non-physical barriers for commercial traffic need appropriate consideration. With a view to optimising the capacity of existing and new infrastructure, inter alia by improving interoperability, efficient and sustainable logistics solutions, such as infrastructure traffic management, should be promoted.

- RECOGNISES that, in order to distribute the burden on infrastructure more evenly, cooperation between modes of transport needs to be enhanced. In that context, efficient transshipment facilities, including inter modal terminals, ports and airports, are of particular importance. With regard to ports, THE COUNCIL INVITES THE COMMISSION, in further proceedings on the future ports policy, to submit proposals on financial transparency and to adopt State aid guidelines on the financing of port infrastructure following the conclusion of the current consultation process.
- RECOGNISES that globalisation of production and the corresponding supply chains increase the need for advanced logistical solutions. Therefore, an effective and efficient logistics system is of significant importance for the competitiveness and sustainability of Europe's transport system. Developing logistical solutions is first and foremost a matter for the industry, but State bodies must help to create a favourable environment. Under that premise, THE COUNCIL SUPPORTS the Commission's intention to prepare a European Action Plan on freight transport logistics. This plan should bring forward proposals for creating the conditions for European trade and industrial companies to flourish, in particular by identifying major obstacles hindering freight transport logistics from developing faster and by encouraging the use of Information and Communication Technology and intelligent transport systems in the supply chain.
- UNDERLINES the importance of increasing the efficiency of European railways in order to strengthen its position as a vital part of the transport system. Furthermore, the COUNCIL ACKNOWLEDGES that - with a view to continuing the process of revitalisation of European railways both for freight and passenger transport - appropriate action should be taken to ensure open access on the basis of adopted Community legislation, to enhance interoperability and to remove bottlenecks and missing links.
- UNDERLINES the important role of road transport, on its own and in the transport chain, for the distribution of goods in the economy and the mobility of persons in society. With a view to further improving the quality, safety and reliability of the industry and to reducing distortions of competition, THE COUNCIL CALLS ON the Commission to propose to review the existing legislative framework on access to the profession and access to the market in a way which, inter alia, ensures that administrative burdens are appropriate and proportionate.

- EMPHASISES the key importance of maritime transport to achieve sustainable mobility within Europe and to interface between Europe and the global economy. Considering that approximately 90% of all goods in the EU's international trade and 40% in intra-EU trade are shipped by sea, THE COUNCIL REITERATES its commitment towards quality shipping ensuring adequate standards for maritime safety and environmental protection and security. Furthermore, THE COUNCIL CALLS ON the Commission to intensify work on simplifying procedures on Short Sea Shipping and making the concept of the Motorways of the Sea more operational.
 - Fully acknowledging the industry's specific SME character, WELCOMES the initiative of the Commission to elaborate further proposals on the basis of the Communication on promoting Inland Waterway Transport (NAIADES). THE COUNCIL WELCOMES IN PARTICULAR the goal of the NAIADES programme to create favourable conditions for services, stimulate fleet modernisation and innovation, promote jobs and skills and provide adequate infrastructure.
3. Greater adaptability of labour markets and skills

The Transport sector itself accounts for about 5% of direct jobs in the EU and contributes to a variety of indirect jobs. In that context, the COUNCIL:

- ACKNOWLEDGES that implementation and enforcement of existing EU legislation on qualifications and working conditions are of paramount importance.
- RECOGNISES that further efforts are needed to improve training and to motivate people to take up employment in the transport sector. In these efforts, social partners must be engaged where possible, and due account must be taken of the principle of subsidiarity. Furthermore, the Council encourages the Member States to take the necessary steps to deposit their instruments of ratification of the ILO (2006) Convention on maritime labour standards with the International Labour Office as soon as possible.

4. Energy and Climate change

Transport accounts for some 71% of all oil consumption in the EU. Therefore, in line with the objectives of the EU's energy policy, the COUNCIL SUPPORTS a transport policy which aims at lowering energy consumption and emissions with a view to reducing the impact of transport on climate change. In this context, the COUNCIL:

- STRESSES as a first step the need for Europe to press ahead collectively with further improvements in engine efficiency, increased use of sustainable bio fuels and the introduction in the European market of innovative engine and fuel technologies as regards vehicles and to comprise these initiatives in a consistent European transport energy approach.
- UNDERLINES with a view to minimising risks of damage to the environment, the importance of completing first Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) services by 2008.
- ACKNOWLEDGES that charging schemes could contribute to financing infrastructure and to optimising transport. Furthermore, the COUNCIL INVITES the Commission to examine how the price of using different modes of transport could better reflect its costs to society. In that light, the process of reflection and consultation on charging needs to be deepened with a view to demonstrating its practical and political usefulness for any future initiatives in this area, taking into account the impacts on economy (including impacts on peripheral regions), environment and society. THE COUNCIL WELCOMES the Commission's approach of taking into account the total financial burden on those concerned. THE COUNCIL NOTES the engagement of the Commission to present, no later than 10 June 2008, a generally applicable, transparent and comprehensible model for the assessment of external costs to serve as a basis for future calculations of infrastructure charges accompanied by an impact assessment of the internalisation of external costs for all modes of transport.

- ACKNOWLEDGES that, given the continuing growth in air transport, the airline industry too will have to face up to the challenges of a reduction in CO₂ emissions. Innovation and investment in modern flight equipment will have a significant role to play in this, alongside improved organisation of airspace. On 20 December 2006, the Commission submitted a proposal on the inclusion of aviation in the existing emissions trading system. From the side of transport an active contribution will be given to the discussion of this proposal considering that the task before us is to seek ways of tackling emissions without putting European aviation at a competitive disadvantage. It is noted that the Community will prepare a common position in view of the ICAO Assembly in the second half of 2007.

- WELCOMES – with due regard for subsidiarity – the Commission's intention of publishing a green paper on urban transport which should identify initiatives which could bring potential added value to measures taken at local, regional and national level. Urban transport problems must be tackled in order to improve the quality of life, the environment and the economic performance of urban areas."

ENERGY

Nuclear Safety Instrument

The Council adopted a Regulation establishing an Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation under the European Atomic Energy Community Treaty. (16959/06)

This Regulation is aimed at supporting the promotion of a high level of nuclear safety, radiation protection and the application of efficient and effective safeguards of nuclear material in third countries. The financial, economic and technical assistance provided under this Regulation is complementary to European Community assistance provided under other existing instruments.

TRANSPARENCY

Public access to documents

The Council adopted:

- the reply to confirmatory application 03/c/01/07 made by Ms Costanza HERMANIN, the Danish and Finnish delegations voting against (5502/07);
 - the reply to confirmatory application 04/c/01/07 (5860/07).
-