



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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2703rd Council Meeting

Agriculture and Fisheries

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President

Josef PRÖLL

Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, the Environment
and Water Management of Austria

P R E S S

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5323/06 (Presse 7)

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Main Results of the Council

The Council took note of the presentation by the Commission of the Biomass action plan and held a thorough exchange of views on this issue.

Under A items the Council formally adopted the Regulation on accompanying measures for sugar protocol countries affected by the reform of the EU sugar regime.

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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://ue.eu.int>.
 - 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 abovementioned Council 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:

Belgium:

Ms Sabine LARUELLE

Minister for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses, the Liberal Professions and the Self-Employed and Agriculture

Mr Yves LETERME

Minister-President of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister for Institutional Reform, Agriculture, Sea Fisheries and Rural Policy

Czech Republic:

Mr Jan MLÁDEK

Minister for Agriculture

Denmark:

Mr Hans Christian SCHMIDT

Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries

Germany:

Mr Gert LINDEMANN

State Secretary, Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture

Estonia:

Ms Ester TUIKSOO

Minister for Agriculture

Greece:

Mr Evangelos BASIAKOS

Minister for Rural Development and Food

Spain:

Ms Elena ESPINOSA MANGANA

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

France:

Mr Dominique BUSSEREAU

Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries

Ireland:

Ms Mary COUGHLAN

Minister for Agriculture and Food

Mr Brendan SMITH

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food (with special responsibility for Food and Horticulture)

Italy:

Mr Giovanni ALEMANNI

Minister for Agricultural and Forestry Policy

Cyprus:

Mr Timmy EFTHYMIU

Minister for Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment

Latvia:

Mr Mārtiņš ROZE

Minister for Agriculture

Lithuania:

Ms Kazimira Danutė PRUNSKIENE

Minister for Agriculture

Luxembourg:

Mr Fernand BODEN

Minister for Agriculture, Viticulture and Rural Development, Minister for Small and Medium-sized Businesses, the Liberal Professions and the Self-Employed, Tourism and Housing
State Secretary for Relations with Parliament, State Secretary for Agriculture, Viticulture and Rural Development, State Secretary for Culture, Higher Education and Research

Ms Octavie MODERT

Hungary:

Mr József GRÁF

Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development

Malta:

Mr Francis AGIUS

Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture and Fisheries,
Ministry of Rural Affairs and the Environment

Netherlands:

Mr Cornelis Pieter VEERMAN

Minister for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality

Austria:

Mr Josef PRÖLL

Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, the
Environment and Water Management
Director-General

M. Andrä RUPPRECHTER

Poland:

Mr Krzysztof JURGIEL

Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development

Portugal:

Mr Jaime SILVA

Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries

Slovenia:

Ms Marija LUKAČIČ

Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Food

Slovakia:

Mr Ján GOLIAN

State Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture

Finland:

Mr Juha KORKEAOJA

Minister for Agriculture and Forestry

Sweden:

Ms Ingrid HJELT AF TROLLE

Deputy Permanent Representative

United Kingdom:

Ms Margaret BECKETT

Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs

.....

Commission:

Ms Mariann FISCHER BOEL

Member

Mr Andris PIEBALGS

Member

Mr Markos KYPRIANOU

Member

.....

The Governments of the Acceding States were represented as follows:

Bulgaria:

Mr Nihat KABIL

Minister for Agriculture and Forestry

Romania:

Mr Mugur CRACIUN

Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and
Rural Development

ITEMS DEBATED

PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE PRESIDENCY

Mr Josef Pröll, chairman of the agriculture and fisheries Council, briefly gave an overview of the working programme and the issues to be debated during the Austrian Presidency¹.

He mentioned among the main priorities, the need for consolidating the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) under the newly agreed financial framework for the 2007-2013 period at the European Council on 15-17 December 2005 and the contribution of the European model of agriculture to the Lisbon Strategy. As regards the Common Market Organisations (1st pillar of the CAP), the Presidency will finalize the draft Regulation on the sugar reform as agreed under the United-Kingdom Presidency last November 2005 in order for the Council to adopt it under "A" item - without debate - in the coming weeks.

As regards the rural development, he noted that the Presidency will aim at ensuring that Member States would be able to plan and implement in due time their national programmes since an agreement had been found at Council level on the financial framework 2007-2013 (€ billion 69.5) for the Regulation on rural development adopted in September 2005².

The negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in the run-up to the Hong-Kong ministerial Conference and the avian influenza issue will be dealt at all sessions of the Agriculture and fisheries Council under the Austrian Presidency.

Amongst the top priorities of the Presidency will certainly be the Action Plan on Biomass (see next item), organic farming and the issue of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) crops and products and their coexistence with conventional and organic crops, where a conference will be organised in April in Vienna (4-6 April).

As concerns the food safety and animal health issues, a conference will be held at the end of March on the action plan on animal welfare exposed during this meeting of the Council (see further).

¹ For further information see the Austrian Presidency website:
http://www.eu2006.at/includes/Download_Dokumente/0512draft_operationalprogrammeEN.pdf
pages 37-40

² Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 (OJ L 277, 21 October 2005, p. 1-40).

BIOMASS ACTION PLAN

The Council held a fruitful first exchange of views on the agricultural aspects of the Communication from the Commission on the biomass action plan. The presentation of the Action Plan was exposed by Commissioners Fisher-Boel, responsible for agriculture and rural development, and Piebalgs, responsible of the energy sector. The Council concluded that exploiting biomass offers one of the best means to reduce the Community's dependence on fossil fuels.

The Council will examine as soon as possible the Communication on Biofuels that will be presented next month by the Commission, which complements the Action Plan presented today. Before the end of the Austrian Presidency, following preparatory work at the appropriate technical level, the Council will continue the discussion that begun today.

The main items discussed at Council level can be summarised as follows:

- in general a very large number of delegations welcomed the Action Plan and acknowledged its future positive impact particularly with regard to securing the Community supplies of renewable energy, reducing the Community's dependency on fossil energies, providing viable alternatives of agricultural production and rural activities for farmers, improving sustainable development and biodiversity and maintaining rural activities;
- several delegations insisted on the need to keep sufficiently high import tariffs to enable the development of a Community biomass production and to avoid excessive imports of renewable sources of energy such as bio ethanol;
- some delegations stressed the importance of using different types of bio energies including bio products, bio plastics and animal by products;
- some delegations expressed their concerns as regard possible further certification for sustainable sources of energy, pointing out the fact that it would increase the bureaucratic burden on the operators;
- More specifically a few delegations, underlining the insufficient amount of money used for renewable energy in agriculture, suggested an increase either of the current level of €45/hectare for the "carbon credit" premium and/or the increase of the current maximum eligible area (1.5 million hectares);

Commissioner Fischer-Boel recalled the delegations that cross compliance rules were the only specific requirements to be applied and fulfilled for growing energy crops. Commissioner Piebalgs indicated that with respect to the trade agreements, a balance had to be set between EU's commitments towards the World Trade Organisation agreements (WTO) and the necessary impulse to be given to the biomass sector in the Community. He confirmed that all possible sources of renewable energies shall be used. It is recalled that a first assessment of the implementation of the "carbon credit" premium - among other, the condition for eligibility and its level - introduced by the CAP reform in 2003 will be carried out by the Commission at the end of the year.

The Action Plan aims at increasing the use of energy from forestry, agriculture and waste materials, in particular by setting out measures to increase the development of biomass energy from wood, wastes and agricultural crops and by creating market-based incentives to its use and removing barriers to the development of the market.

This initiative constitutes a first, coordinating step. It contains measures to promote biomass in heating, electricity and transport, including cross-cutting measures on the Action Plan. It is accompanied by a general impact assessment.

As regards, in particular, cross-cutting measures, the Communication deals with the questions related to the energetic crops and the measures favouring the supply of these crops in the framework of the reformed CAP.

The Plan announces more than 20 actions; most of them will be implemented from 2006 onwards. For transport bio fuels, they include promotion of "bio fuels obligations", through which suppliers include a minimum proportion of bio fuels in the conventional fuel they place on the market. In 2006, the Commission will bring forward a report in view of a possible revision of the bio fuels Directive.

The reformed Common Agriculture Policy introduced the "energy crop payment", under which a premium of €45 per hectare is available, with a maximum guaranteed area of 1.5 million hectares as the budgetary ceiling (total of € 67,5 Million available), for the production of energy crops. This measure, considered as crucial by the Commission has been used for 300 000 hectares in 2004 and 500 000 hectares in 2005. The Commission representative indicated possibilities of using set-aside land would also be examined. Currently set aside is compulsory with exemptions for organic production, as well as non-food and non-feed production. Lands under set-aside scheme may be subject to rotation.

FOOSTUFFS QUALITY

The Council took note of the presentation by the Commission of the four proposals on foodstuffs quality, including two proposals on organic production and amending Council Regulation (EEC) n°2092/91¹, one proposal on agricultural products and foodstuffs as traditional specialities guaranteed (TSG) and replacing Council Regulation (EEC) n°2082/92, and one proposal on the protection of geographical indications (GI) and designations of origin (DO) for agricultural products and foodstuffs and replacing Council Regulation (EEC) n°2081/92² (5101/06, 5099/06 and 5098/06).

As regards the proposals on GI's, DO's and TSG's, the Council invited the Special Committee on Agriculture to continue examination of these proposals with a view to reaching an agreement in a forthcoming Council meeting, taking into account the deadline set in the context of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to implement the Panel, scheduled on 3rd of April.

Concerning the proposals on organic production, the Council invited the Special Committee on Agriculture to begin detailed examination of the proposal.

The original Community legislative framework for organic production, TSG's, GI's, DO's was set up in the early nineties. In the meantime, following legislative changes, enlargement and in particular legal claims lodged by third countries (Australia and the United-States) at the World Trade Organisation as well as technical problems when implementing these Regulations have showed the need for an overall change.

When comparing the two proposals on GI's-DO's and TSG's with Council Regulations (EEC) n°2082/92 and 2081/92, the main changes are:

- the introduction of a single document (Article 5(3)c doc 5099/1/06) for applications containing the name, a brief description of the product, specific rules concerning packaging and labelling, a definition of the geographical area from which comes the agricultural product or foodstuff; and proof of the link between the product and its geographical origin; this single document aims at ensuring key information to be officially published before registration in order to allow any operator to use its right of objection, and the authorities to guarantee protection for the names registered in each Member State. It will also ensure a greater homogeneity and equal treatment for applications; On TSG's, only the restricted product specification (Article 6 doc 5098/06) shall be transmitted to the Commission;

¹ See press release:
<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/1679&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr>

² See press release:
<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/2&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr>

- the possibility for third countries operators to submit registration application directly through the Commission (Article 5(9) doc 5099/1/06 and Article 7(7) of doc 5098/06) ;
- to bring the Community legislation into line, all provisions related to equivalence and reciprocity for products from third countries are deleted (former Articles 12 to 12d) in order to allow all names corresponding to geographical areas in third countries to have access to the Community scheme for the protection of GI's; in the same spirit the draft proposal allows third countries as well as Member States or operators to object directly to a registration proposed by groups of producers (Article 7 doc 5099/1/06).

As regard the two proposals on organic production and amending Council Regulation (EEC) n°2092/91, they include new definitions and objectives which aims at avoiding misleading labelling for consumers' interest, rules allowing a certain level of flexibility in the production rules for Member States to take account of local climatic, development and specific production conditions. While excluding a compulsory EU logo for organic products for the time being, the proposals also foresee the use of a simple standardised text fragment EU-ORGANIC in cases where the product do not bear the EU logo (Articles 18 and 19 of the draft). Products containing GMOs cannot be labelled as organic, except if the GMO content is due to accidental contamination and does not exceed 0.9%. The proposal also aims at developing permanent import rules based on direct access for fully compliant or equivalent products.

These four proposals are being dealt with under the advisory procedure (Article 37 of the Treaty) and therefore the Opinion of the European Parliament is not legally binding. The adoption of the EP's Opinion is scheduled on 13 March 2006 for the two proposals on GI's, DO's and TSG's. These proposals do not have a financial impact on the Community budget.

CYPRIT NATIONAL AID

The Council adopted a Decision authorising Cyprus to grant an exceptional € 39,33 million State aid to its farmers (*14543/1/05 + COR 1 +ADD 1 and 15050/05*). The Danish, Dutch, Swedish and United-Kingdom delegations abstained.

At the November agriculture Council, the Cypriot delegation drew the attention of the Council and the Commission, on the basis of a document (14543/1/05), to the need for granting national aid of € 39,33 million to Cypriot farmers to enable them to repay part of their agricultural debt which they had incurred before 31 December 1998 due to exceptional political circumstances before - starting in 1974 with the displacement of population and the military intervention of Turkey - and up to that particular date. It also mentioned as an exceptional circumstance the long-time drought that had affected the country during the 1990s. The rest of the debt will be transformed into long-terms loans repayable over a period of 15 years. It is estimated that over 15000 farmers will be eligible under the proposed national aid scheme.

Pursuant to Article 88(2) of the Treaty, the Council has to adopt an attitude within three months of the application by a Member State for the authorisation to grant an aid. If no decision has been taken within that period, the Commission shall give its decision.

**COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN ON THE PROTECTION AND WELFARE OF ANIMALS
2006-2010**

The Council took note of the presentation by Commissioner Kyprianou of the Community Action Plan on the protection and welfare of animals for the period 2006-2010, and of the comments of some delegations. The Council agreed to come back on this issue more thoroughly at its session on 20 February.

Commissioner Kyprianou indicated that the Action Plan:

- would try to upgrade the animal welfare on the basis of scientific standard
- will aim at better informing the citizen
- would support an initiative for an international forum on the issue of animal welfare
- would try to set indicators and benchmarks to determine the level of animal welfare
- would encourage research in this sector.

The Swedish delegation welcomed the action plan on animal welfare, the issue of the protection of animals being very important in this country. The Italian, Spanish and Portuguese delegations expressed their concerns as regard the working document annexed to the Action Plan which was not available in all official languages.

OTHER BUSINESS

– *Avian Influenza*

Commissioner Kyprianou provided a written update (5543/06) to the Council on the latest state of play on avian influenza.

The German delegation expressed its concerns as regard the illegal transport of goods and animals from risk countries and envisaged the possibility of a self-declaratory form for travellers as a requirement from the custom authorities when public health is at stake. The German delegation, supported by the French and Austrian delegations, also asked for a long-term viable mechanism to face health crisis situations and for the setting up of a veterinary expert task force to cope rapidly and efficiently with outbreaks of avian influenza. The German delegation, supported by the Austrian delegation also recommended to monitor closely the situation in Africa due to the migratory birds flows and the lack of reliable data in this part of the world on the outbreak.

The Greek delegation, having said it had strengthened its veterinary staff and experts to prepare itself against any possible outbreak called on the Commission and the Member States to step up their efforts to protect the Community from the avian influenza. The Cypriot delegation expressed its concerns as Turkish authorities did not answer to their initial suggestion to send veterinary experts in Turkey in the framework of the cooperation with a neighbouring country and to have a mutual exchange of information. The Cypriot delegation also indicated that, following the Turkish military intervention of northern Cyprus, investigations were hard to carry out in this part of the island.

Commissioner Kyprianou suggested the reinforced use of information leaflets to be distributed to the passengers when travelling, as one of the best tool to raise the public's awareness on the risks of illegal imports of goods. However he emphasised that a declaration would not be helpful in the case of an intended illegal import of goods, but agreed to come back on this issue at the level of the Permanent Representatives Committee. As regards a Community rapid intervention task force suggested by some delegations, he mentioned that such task force already operated and offered the Community expertise in some neighbouring third countries recently (Romania, Russia and Turkey), but agreed to strengthen the operating structure in order to save time. To this regard, he noted that it would be worth discussing the operational aspects of this task force as well as its budgetary implications in the future. Finally he noted that the situation in Africa was closely monitored by the Community in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO) and the Office International des Epizooties (OIE), notably to increase surveillance programmes.

– *Sugar*

The German delegation, supported by the Austrian, Danish, French, Dutch, Belgian and Swedish delegations drew the attention of the Council and the Commission to the need for emergency measures to stabilize the Community sugar market in order to cope with exceptional quota sugar surplus (over 2 million tonnes) (5478/06). The German delegation suggested a 10% cut on the sugar quotas for the marketing year 2006/2007 to be applied before spring so that prices for next year's harvest will remain stable, and asks for an early statement from the Commission on this issue in order to give time to beet growers to react accordingly. All possibilities of export following the WTO Panel ruling, may also be used. The German delegation also insisted for current intervention sugar stocks not to be reintroduced onto the sugar market for the moment.

The Italian, Portuguese and Polish delegations, stressing the fact that the newly agreed reform of the Common Market Organisation (CMO) on sugar in November 2003 may reduce by more than 50% their current national quotas in 2005, suggested that the quota cut for 2006-2007 be only applied on Member States where the national quotas would be reduced by less than 50% in the run-up to this reform. The Latvian, Finnish, Lithuanian, Hungarian and Irish delegations suggested to apply a quota cut only on "B" quota of sugar used for exports and eligible to export refunds, and possibly on "C" quota. The Slovenian, Spanish and Czech delegations expressed their opposition to the German request.

Commissioner Fischer-Boel noted the limited possibilities of intervention to stabilize the sugar market and to reduce the stocks. She pointed out that the restructuring fund scheduled by the sugar reform to accompany the changes in the sector would not be operational in early 2006 yet. As regard the surpluses she made clear that a withdrawal of the huge quantities - between 2 and 3 million tonnes - from the market was not an option, and that export possibilities were very much reduced due to the WTO Panel and budgetary constraints. Finally she stressed that storing the surpluses would increase the storage costs and would create more imbalance on the market. She concluded that a cut would be necessary as a temporary measure in order to relieve the pressure of the stocks on the market within the transitional period between the old sugar regime and the new one and indicated that :

- a Communication from the Commission would be published in the Official Journal at the end of January announcing a future cut of the Community quota in order for the beet growers to plan and organise their sowings and the subsequent harvest in due time;
- the Council Regulation on the sugar reform would then be officially adopted as an "A" item, probably at the next meeting of the agriculture and fisheries Council on 20 February;
- once the Council Regulation had been adopted, the management committee on sugar would propose to apply a quota cut at the end of February.

– ***Poultry meat***

The Italian delegation, supported by the Greek, Cypriot, Polish, French, Spanish, Maltese and Hungarian delegations raised its concerns as regard the economic impact of avian influenza on the poultry industry in the EU and asked the Commission to take appropriate emergency measures to support the businesses severely affected by dropping prices of the poultry meat (5519/06).

Commissioner Fischer-Boel recalled the delegations that after a strong fall of the prices during the autumn 2005, mostly due according to her, to the media campaign following the outbreak of avian influenza mostly in Asia and in some eastern European countries, the poultry market had recovered by Christmas. She acknowledged nevertheless that the situation was still fragile and may deteriorate again following the media coverage of the outbreak of bird flu in Turkey. However, she underlined that the Common Market Organisation for poultry did not provide for any specific instrument other than export refunds and that her Institution did not envisage to use any other tool to support the market.

To this regard she noted that the Commission had already used this tool, by increasing at the management committee on poultry and eggs on 18 January the level of export refunds (from €24/100 kilos to €26/100 kilos) for whole chickens. This €2/100kilos increase follows the increase in November of the level of export refunds for one day-old chicks and chicken and turkey hatching eggs as well as for chicken cuts. Finally, she suggested to wait for the positive consequences of these increases on the market and recalled the delegations that Russian import quota would soon be reallocated to European operators.

– ***Future works of the Council***

The next meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council will be held on Monday 20 February 2006.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

AGRICULTURE

Avian influenza

The Council adopted a decision setting an EU financial contribution for measures for the eradication of avian influenza (5001/1/06).

Adoption of this decision follows the political agreement reached by the Council on 20 December 2005 amendment of decision 90/424/EEC on expenditure in the veterinary field (*see press release 15479/05*).

The decision sets at 50% the Community co-financing rate for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI), for the costs incurred by the member states in compensating livestock owners for the killing of poultry or other captive birds and for the destruction of animals or animal products, the cleaning and disinfection of holdings and equipment and the destruction of contaminated feedingstuffs and equipment.

The Community may also reimburse 100% of vaccine costs and 50 % of the costs incurred in carrying out emergency vaccination, where such equipment cannot be disinfected.

Under current legislation -decision 90/424/EEC- a Community financial contribution is granted to member states for some of the expenditure which they may incur when eradicating HPAI.

ACP Sugar - Accompanying protocol

The Council unanimously adopted in first reading a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing accompanying measures for sugar protocol countries affected by the reform of the EU sugar regime. This adoption takes place after the opinion issued by the European Parliament on 15 December and on the basis of a compromise text between the two institutions (*PE-CONS 3673/05 and 15978/05*).

The accompanying measures are part of a multi-annual adaptation strategy which pursues the objectives of enhancing the competitiveness of the sugar and cane sector, where this is a sustainable process, in particular in terms of the long-term economic viability of the sector, taking into account the situation of the different stakeholders in the chain, promoting the economic diversification of sugar-dependent areas. In 2006 a specific assistance plan will be defined with particular attention to be given to cost effectiveness, sustainable impact and the clear definition and monitoring of objectives and indicators of achievement.

A financial amount of €40 million has been scheduled to finance measures for 2006 for the 18 ACP Sugar Protocol countries.

FISHERIES

EU - Seychelles Agreement

The Council adopted a regulation approving a protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for in the agreement between the EU and Seychelles on fishing off Seychelles for the period from 18 January 2005 to 17 January 2011 (13539/05).

The fishing opportunities provided for in the protocol are expressed in vessel numbers (40 tuna seiners and 12 surface longliners) and concern Spain, France, Italy and Portugal.

The financial contribution is set at EUR 24 750 000 (EUR 4 125 000 to be paid annually over 6 years).

ENLARGEMENT

Turkey - Accession partnership

On the basis of the political agreement reached by the Council on 12 December 2005, the Council adopted a Decision on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the accession partnership with Turkey (15671/05).

The revised Accession Partnership is an important document to focus Turkey's preparations for accession and to adapt priorities to the evolving needs. The revised Accession Partnership includes a set of priorities which relate to Turkey's capacity to meet the criteria defined by the Copenhagen European Council of 1993 and the requirements of the negotiating framework adopted by the Council on 3 October 2005. These priorities, which concern both legislation and the implementation thereof, have been selected on the basis that it is realistic to expect that Turkey can complete or take them substantially forward over the next few years. A distinction is made between short-term priorities, which are expected to be accomplished within one or two years, and medium-term priorities, which are expected to be accomplished within three to four years.

On 3 October, the Member States started negotiations with Turkey on its accession to the EU. The advancement of the negotiations will be guided by Turkey's progress in preparing for accession, which will be measured, inter alia, against the implementation of the Accession Partnership, as regularly revised.

Accession Partnerships with Turkey were adopted by the Council in 2001 and 2003. The Commission's 2004 recommendation on Turkey stressed that a revised Accession Partnership should be proposed in 2005. In December 2004, the European Council also concluded that the EU would continue to monitor closely progress of the political reforms on the basis of an Accession Partnership setting out priorities for the reform process.

Turkey is now expected to develop a plan with a timetable and specific measures to address the priorities of the Accession Partnership.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Liberia - Restrictive measures

The Council adopted a common position renewing restrictive measures imposed against Liberia in order to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1647(2005).

Adopted in December 2005, Resolution 1647(2005) renews the restrictive measures imposed on Liberia by UNSCR 1521(2003): for a further 12 months concerning measures on arms and travel and for a further six months for the measures on diamonds and timber.

The Council adopted for the first time restrictive measures against Liberia in February 2004, in order to implement UNSCR 1521(2003).

EU neighbourhood policy - Technical assistance and information exchange programme

The Council adopted a decision enabling countries covered by the European neighbourhood policy (ENP), as well as Russia, to benefit from the EU's technical assistance and information exchange programme (TAIEX) (5180/06).

The purpose of the decision is to support neighbouring countries in understanding and drafting legislation related to ENP action plans and to help them with implementation and enforcement.

The TAIEX programme provides five main services: documentation, information and advice on legislation; workshops and seminars; study visits to the EU; expertise to advise the beneficiary countries and databases.

The ENP objective, as stated in the Commission's strategy paper adopted in May 2004, is to share the benefits of the EU's 2004 enlargement with neighbouring countries and to use some of the instruments and experience gained during the enlargement process to bring partner countries closer to the EU, with the aim of gradual economic integration and a deepening of political cooperation.

Seven ENP action plans have been adopted -with Israel, Jordan, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia and Ukraine- and five more are under preparation, with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Georgia and Lebanon.

Russia, which is not part of the ENP, adopted with the EU road maps for the creation of four common spaces setting out objectives similar to those of the ENP.

Ivory Coast - Restrictive measures

The Council adopted a common position renewing and supplementing the restrictive measures imposed against Ivory Coast by common position 2004/852/CFSP¹ for a further period of 12 months in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1643(2005) adopted on 15 December 2005 (16071/05).

The common position restricts the provision of arms and military assistance to Côte d'Ivoire and establishes the framework for a visa ban and freeze of assets on persons constituting a threat to peace and national reconciliation.

In addition to these measures it prohibits, in accordance with UNSCR 1643 (2005), the direct or indirect import of all rough diamonds from Ivory Coast to the Community, whether or not such diamonds originated in Ivory Coast.

It is applicable from 16 December 2005.

¹ OJ L 368, 15.12.2004, p. 50

Bosnia and Herzegovina - Arms control

The Council adopted a common position lifting an arms embargo imposed in 1996 on Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to take into account the fact that this country has now adopted, and is implementing, legislation on arms trade which meets EU standards (15498/05).

TRADE POLICY

Antidumping measures

India - Cotton-type bed linen

The Council adopted a regulation amending regulation 74/2004 imposing a definitive countervailing duty on imports of cotton-type bed linen originating in India (15542/05).

India - Sulphanilic acid

The Council adopted a regulation amending regulation 1338/2002 imposing a definitive countervailing duty on imports of sulphanilic acid originating in India and amending regulation 1339/2002 imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of sulphanilic acid originating, inter alia, in India (15887/05 + COR3).

India - Steel ropes and cables

The Council adopted a regulation amending regulation 1858/2005 imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of steel ropes and cables originating, inter alia, in India (5046/06).

Russia - Aluminium foil

The Council adopted a regulation amending Regulation (EC) n° 950+2001 imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of certain aluminium foil originating, inter alia, in Russia (5202/06).

China - Tartaric acid

The Council adopted a regulation imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty and collecting definitively the provisional duty imposed on imports of tartaric acid originating in China (5216/06).

Brazil and Israel - Polyethylene terephthalate film

The Council adopted on 19 January, by written procedure, a regulation amending regulations 1975/2004 and 1976/2004 extending definitive anti-dumping and countervailing duties on imports of polyethylene terephthalate film originating in India, to imports of polyethylene terephthalate film consigned from Brazil and from Israel, whether declared as originating in Brazil or Israel or not (*published in Official Journal L 17 of 21.1.2006, p.1*).

Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Libya, Lithuania, Romania and Ukraine - Urea

The Council adopted on 13 January, by written procedure, a regulation amending regulation 92/2002 imposing definitive anti-dumping duty and collecting definitively the provisional anti-dumping duty imposed on imports of urea originating in Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Libya, Lithuania, Romania and the Ukraine (*published in Official Journal L 12 of 18.1.2006, p. 1*).

Laos - Ring binders

The Council adopted on 9 January, by written procedure, a regulation extending the definitive anti-dumping duty imposed by regulation 2074/2004 on imports of certain ring binder mechanisms originating in China to imports of the same product consigned from Laos (*published in Official Journal L 7 of 12.1.2006*).

CUSTOMS UNION**Simplification of formalities in trade in goods**

The Council approved a position to be adopted by the Community within the EC-EFTA Joint Committee on a decision to amend the Convention on simplification of formalities in trade in goods.

The draft decision aims at preserving the consistency of the legal arrangements governing the use of a Single Administrative Document (SAD) in Europe, following amendments to EU rules on customs declarations. Given that the Community has revised the provisions on the use of the SAD in order to reduce the volume of data required of economic operators and to codify a certain amount of that data, the Commission proposed to adopt similar measures in the framework of the EC-EFTA Convention of May 1987 on simplification of formalities in trade in goods.

INSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Council rules of procedure - Weighting of votes

The Council adopted a decision modifying its rules of procedure in order to update the table on the population of EU member states for 2006 for the purposes of qualified majority voting in the Council (14591/05).

The Council's rules of procedure provide that when a decision is to be adopted by the Council by a qualified majority, and if a member of the Council so requests, it will be verified that the member states constituting the qualified majority represent at least 62% of the total population of the Union.

For this purpose EU population figures are updated every year in accordance with data supplied by Eurostat.

For 2006 the threshold of 62% is established as 286 million people out of a total of 461 millions.

A qualified majority is the number of votes required in the Council for a decision to be adopted when issues are debated on the basis of article 205(2) of the EC Treaty. It is set at 232 votes out of a total of 321, representing a majority of the member states.

ENVIRONMENT

Infrastructure for spatial information in the Community*

The Council adopted a common position on a proposal for a Directive establishing an infrastructure for the dissemination of spatial information for the benefit of environmental policy and providing public information (INSPIRE). The common position will be forwarded to the European Parliament for a second reading under the codecision procedure (12064/05 and 15148/05 ADD 1).

The draft Directive focuses on information needed in order to monitor and improve the state of the environment, in particular information regarding air, water, soil and the natural landscape.

INSPIRE aims to optimise the use of data already available, by documenting existing spatial data, rendering it more accessible and operable and by dealing with obstacles to the use and sharing of data. The beneficiaries of the Directive will be public authorities, legislators, universities, researchers and the media as well as citizens' organisations.

INSPIRE focuses on environmental policy, but is open for use by other sectors such as agriculture, transport and energy.

Protection of groundwater against pollution*

The Council adopted a common position, by qualified majority, with Germany, Hungary, Italy and Sweden voting against, on a draft Directive on the protection of groundwater against pollution (12062/05 and 15149/05 ADD 1). The common position will be forwarded to the European Parliament for a second reading under the codecision procedure.

The draft Directive aims to prevent and control groundwater pollution by establishing criteria for the assessment of groundwater chemical status, for the identification and reversal of significant and sustained upward trends in pollutant concentrations in groundwater bodies, and for the definition of starting points for trend reversals. The Directive also aims to prevent or limit inputs of pollutants and to prevent deterioration in the status of groundwater bodies.

In particular, the draft Directive will enable Member States to set threshold values for certain pollutants according to hydro-geological circumstances at national level. For other pollutants, quality standards will be set at Community level.

For further details, see press release 10074/05.

TRANSPARENCY

Public access to documents

The Council adopted :

- the reply to confirmatory application 46/c/10/05 made by Mr David Cronin, the Swedish delegation voting against (15005/05);
- the reply to confirmatory application 47/c/01/05 made by Ms Anna Hakobyan (15772/05);
- the reply to confirmatory application 48/c/01/05, the Danish and Swedish delegations voting against (15918/05);
- the reply to confirmatory application 49/c/01/05 made by Mr Thomas Meyer-Falk (15938/05);
- the reply to confirmatory application 53/c/01/05 (16009/05).

APPOINTMENTS

Court of Auditors

The Council adopted a Decision (15742/05) appointing as members:

- Mr Olavi Ala-Nissilä,
- Ms Máire Geoghegan-Quinn,
- Mr Lars Heikensten,
- Mr Morten Louis Levysohn,
- Mr Karel Pinxten,
- Mr Juan Ramallo Massanet,
- Mr Vítor Manuel da Silva Caldeira,
- Mr Massimo Vari.

of the Court of Auditors for the period from 1 March 2006 to 29 February 2012.
