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THE EUROPEAN UNION

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PRESS RELEASE

2973rd Council meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

General Affairs

Brussels, 16 November 2009

President **Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖM**
Minister for EU Affairs of Sweden

* The 2974th meeting on External Relations is the subject of a separate press release (15914/09).

P R E S S

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Main results of the Council

*The Council asked the Commission to give its opinion on **Albania's application** to join the European Union.*

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PARTICIPANTS

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

Belgium:	
Mr Yves LETERME	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Olivier CHASTEL	State Secretary for European Affairs
Bulgaria:	
Ms Rumiana JELEVA	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Milen LYUTSKANOV	Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs
Czech Republic:	
Mr Jan KOHOUT	Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs
Ms Helena BAMBASOVÁ	Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Marek MORA	Deputy Minister for European Affairs
Denmark:	
Mr Per Stig MØLLER	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Germany:	
Mr Guido WESTERWELLE	Vice-Chancellor and Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Werner HOYER	Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr Wolf-Ruthart BORN	State Secretary for European Affairs
Estonia:	
Mr Urmas PAET	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Ireland:	
Mr Dick ROCHE	Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and at the Department of Foreign Affairs with special responsibility for European Affairs
Greece:	
Mr Dimitris DROUTSAS	Alternate Minister for Foreign Affairs
Spain:	
Mr Miguel Ángel MORATINOS	Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
Mr Ángel LOSSADA TORRES-QUEVEDO	State Secretary for Foreign Affairs
France:	
Mr Pierre LELLOUCHE	State Secretary with responsibility for European affairs
Italy:	
Mr Franco FRATTINI	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Vincenzo SCOTTI	State Secretary for Foreign Affairs
Cyprus:	
Mr Marcos KYPRIANOU	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Latvia:	
Mr Māris RIEKSTIŅŠ	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Lithuania:	
Mr Vygaudas UŠACKAS	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Evaldas IGNATAVICIUS	Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs
Luxembourg:	
Mr Jean ASSELBORN	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration
Ms Marie-Josée JACOBS	Minister for the Family and Integration, Minister for Equal Opportunities
Hungary:	
Mr Péter BALÁZS	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr László VÁRKONYI	State Secretary (with special responsibility), Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Malta:	
Mr Tonio BORG	Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

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
Mr Mikołaj DOWGIELEWICZ	State Secretary, Office of the Committee for European Integration
Portugal:	
Mr Luis AMADO	State Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Pedro LOURTIE	Secretary of State for European Affairs
Romania:	
Mr Bogdan MAZURU	State Secretary for European Affairs
Mr Doru Romulus COSTEA	State Secretary for International Affairs
Slovenia:	
Mr Samuel ŽBOGAR	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Mitja GASPARI	Minister without Portfolio, responsible for Growth and European Affairs
Slovakia:	
Mr Miroslav LAJČÁK	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Ms Olga ALAGAYEROVA	State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Finland:	
Mr Alexander STUBB	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Paavo VÄYRYNEN	Minister for Foreign Trade and Development
Ms Astrid THORS	Minister for Migration and European Affairs
Sweden:	
Ms Cecilia MALMSTRÖM	Minister for European Affairs
United Kingdom:	
Mr Chris BRYANT	Minister of State for Europe and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

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Commission:	
Ms Margot WALLSTRÖM	Vice President

ITEMS DEBATED

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Council held a policy debate on implementation of the EU's sustainable development strategy, with a view to the European Council's review of the strategy at its meeting on 10 and 11 December.

Sustainable development is an overarching concept and the strategy, renewed in 2006, is intended to guide all EU policies and actions, requiring economic, environmental and social policies to be designed and implemented in a mutually reinforcing and well coordinated manner.

This year's review is based on a two-yearly progress report from the Commission on the strategy's implementation at EU level and in the member states (*doc. 12453/09*). The presidency intends to present a report to the December European Council.

Whilst the EU has integrated sustainable development priorities into a broad range of policies, the Commission's report points out that unsustainable trends still persist in several areas, notably demand for natural resources, loss of biodiversity, energy consumption in transport and global poverty. And a number of new challenges are emerging, such as adaptation to climate change, food security, land use, sustainability of public finances and the international dimension of sustainable development.

The Council's debate focused on the choice of areas to be given the highest priority and on governance, monitoring and follow-up considerations, including consistency with other EU strategies.

EU STRATEGY FOR GROWTH AND JOBS POST-2010

The Council held a policy debate on the preparation of a renewed EU strategy for growth and jobs for the period post-2010, following the expiry of the current strategy, launched by the European Council in Lisbon in 2000.

The Commission is expected to present proposals at the beginning of 2010 for a successor to the Lisbon strategy. The Council's debate, and preparatory work undertaken in its other configurations, will feed into more formal preparations for the new strategy under the forthcoming Spanish presidency (January to June 2010).

The debate focused on two broad issues:

– key priorities for the new strategy, and the elements necessary to support a successful exit from the economic and financial crisis and delivery on objectives;

– how to improve organisation and working methods, in order to reinforce ownership and the effectiveness of the new strategy.

PREPARATION FOR THE DECEMBER EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The Council examined an annotated draft agenda prepared by the presidency for the European Council meeting to be held on 10 and 11 December (*15525/09*).

It will make more detailed preparations at its meeting on 7 and 8 December.

Issues to be addressed by the European Council include:

– institutional issues;

– the economic, financial and employment situation;

– justice and home affairs (Stockholm programme);

– climate change.

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 in the run-up to the Council meeting on 7 and 8 December.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

ENLARGEMENT

Albania - Application for EU membership - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"On 28 April 2009, President Mr. Bamir TOPI and Prime Minister Mr. Sali BERISHA presented the application of the Republic of Albania for membership of the European Union. The Council decided to implement the procedure laid down in Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union. Accordingly, the Commission is invited to submit its opinion.

Recalling the renewed consensus on enlargement as expressed in the conclusions of the European Council of 14/15 December 2006, the Council reaffirms that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union. It reiterates that each country's progress towards the European Union depends on its individual efforts to comply with the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilisation and Association Process. Recalling Council conclusions of 8/9 December 2008, it is noted that a country's satisfactory track-record in implementing its obligations under a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), including trade related provisions, is an essential element for the EU to consider any membership application."

HUMAN RIGHTS

Freedom of religion or belief - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council reaffirms the strong commitment of the European Union to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief.

The Council recalls that freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief applies equally to all persons. It is a fundamental freedom which includes all religions or beliefs, including those that have not been traditionally practiced in a particular country, the beliefs of persons belonging religious minorities, as well as non-theistic and atheistic beliefs. The freedom also covers the right to adopt, change or abandon one’s religion or belief, of one’s own free will.

The Council underlines that States have a duty to protect everyone, including persons belonging to minorities, from discrimination, violence and other violations. States must ensure that their legislative systems provide adequate and effective guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief to all without distinction.

The Council condemns all forms of intolerance against persons because of their religion or belief. The Council deplores that discrimination based on religion or belief still exists in all regions of the world, and that persons belonging to particular religious communities, including religious minorities, continue to be denied their human rights in many countries. The Council is alarmed by reports of recent and increasing acts of extreme violence against persons belonging to religious minorities and expresses its concern about the vulnerable situation faced by them in many parts of the world.

The Council expresses its deep concern that in countries that have legislation on defamation of religions, such legislation has often been used to mistreat religious minorities and to limit freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. The Council stresses that international human rights law protects individuals and groups of individuals and, in this regard, reiterates that defamation of religions is not a human rights concept. Recalling that human rights transcend differences between religions, the Council underlines that no restrictions in the name of religion may be placed on those rights and religion may never be used to justify or condone the restriction or violation of individual rights. The EU will continue to reject any attempts to do so.

The Council emphasises that freedom of religion or belief is intrinsically linked to freedom of opinion and expression. Freedom of opinion and expression is necessary to create pluralist, tolerant, broad-minded and democratic societies. By allowing free debate and exchanges of ideas, and by disseminating information on human rights abuses and calling for accountability, independent media, press, television, internet and other new media, freedom of expression plays an important role in the fight against intolerance.

The Council underlines the strategic importance of freedom of religion or belief and of countering religious intolerance, and reaffirms its intention to continue to give priority to the issues as part of the European Union’s human rights policy. The Council invites the relevant Council bodies to evaluate existing EU initiatives and to elaborate proposals, as appropriate, for promoting the freedom of religion or belief in bilateral relations and in multilateral context."

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Cariforum-EU Council

The Council adopted two decisions on the creation of a joint Cariforum-EU Council, as provided for by a economic partnership agreement between Cariforum (15 Caribbean states) and the EU.

The decisions concern Community positions on

– the rules of procedure of the joint Cariforum-EU Council, the trade development committee and special committees provided for by the economic partnership agreement (*14871/09*);

– participation in the Cariforum-EU consultative committee and the selection of the representatives of organisations (*14872/09*).

Union for the Mediterranean ministerial conference

The Council adopted EU guidelines with a view to a Union for the Mediterranean (UFM) ministerial conference on the environment to be held in Dubrovnik, Croatia, on 26 and 27 November.

The 4th UFM environment ministers' conference will be an opportunity to assess progress in the Horizon 2020 initiative[1] and UFM projects. The meeting, bringing together the 43 countries of the UFM, will also be an opportunity to bring positions closer together ahead of the Copenhagen meeting on climate change.

Since the last conference of Euro-Mediterranean environment ministers, combating pollution and achieving good environmental status for all seas around the EU has become enshrined in EU law through a framework directive on marine strategy. The directive, which came into force in 2008, calls for enhanced cooperation between EU countries sharing a marine region as well as neighbouring countries.

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enlarg/med/horizon_2020_en.htm

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Work in the Council's different configurations

The Council took note of a report on proceedings in its different configurations *(15499/09)*.

TRANSPORT

Integrated maritime policy - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council of the European Union

HAVING REGARD TO

– the Commission Communication on an Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union and Action Plan, presented on 10 October 2007;

– the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council of 14 December 2007;

– the Council conclusions on the Integrated Maritime Policy of 8 December 2008;

– the Commission Progress Report on the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy of 15 October 2009;

ACKNOWLEDGING the achievements described in the Progress Report, and CONFIRMING the validity of the integrated approach to maritime affairs;

RECOGNISING the need to keep the momentum in the unfolding of the EU Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) addressing the essential mid- and long- term challenges of environmental protection, maritime safety and security, economic growth, quality jobs and well-being; RECOGNISING that the double impact of climate change and the economic crisis is particularly felt in the maritime sector; EMPHASISING the importance of further enhancing the economic potential of maritime Europe within the concepts of sustainability in line with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), of improving the effectiveness of government action on the seas, and of further exploring synergies to improve economic growth and environmental stability, while keeping in mind the social dimension of IMP;

RECOGNISING that the priority given to the oceans, seas and coastal regions in EU policy-making yields significant results; NOTING in particular progress in areas relevant for the sustainable development of the oceans, seas and coastal regions, such as marine environmental protection[5], maritime transport, research, renewable energies and fisheries;

REAFFIRMING that cross-cutting policy tools are of utmost importance to enhance sustainable economic development, environmental monitoring, safety, security and law enforcement on Europe's oceans, seas and coastal regions following the ecosystem approach as well as the better integration of these issues; HIGHLIGHTING that maritime spatial planning, in combination with increased marine knowledge, can contribute to considerable economic investment, drive new innovative projects and significantly improve the way our maritime spaces are managed, preserving their ecosystems; RECOGNISING that the cross-sectoral integration of maritime surveillance will increase the effectiveness in the way that key policy objectives as well as facilitation of trade and for the promotion of the economic interests of the European Union and its Member States can be reached;

RECOGNISING that sea-basin strategies are keys to a successful implementation of the IMP, as far as they represent added value and are a tool to adapt to the specific geographic, climatic, economic and political contexts of each maritime region; EMPHASISING that co-operation with and among Member States and regions sharing a sea basin - and with third countries whenever relevant and appropriate - is a crucial element of success;

UNDERLINING that the implementation and further development of IMP, in the present context of the economic downturn, should put a renewed focus on sustainable economic growth, employment and innovation in an eco-efficient way;

HIGLIGHTING the necessity to develop links between Europe's Climate Change Policy and the IMP, by developing a strategy for adaptation to climate change in coastal and maritime areas, aiming at protecting coastal infrastructure and preserving marine biodiversity;

STRESSING that the EU shall also implement the Action Plan on European Maritime Transport Space without Barriers as foreseen in the Council conclusions in order to foster co-modality, to facilitate maritime transport, to implement the concept of the Motorways of the Sea, to improve the EU programme for short sea shipping and to foster territorial cohesion; RECOGNISING the necessity to find ways and means to further stimulating quality maritime employment and the competitiveness of the European merchant fleet, while remaining determined to advance the introduction of clean ship technologies;

RECOGNISING that the EU and Member States have played a major role in strengthening global maritime governance, as seen in combating piracy or destructive fishing practices and protecting vulnerable eco-systems, and should continue to do so;

THE COUNCIL THEREFORE;

1. WELCOMES the strong commitment towards integrated maritime governance in Member States; INVITES Member States and the Commission to continue to implement and to elaborate further a comprehensive strategy for growth, jobs and sustainability for the oceans, seas and European coastal regions, with due respect to subsidiarity and proportionality and on the basis of a continued strong involvement of stakeholders;

2. LOOKS FORWARD to the continuation of the regular strategic dialogue between the Commission and Member States on the Integrated Maritime Policy, the High Level Focal Points Group, chaired by the Presidency;

3. RECALLS that the MSFD has been welcomed by the European Council as the environmental pillar of the IMP; ACKNOWLEDGES the MSFD, with the ecosystem based-approach to the management of human activities as an overarching principle, as a basis on which to develop more successfully all maritime activities within the concepts of sustainability in line with the MSFD, having regard to their cumulative impacts, and STRESSES the need to integrate the sustainable use of marine goods and services by present and future generations into decision-making;

4. INVITES the Commission to report on the outcomes of the discussion on the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Roadmap and to come forward with initiatives aimed at encouraging the development and use of MSP that is based on an ecosystem approach during early 2010, and which, in the light of increased economic activities at sea, help coordinate and balance sectoral interests to contribute to a sustainable use and development of the European maritime areas;

5. NOTING the need to further explore synergies between the European Energy Policy and the IMP, by promoting energy generation from the sea, in particular renewable forms of energy, not only offshore wind, but also wave, tide, currents and thermo gradient sources;

6. WELCOMES the continued implementation of the EU Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research aimed at providing the knowledge base for the implementation of the IMP. The strategy should support policy-making in relation to the MSFD and the work on MSP; UNDERLINES that efforts should also foster innovation by identifying the economic value of marine goods and services, including ecosystem services, and by developing core ocean technologies and exploring future market potentials in relation to maritime clusters; INVITES the Commission to make proposals regarding governance of marine and maritime research, with a view to improving the use of scientific knowledge by policy-makers and ensuring a coordinated and sustained development of marine research infrastructure at EU level;

7. WELCOMES the idea of establishing an integrated approach to maritime surveillance, through a common information sharing environment;

8. NOTES the Presidency conclusions of the European Council on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region;

9. WELCOMES the IMP approach presented for the Mediterranean and CALLS for further dialogue and co-operation in order to improve the governance of the marine space and coastal areas in the Mediterranean area, taking into account its sub-regions; EMPHASISES the need to engage, where necessary and appropriate**,** in an early dialogue with Mediterranean neighbours on this item, taking into account the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS);

10. ENCOURAGES further dialogue in order to strengthen the Black Sea Synergy-based cooperation and its relevance for the IMP**;**

11. CALLS for a further development of the strategic approaches to regional sea basins where there is a demand and a perspective of clear added value**,** taking into account the experience made so far with existing strategies**,** and a sound and speedy implementation of the specific actions under these specific strategies, inter alia by setting up relevant pilot projects, also including seeking synergies with other EU policy instruments and funding, such as Cohesion Policy, Neighbourhood policy and External Relations, and the regional dimension in the implementation of the MSFD;

12. WELCOMES the presentation of the Commission's Communication "Developing the International Dimension of the Integrated Maritime Policy of the European Union" and RECOGNISES the importance of the dialogue at international level on an integrated maritime policy and other maritime issues in the competent fora, including on the ratification and implementation of UNCLOS and relevant existing international conventions based on UNCLOS ;

13. NOTES its guidance for a next step towards an EU policy on Arctic issues that is provided in relation to the Commission's Communication "The EU and the Arctic region" ;

14. EXPRESSES gratitude to the Italian Government to have held a successful European Maritime Day Stakeholder conference in Rome on 19-21 May 2009 and its appreciation to the Spanish Government and the Regional Government of Asturias for the invitation to hold the Stakeholder conference at the occasion of the European Maritime Day in the city of Gijon, on 19-21 May 2010; NOTES with satisfaction that a number of Member States are proposing to host the European Maritime Day Stakeholder conference from 2011 onwards, and ENCOURAGES the Governments of Member States and stakeholders to also organise de-centralised events celebrating the European Maritime Day across Europe;

15. INVITES the Commission, Member States and next Presidencies to explore the opportunities and synergies that can be achieved by a further development of the integrated approach to maritime affairs;

16. INVITES the Commission to detail its policy intentions on the IMP during 2010, taking account of these conclusions**,** inter alia with a renewed focus on sustainable economic growth, employment and innovation in an eco-efficient way for consultation with Member States and stakeholders;

17. INVITES the Commission to present the necessary proposals for the financing of integrated maritime policy actions within the existing Financial Perspective, with a view to entry into force by 2011;

18. CALLS upon the Commission to present a progress report on the implementation of the IMP in good time for the European Council at the end of 2012."

ENVIRONMENT

Dangerous substances - Committee procedure

The Council decided not to oppose adoption by the Commission of:

– a decision amending, for the purposes of adapting to technical progress, the annex to directive 2002/95/EC on dangerous substances as regards an exemption for an application of cadmium;

– a regulation amending annex I to regulation 689/2008 concerning the export and import of dangerous chemicals;

– directives amending directive 98/8/EC (on biocidal products) to include warfarin, terbutryn, brodifacoum, magnesium phosphide releasing phosphine and acrolein as active substances and to extend the inclusion of aluminium phosphide releasing phosphine; and

– decisions concerning the non-inclusion of certain substances in annex I to directive 98/8/EC and the setting of deadlines for the submission of dossiers for certain substances to be examined under a 10-year work programme.

RESEARCH

EU-Algeria scientific and technological cooperation agreement

The Council adopted a decision authorising the Commission to open negotiations with Algeria on an agreement on scientific and technological cooperation.

EU-Brazil fusion energy cooperation agreement

The Council adopted a decision approving the conclusion of a (Euratom) cooperation agreement with Brazil in the field of fusion energy research (*14268/09*).

The aim of the agreement is to intensify cooperation on the basis of mutual benefit and reciprocity, in order to develop the scientific understanding and technological capability underlying a fusion energy system. Cooperation will include the exchange of information and scientists, the organizing of seminars and conducting joint studies.

ITER experimental fusion reactor project

The Council approved guidance for the Commission with a view to a meeting of the council of the ITER International Fusion Energy Organization that will take place in Cadarache (France) on 18 and 19 November.

AGRICULTURE

EU-Ghana agreement on trade in timber products

The Council adopted a decision on the signature and conclusion of a voluntary partnership agreement with Ghana on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber products (*14356/09* + *14356/09 ADD 1*).

The agreement will provide a legal framework ensuring that all imports of timber products from Ghana have been produced legally.

Statistics on plant protection products

The Council adopted a regulation concerning statistics on plant protection products, on the basis of a text agreed with the European Parliament under the Parliament-Council conciliation procedure.

The regulation establishes a common framework for the systematic production of Community statistics on the marketing and use of approved pesticides. The statistics, together with other relevant data, will allow the member states to establish national action plans with quantitative objectives, targets, measures and timetables aimed at reducing the risks and impacts of pesticide use on human health and the environment.

The targets may cover different areas of concern, for example worker protection, protection of the environment, residues, use of specific techniques or use in specific crops. The statistics will also be used to establish harmonised risk indicators as referred to in annex IV to directive 2009/128/EC on the sustainable use of pesticides *(3676/09)*.

CUSTOMS UNION

Relief from customs duty

The Council adopted a codified version of a regulation on relief from customs duty (*12850/09*).

The new regulation replaces the various acts incorporated into regulation 918/83, whilst fully preserving their content.

TRANSPARENCY

Public access to documents

The Council adopted the reply to confirmatory application No 23/c/01/09, with the Finnish and Swedish delegations voting against (*14694/09*).