



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



6854/12

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PRESS RELEASE

3150th Council meeting

General Affairs

Brussels, 28 February 2012

President

Mr Nicolai WAMMEN
Minister for European Affairs of Denmark

P R E S S

Main results of the Council

*The Council recommended that **Serbia** be granted the status of candidate country following its application for EU membership. The decision is expected to be confirmed by the European Council at its meeting on 1 and 2 March.*

*The Council approved strengthened measures against those responsible for the crackdown on civil society and the opposition in **Belarus**, adding 21 names to the list of people targeted by a travel ban and asset freeze.*

*It adopted a regulation setting technical requirements for credit transfers and direct debit transactions in euros. The regulation constitutes a key element of SEPA, the **single euro payments area**, setting deadlines for migration from national to EU-wide payment instruments. Its adoption follows an agreement reached with the European Parliament at first reading.*

*The Council also adopted a regulation on contractual relations in the **milk and milk products** sector, reinforcing the bargaining power of milk producers, allowing member states to introduce written contracts between producers and purchasers, and improving market transparency. Adoption of the regulation, which comes in response to the crisis that affected the sector in 2008 and 2009, follows an agreement reached with the European Parliament at first reading.*

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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

Belgium:

Mr Didier REYNDERS

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs,
External Trade and European Affairs

Bulgaria:

Mr Konstantin DIMITROV

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Karel SCHWARZENBERG

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign
Affairs

Denmark:

Mr Nicolai Halby WAMMEN

Mr Michael ZILMER-JOHNS

Minister for European Affairs
State Secretary for Foreign Policy

Germany:

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Mr Michael LINK

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Minister of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ireland:

Ms Lucinda CREIGHTON

Minister of State for European Affairs (Departments of the
Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs)

Greece:

Mr Stavros DIMAS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr Iñigo MÉNDEZ DE VIGO Y MONTOJO

State Secretary for the European Union

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Mr Jean LEONETTI

Minister with responsibility for European Affairs, attached
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Italy:

Mr Enzo MOAVERO MILANESI

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Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

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Mr Uri ROSENTHAL

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State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Mr Miguel MORAIS LEITÃO

State Secretary attached to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, with responsibility for European Affairs

Romania:

Mr Cristian DIACONESCU

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Igor SENČAR

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Mikuláš DZURINDA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Alexander STUBB

Minister for European Affairs and Foreign Trade

Sweden:

Ms Birgitta OHLSSON

Mr. Carl BILDT

Minister for EU Affairs

Minister for Foreign Affairs

United Kingdom:

Mr David LIDINGTON

Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Commission:

Mr. Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ

Mr Štefan FÜLE

Vice President

Member

High Representative

Ms Catherine ASHTON

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

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The government of the acceding state was represented as follows:

Croatia:

Ms Vesna PUSIĆ

Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

ITEMS DEBATED**ENLARGEMENT AND WESTERN BALKANS**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council recalls the Commission's Opinion of October 2011 on Serbia's application for membership and the Council conclusions of 5 December 2011. In accordance with the European Council conclusions of 9 December 2011, the Council has examined and confirmed that Serbia has continued to show credible commitment and achieved further progress in moving forward with the implementation in good faith of agreements reached in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue including on IBM, has reached an agreement on inclusive regional cooperation and has actively cooperated to enable EULEX and KFOR to execute their mandates. In the light of its examination, the Council recommends to grant Serbia candidate status and looks forward to the confirmation of this decision by the March European Council.

As regards Kosovo* the Council recalls its conclusions of 5 December 2011. Without prejudice to Member States' position on status, or any future decisions to be taken by the Council, the Council takes note of the intention of the Commission to launch a feasibility study for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Union and Kosovo.

The Council urges both sides to continue to take forward the implementation of all the agreements reached to date."

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

PREPARATION OF THE MARCH EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The Council examined draft conclusions for the European Council meeting to be held on 1 and 2 March.

The European Council is due to focus on:

- Economic policy:
 - assessing progress made in implementing country-specific recommendations under the EU's European Semester and commitments under the Euro Plus Pact;
 - giving guidance to member states, on the basis of the Commission's annual growth survey, for the preparation of their national reform programmes (structural reforms) and stability or convergence programmes (fiscal policies);
 - highlighting labour market reforms and employment and competitiveness issues; and
 - providing guidance to the Commission and the Council on the implementation of flagship initiatives for jobs and growth.
- International summits: preparations for a G-8 summit on 19 and 20 May, a G-20 summit on 18 and 19 June and a UN "Rio+20" conference on sustainable development on 20 to 22 June;
- Foreign policy, including the southern neighbourhood (one year after the start of the Arab Spring) and Syria;
- Other issues, including EU enlargement (Serbia) and accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Schengen area.

The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union ("fiscal compact") will be signed in the margins of the meeting.

The draft conclusions will be reviewed in the light of the Council's discussion. An annotated draft agenda was discussed by the Council on 27 January ([5354/12](#)).

OTHER BUSINESS

– *Belarus*

The Council was briefed by the High Representative on latest developments in Belarus.

It also approved, without discussion, strengthened measures against the Belarusian regime, see page 10 and press release [6814/12](#).

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****Belarus - Restrictive measures**

The Council approved strengthened restrictive measures against the Belarusian regime.

For details, see press release [6814/12](#).

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS**Single euro payments area - Credit transfers and direct debits**

The Council adopted a regulation setting technical and business requirements for credit transfers and direct debit transactions in euros ([6574/12](#) + [ADD 1](#) + [PECONS 76/11](#)).

The regulation constitutes a key element of SEPA – the single euro payments area – an EU-wide integrated market for credit transfers and direct debits with no distinction between national and cross-border payments.

Adoption of the regulation follows agreement reached with the European Parliament at first reading on 14 December.

The regulation sets deadlines for migration from national to EU-wide payment instruments, introducing a set of common standards and general technical requirements. It will also contribute to the simplification of payment processes.

For details, see press release [5422/12](#).

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Cooperation and verification mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania

The Council adopted conclusions on the mechanism on cooperation and verification for Bulgaria and Romania.

The conclusions can be found in [6648/12](#).

AGRICULTURE

Contracts in the milk sector*

The Council adopted a regulation aimed at improving the functioning of the EU milk sector ([77/11](#) and [6726/12](#) + [ADD 1 REV 2](#)).

Provisions on contractual relations in the milk sector and for milk products come in response to the crisis which affected this sector in 2008 and 2009, but these measures should also be seen in the context of the abolition of the EU's milk quotas regime from 2015.

For details, see press release [6974/12](#).

FISHERIES

Fisheries partnership agreement with Guinea-Bissau

The Council adopted a decision approving the conclusion of a new protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and financial contribution provided for under the EU's fisheries partnership agreement with Guinea-Bissau ([15178/11](#)).

The partnership agreement was concluded in 2008. The new protocol was initialled on 15 June 2011; the previous protocol expired on the same date. Following signature, the new protocol was applied provisionally in order to allow EU vessels to continue their fishing activities.

INTERNAL MARKET

Chemicals - Dimethylfumarate

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption by the Commission of a regulation restricting the use of dimethylfumarate (DMF) by including this substance in the EU's "REACH" system (regulation 1907/2006 on the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals).

The inclusion of DMF in the REACH system follows a request aimed at restricting its use in concentrations greater than 0.1 mg/kg. DMF is a biocide that prevents moulds that may degrade leather furniture or footwear during storage.

Under the REACH system, any EU country can file a request for restricting the use of a substance on a EU-wide basis that may pose a risk to human health or the environment.

The draft regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. Now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

ENERGY

Electricity system operation of the Baltic member states

The Council adopted a decision authorising the Commission to negotiate an agreement with Russia and Belarus on electricity system operation of the Baltic member states.

ENVIRONMENT

Emissions from light commercial vehicles

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption by the Commission of a regulation amending annex II to regulation 510/2011¹, setting emission performance standards as part of the EU's integrated approach to reducing CO2 emissions from light commercial vehicles, with regard to the data source and the data parameters to be reported by member states ([5786/12](#)).

The draft regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. Now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

APPOINTMENTS

Court of Auditors

The Council appointed Mr Baudilio TOMÉ MUGURUZA from Spain as new member of the Court of Auditors for a term of six years as from 1 March 2012.

The Court has one member from each EU country appointed by the Council for a six-year term (renewable). The members elect one of their number as President for a term of three years (also renewable).

The Court of Auditors is responsible for ensuring that EU taxpayers' money is properly spent. It therefore has the right to audit any person or organisation handling EU funds. The Court frequently carries out on-the-spot checks. Its findings are written up in reports submitted to the Commission and EU national governments.

¹ [OJ L 145, 31.5.2011.](#)