



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2008)1819 final

Brussels, 27 February 2008

MINUTES

of the 1819th meeting of the Commission

held in Strasbourg

(Winston Churchill building)

on Tuesday 19 February 2008

(afternoon)

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PV(2008)1819 final

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Single sitting: Tuesday 19 February 2008 (afternoon)

The sitting opened at 13.34 hours with Mr BARROSO, President, in the chair.

Present

Mr BARROSO	President	
Ms WALLSTRÖM	Vice-President	Items 1 to 14 (in part)
Mr VERHEUGEN	Vice-President	Items 14 (in part) and 15 (in part)
Mr BARROT	Vice-President	
Mr KALLAS	Vice-President	
Mr FRATTINI	Vice-President	
Ms REDING		
Mr DIMAS		
Mr ALMUNIA		
Ms HÜBNER		
Mr BORG		
Ms GRYBAUSKAITĖ		
Mr FIGEL'		
Mr REHN		
Mr MICHEL		Items 1 to 14
Mr KOVÁCS		
Ms KROES		
Ms FISCHER BOEL		
Ms FERRERO-WALDNER		
Mr McCREEVY		
Mr ŠPIDLA		
Mr PIEBALGS		Items 1 to 14
Ms KUNEVA		
Mr ORBAN		

Absent

Mr POTOČNIK

Mr KYPRIANOU

Mr MANDELSON

The following sat in to represent absent Members of the Commission

Mr NEALE	A member of Mr POTOČNIK's staff	
Mr TOD	A member of Mr KYPRIANOU's staff	
Ms NIKOLAY	A member of Mr MANDELSON's staff	Items 1 to 15 (in part)

The following also sat in

Mr VALE DE ALMEIDA	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Ms DURAND	Acting Director-General, Legal Service	
Mr SZUCS	Communication DG	
Mr LAITENBERGER	Commission Spokesman	
Mr CONDOMINES	Bureau of European Policy Advisers	
Ms MARTINHO	Chief adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 14 (in part) and 15
Ms WEYAND	Adviser in the President's Office	Items 1 to 13
Ms OEN	A member of Mr KALLAS's staff	
Ms SCHREIBER	Chef de cabinet to Mr ŠPIDLA	Items 1 to 13
Ms SOEWARTA	A member of Mr PIEBALGS's staff	Item 15
Mr ITALIANER	Deputy Secretary-General	

Secretary: Ms DAY, Secretary-General, assisted by Mr AYET PUIGARNAU, Director in the Secretariat-General.

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2008)1819/3; SEC(2008)205/2)

The Commission took note of that day's agenda and of the tentative agendas for forthcoming meetings.

2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET

(SEC(2008)1819)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 18 February.

3. MINUTES AND SPECIAL MINUTES OF 1818TH MEETING (13 FEBRUARY)
(PV(2008)1818; PV(2008)1818, PART II)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 1818th meeting.

4. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

4.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2008)206 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 11 and 15 February.

4.2. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES
(SEC(2008)207)

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expired between 18 and 22 February.

4.3. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2008)208 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 11 and 15 February.

4.4. DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation procedure between 11 and 15 February, as archived in "Greffé 2000" (Registry).

5. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS
(SEC(2008)209)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2008)15)

**5.1. DG PERSONNEL AND ADMINISTRATION – EXTERNAL
PUBLICATION OF VACANCY NOTICE FOR AN AD14 FUNCTION OF
DIRECTOR (EU-12)**
(PERS(2008)16)

On a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to authorise the publication, under Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2008)16 for the post of Director, Social Welfare and Health Policies, in the Directorate-General for Personnel and Administration.

This decision would take effect immediately.

5.2. *DG RESEARCH – EXTERNAL PUBLICATION OF VACANCY NOTICE FOR AN AD14 FUNCTION OF DIRECTOR (EU-12)*
(PERS(2008)17)

On a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Mr POTOČNIK, the Commission decided to authorise the publication, under Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2008)17 for the post of Director, Health, in the Directorate-General for Research.

This decision would take effect immediately.

5.3. *DG COMPETITION – EXTERNAL PUBLICATION OF VACANCY NOTICE FOR AN AD14 FUNCTION OF DIRECTOR (EU-12)*
(PERS(2008)18)

On a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms KROES, the Commission decided to authorise the publication, under Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2008)18 for the post of Director, Markets and Cases I: Energy and Environment in the Directorate-General for Competition.

This decision would take effect immediately.

5.4. *SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – TERMINATION OF THE INTERNAL SELECTION PROCEDURE TO APPOINT AN AD14/15 DIRECTOR*
(PERS(2007)84 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the procedure followed, as set out in point 4 of PERS(2008)15, and, on a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided to terminate - without making any appointment - selection procedure COM/2007/1648 for the post of Director, Resources and General Affairs in the Secretariat-General.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

5.5. *LEGAL SERVICE – APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15 PRINCIPAL LEGAL ADVISER*
(PERS(2008)19 TO /3)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Principal Legal Adviser responsible for the Institutions team in the Legal Service (PERS(2008)19).

The Commission took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 4 December 2007 and 24 January 2008 (PERS(2008)19/2 and /3).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants' qualifications for the post. It also considered their ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Mr Bernardus SMULDERS to the post.

This decision would take effect on 1 March.

5.6. *DG HEALTH AND CONSUMER PROTECTION – TRANSFER OF AN AD15 OFFICIAL*

On a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms KUNEVA, the Commission decided, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, to fill the post of Director, Consumer Policy by transferring in the interest of the service Ms Jacqueline MINOR, an AD15 official and currently Director, Horizontal Policy Development, in the Directorate-General for the Internal Market and Services.

This decision would take effect on 1 April.

5.7. *EUROPEAID – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART AND TRANSFER OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL*

The Commission, on a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms FERRERO-WALDNER, decided:

- to create a function of Chief Adviser in the EuropeAid Cooperation Office;
- to fill this function, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, by transferring in the interest of the service Ms Androulla KAMINARA, an AD14 official currently Director, Quality of Operations, in the EuropeAid Cooperation Office, with a view to her secondment to the post of Head of the Representation in Cyprus.

These decisions would take effect on 16 April.

5.8. *DG PERSONNEL AND ADMINISTRATION – APPOINTMENT OF CONTRACT STAFF FROM MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION (EFTA)*

The Commission took note of the information in point 8 of PERS(2008)15 and, on a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided, by way of derogation from Article 5 of General implementing provisions on the procedures governing the engagement and the use of contract staff at the Commission (C(2004) 1313), to authorise the recruitment as contract staff of nationals of the Member States of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), after the candidates had passed the computer-based test organised by the European Personnel Selection Office but without having taken part in the full selection procedure.

This decision would take effect immediately.

6. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION FOR A COUNCIL OPINION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 5(3) OF COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) 1466/97 ON THE UPDATED STABILITY PROGRAMME OF GREECE (2007-2010)

(SEC(2008)220 AND /2; SEC(2008)222; SEC(2008)223)

The Commission adopted the recommendation for a Council opinion on the updated stability programme of Greece, as set out in SEC(2008)220/2, for transmission to the Council.

7. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION FOR A COUNCIL OPINION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 5(3) OF COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) 1466/97 ON THE UPDATED STABILITY PROGRAMME OF SPAIN (2007-2010)

(SEC(2008)219 AND /2; SEC(2008)222; SEC(2008)223)

The Commission adopted the recommendation for a Council opinion on the updated stability programme of Spain, as set out in SEC(2008)219/2, for transmission to the Council.

8. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION FOR A COUNCIL OPINION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 5(3) OF COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) 1466/97 ON THE UPDATED STABILITY PROGRAMME OF IRELAND (2007-2010)

(SEC(2008)221 AND /2; SEC(2008)222; SEC(2008)223)

The Commission adopted the recommendation for a Council opinion on the updated stability programme of Ireland, as set out in SEC(2008)221/2, for transmission to the Council.

**9. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION FOR A COUNCIL OPINION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 9(3) OF COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) 1466/97 ON THE UPDATED CONVERGENCE PROGRAMME OF DENMARK (2007-2010)
(SEC(2008)218 AND /2; SEC(2008)222; SEC(2008)223)**

The Commission adopted the recommendation for a Council opinion on the updated convergence programme of Denmark, as set out in SEC(2008)218/2, for transmission to the Council.

**10. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION FOR A COUNCIL OPINION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 9(3) OF COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) 1466/97 ON THE UPDATED CONVERGENCE PROGRAMME OF LITHUANIA (2007-2010)
(SEC(2008)217 AND /2; SEC(2008)222; SEC(2008)223)**

The Commission adopted the recommendation for a Council opinion on the updated convergence programme of Lithuania, as set out in SEC(2008)217/2, for transmission to the Council.

**11. COMMISSION DECISION CONCERNING A PROCEEDING UNDER ARTICLE 8(2) OF COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) 139/2004 ON THE CONTROL OF CONCENTRATIONS BETWEEN UNDERTAKINGS AND ARTICLE 57 OF THE EEA AGREEMENT (CASE COMP/M.4726 – THOMSON CORPORATION/REUTERS GROUP)
(C(2008)654 TO /8)**

The Commission

- took note of the opinion of the Advisory Committee on Concentrations of 6 February in C(2008)654/3;
- took note of the final report of the Hearing Officer of 12 February in C(2008)654/6;
- adopted, in the authentic language (English), the decision set out in C(2008)654/7, declaring the notified operation compatible with the common market and with operation of the Agreement on the European Economic Area subject to full compliance with the commitments made, as set out in document C(2008)654/8;
- decided to notify the decision set out in C(2008)654/7 and /8 to the undertaking concerned, together with the final report of the Hearing Officer and the opinion of the Advisory Committee;
- decided that the most important parts of the decision and the opinion of the Advisory Committee and the report of the Hearing Officer would be published in the official languages in the Official Journal of the European Union (with business secrets removed);
- decided to publish the decision (with business secrets removed) on the Internet.

12. RELATIONS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

VISIT TO UKRAINE AND THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA (KIEV AND CHISINAU, 14 AND 15 FEBRUARY) (SEC(2008)251)

The Commission took note of the information note from Ms FERRERO-WALDNER in SEC(2008)251.

13. OTHER BUSINESS

***MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON MULTILINGUALISM (BRUSSELS,
15 FEBRUARY)***

(SEC(2008)252)

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr ORBAN in SEC(2008)252.

**14. COMMISSION COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,
THE COUNCIL AND THE COURT OF AUDITORS – ACTION PLAN ON
THE COMMISSION'S AUDIT STRATEGY IN THE FIELD OF THE
STRUCTURAL FUNDS**

(COM(2008)97 TO /4; SEC(2008)229)

The PRESIDENT introduced the action plan to strengthen supervision where management of structural actions is shared with the Member States, which Ms HÜBNER and Mr ŠPIDLA were presenting to the Commission, in agreement with the PRESIDENT himself and Mr KALLAS. He began by locating the action plan in the context of the 2006 discharge procedure and reminding the meeting of the importance of focusing on this exercise, given the unique opportunity it offered to engage in a dialogue with the discharge authority and the Court of Auditors on the management of the Structural Funds.

He highlighted the highly political nature of the exercise and what was at stake in terms of relations with the European Parliament, and underlined the importance of providing clear answers to the questions raised about how the Commission intended to correct the shortcomings that had been found.

He reminded the meeting, furthermore, that the Council had been in favour of granting the discharge, with the exception of one Member State, whose no-vote had been prompted not by the action of the Commission, but by the number of shortcomings identified in the management of the funds by the other Member States. He therefore felt that the Council recommendation in favour of the 2006

discharge represented progress in acknowledging the responsibility of the Member States for management of the Structural Funds, but stressed that this in no way diminished the Commission's responsibility for taking proper measures in the absence of appropriate checks by the Member States.

The PRESIDENT referred more specifically to the two main points of concern highlighted by the rapporteur of Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control (COCOBU), viz. the Structural Funds and the EU contribution to the reconstruction of Iraq.

The question of the Structural Funds was particularly complex and sensitive. The PRESIDENT reminded the meeting that the action plan was a response to the COCOBU's request to question the Commission Members concerned for a second time on 25 February, after which the decision would be taken either to grant the Commission the discharge or to defer the discharge until October 2008.

The PRESIDENT presented the action plan, which consisted of 29 measures to be implemented as quickly as possible and by specific deadlines by the Commission departments in cooperation with the Member States. He also drew the Members' attention to the indicators for measuring the effectiveness of each measure and the requirement for regular reports on the implementation of the plan. The measures sought particularly to step up audits of high-risk organisations, to ensure more rapid follow-up to the results of audits and, if necessary, to proceed more quickly to suspension of payments and recovery.

The implementation of these measures called for close cooperation between the Commission and the Member States. The PRESIDENT noted that the Commission was working on improving the checks carried out at national level and the information that had to be transmitted to it on the financial corrections and recoveries carried out. He also mentioned the importance the Commission attached to the annual audit summaries presented by the Member States and to compliance with the 15 February deadline for their submission. Many of the Member States had now sent in their summaries, which were currently being examined by the

Commission departments to check their quality and their relevance to improving the standard of the assurances given about the management of the Structural Funds.

He emphasised in this respect the balanced nature of the action plan, which clearly set out the division of responsibilities between the various players. The Member States were responsible for establishing an effective internal system of controls, whereas the Commission was responsible for monitoring this system, which of course required the close cooperation of the Member States. He highlighted the very practical nature of the measures proposed, but also the priority the Commission was attaching to this action plan by sending it to the other institutions as an official document. He felt that the action plan was timely and that the Commission had reacted speedily and correctly to Parliament's request.

Finally, he reminded the meeting of the positive experience of the action plan in the field of research and urged the Commission Members, in their contacts with the representatives of the discharge authority, to emphasise the Commission's determination to do whatever was necessary to resolve the problems that had been identified.

Turning to Iraq, the PRESIDENT reported that the Commission departments had in recent weeks provided the COCOBU with all the available information on the operations in question and their financial implications; further explanations could be given orally by Ms FERRERO-WALDNER at the COCOBU meeting on 25 February.

He pointed out that, in the absence of effective infrastructure and national administrations on the spot, the Commission's support for the reconstruction of Iraq essentially had to be channelled through the United Nations trust fund, which had regular reporting and monitoring mechanisms of its own. He emphasised the importance of being able to account for exactly how the funds from the Community budget were being used.

Winding up, the PRESIDENT felt that a decision by the COCOBU to defer the discharge would serve no useful interinstitutional purpose, given that it would not

be possible to add any new element to the action plan between now and autumn 2008 and also given the fact that the Court of Auditors had recognised that major progress had been made in areas other than the Structural Funds, particularly in agriculture.

Ms HÜBNER in turn briefly reviewed the background to the action plan, referring in particular to the system of monitoring by the Commission departments and the national authorities, but also to the main results of the audits carried out by the Court of Auditors.

She explained that the Court's analysis was based on an extrapolation of the error rates found in a sample. The Court had examined a sample of 177 projects, 77 of them in the field of the European Regional Development Fund, 60 in the European Social Fund, 30 in the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund and 10 under the Cohesion Fund, out of a total of approximately 700 000 projects in the period 2000-2006. She noted that the Court had identified errors, such as a lack of full documentation or failure to comply with the rules on public procurement, affecting expenditure totalling 65 million euros.

Ms HÜBNER stressed that the Court had not, however, identified any cases of fraud, and that in the case of 30 million of the 65 million euros mentioned the errors had already been corrected or would not have any impact on the budget.

She then referred to the financial corrections carried out in 2006 and 2007 in relation to the expenditure in the field of the Structural and Cohesion Funds for the periods 2000-2006 and 1994-1999. She explained that the corrections resulting from the audits carried out by the Commission departments and the Court of Auditors in 2006 amounted to 502 million euros for the period 2000-2006 and 283 million euros for the period 1994-1999. Further corrections amounting to 359 million euros for the period 2000-2006 resulted from the audit work carried out in 2007.

She also reported on the audits carried out by the departments for which she was responsible (a total of 117 in 2006 and 101 in 2007), the action plans implemented in the Member States, and the payment suspension and correction procedures that

had been launched. She particularly stressed the importance of strengthening the *ex ante* controls at Member State level.

Ms HÜBNER then cited the key elements of the action plan, which was the result of close cooperation for which she thanked the PRESIDENT, Mr KALLAS and Mr ŠPIDLA, their departments and the departments for which she was responsible, as well as the Secretariat-General. She firmly believed that the action plan covered all the necessary areas, that it would effectively improve the system of monitoring, preventing and correcting errors, that it would help to bring about a lasting change in risk management at Member State level, and that it complemented the Commission's existing audit strategy and action plan for an integrated internal control framework.

She also pointed to the direct links between the proposed actions and the recommendations of the Court of Auditors, as well as the strict requirements regarding regular reporting, including the interim progress report due on 31 October 2008 at the latest, and a final report to be sent by 31 January 2009.

Lastly, Ms HÜBNER reported on the contacts between her departments and the Member States to clarify the obligations under Article 53b of the Financial Regulation as regards annual summaries. She explained that the Member States had been consulted on several occasions about the content of the guidelines for the annual summaries and that in January 2008 she had sent a reminder to the ministers responsible in the Member States about the 15 February deadline for submitting the annual summaries.

She was pleased to see that a very large number of Member States had now sent their summaries to the Commission. She also announced that the other Member States concerned would be asked to submit their annual summaries as required by the Financial Regulation.

Mr ŠPIDLA endorsed Ms HÜBNER's remarks. He completed the presentation by referring to the main improvements being proposed, namely the development of

monitoring mechanisms to reduce the error rate and corrective measures that could help to encourage the Member States to improve their monitoring systems.

He emphasised the importance of taking into account the specific constitutional features of the Member States and the administrative differences resulting from them, and the differences between the various programming periods for the Structural Funds and the associated monitoring systems. He also mentioned the importance of the 2006 financial year and its significance as the final programming year of the 2000-2006 period, but also the importance of evaluating the period as a whole.

Mr KALLAS took the floor to inform the Commission of his contacts with the representatives of the discharge authority. In his view, deferring the discharge would be counterproductive, because it would not take into account the major improvements on the 2005 financial year and its operational significance would be very limited.

He felt that the action plan sent out a positive signal about the Commission's determination to take effective action to correct the shortcomings identified. He emphasised the importance of the hearings before the discharge authority on 25 February and asked the Commission Members to pursue the constructive approach towards the discharge authority and to explain the proposed measures properly. He expressed his willingness to provide any assistance required.

On the subject of aid for the reconstruction of Iraq, Mr KALLAS agreed that financing via the United Nations trust fund was a useful and essential instrument in the current situation.

On the latter subject, Ms FERRERO-WALDNER reported on her contacts with the representatives of the discharge authority. She reminded the meeting of the favourable opinion of the Court of Auditors in its report on the 2006 financial year, which was a marked improvement on 2005, and the current position of the discharge authority.

More specifically, Ms FERRERO-WALDNER described the important role of the United Nations trust fund in the multilateral cooperation for the reconstruction of Iraq and the reasons why the Commission, supported by the Council and the European Parliament, had opted for this instrument for pooling international efforts.

She explained that in 2006 the EU's contributions to the United Nations and World Bank funds for the reconstruction of Iraq amounted to some 200 million euros. These funds were the only reliable way of providing aid, given the lack of sufficient EU capacity on the ground and the security risks such a presence would involve.

The Commission then held a brief exchange of views in which the following aspects in particular were raised:

- support for the action plan;
- recognition that the action plan complemented other important financial control measures already implemented by the Commission in the areas of shared management and the Structural Funds;
- the sensitive nature of this issue, which was extremely important for the public perception of European institutions as a whole;
- the joint responsibility of the Member States for monitoring expenditure under shared management, and the importance of invoking the payment suspension and financial correction instruments, where necessary;
- an awareness of the specific nature of the international institutions, not least as regards financial rules;
- the need in communication activities relating to this issue to stress that the measures proposed in the action plan complemented other supervisory instruments that were already in place.

The PRESIDENT wound up the exchange of views by thanking the Commission Members and all the departments for their contributions. He noted the Commission's unanimous support for the action plan and stressed its political and symbolic

importance and the collective solidarity it represented, and urged Members to do everything possible to demonstrate the Commission's willingness to respond effectively to the Court's recommendations and to find lasting solutions to the shortcomings identified.

At the end of this exchange of views, the Commission adopted the action plan in COM(2008)97/4 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the Court of Auditors and the Member States, and also to national parliaments.

It also instructed the departments:

- to implement the action plan by the deadlines indicated;
- to report quarterly to the GPA steering group on progress in implementing the action plan;
- to present an interim progress report to the Commission by 31 October 2008;
- to present a final report on implementation of the action plan to the Commission by 31 January 2009, accompanied, if necessary, by a revised and updated version of the plan for 2009.

15. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(SEC(2008)212)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group held on Friday 15 February (SEC(2008)212).

It paid particular attention to the following:

15.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

i) Preparation for Parliament's February part-session

(point 1.2 of the IRG record)

In accordance with the rules in force, the Commission authorised the Commission Members responsible, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms WALLSTRÖM and any other Members associated, to take a position on Parliament's amendments to its proposals.

It paid particular attention to the following:

Codecision – 1st reading

- Requirements for accreditation and market surveillance relating to the marketing of products (Regulation) – BRIE report – 2007/0029 (COD)
- Common framework for the marketing of products (Decision) – SCHALDEMOSE report – 2007/0030 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)673/3 and /4.

- Application of certain national technical rules to products lawfully marketed in another Member State (Regulation) – STUBB report – 2007/0028 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)675/2.

- Population and housing censuses (Regulation) – JUKNEVIČIENĖ report – 2007/0032 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)744 and /2.

15.2. RELATIONS WITH THE COUNCIL

ii) Programming of Council business

(SI(2008)85)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2008)85 on the Council meetings between 14 and 27 February.

iii) Preparation for the Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER) meeting of 20 February and of the meeting of G8 Ministers responsible for energy (Aomori, 8 June)

(point 2.3 of the IRG record)

- Ministerial declaration on an international partnership for cooperation on energy efficiency

The Commission authorised Mr PIEBALGS to sign, on behalf of the Commission, at the meeting of the G8 Ministers responsible for energy on 8 June, the ministerial declaration as set out in Annex to SI(2008)79/2, following the line set out in that note.

iv) Preparation for meeting of Economic and Financial Committee of 21 and 22 February

(point 2.4 of the IRG record)

- Commission statement on the follow-up to the conclusions of the Council (Economic and Financial Affairs) of 9 October 2007 on financial stability

The Commission authorised staff to present, in the Council's preparatory bodies, the declaration statement in the annex to SI(2008)78/2, following the line set out in SI(2008)78.

**v) Preparation for Council meeting (Justice and Home Affairs)
(Brussels, 28 February)**

(point 2.5 of the IRG record)

- Creation of the European Police Office (EUROPOL) – Questions outstanding

The Commission authorised Mr FRATTINI, at the Council meeting (Justice and Home Affairs) of 28 February 2008, to support the Presidency compromise and to make a statement following the line set out in SI(2008)86.

vi) Results of the Council meeting (General Affairs and External Relations) – session on External Relations (Brussels, 18-19 February)

(SI(2008)109; SEC(2008)253)

Relations with Kosovo

Supplementing his note, Mr REHN reported on the political developments following the declaration of independence proclaimed by the Kosovo assembly on Sunday 17 February.

Mr REHN pointed out that the text approved by the Kosovo assembly included a number of very important political guarantees, namely the commitment to respect and promote the rights of all the communities, and the acceptance of the obligations in the Ahtisaari plan; but this had not prevented certain isolated protest movements in a number of Serbian towns and areas and in Mitrovica, some of them involving violence. In this connection, he insisted on the importance of keeping a close eye on the security situation of the diplomatic missions and of the Commission delegation in Belgrade.

He also outlined the diplomatic measures taken by Serbia following Kosovo's declaration of independence. He reported on the contacts between various players within the United Nations. He then mentioned the main positions expressed by the Member States and the unity that had been maintained at the

meeting of the Council (General Affairs and External Relations) on 18 February concerning the recognition of the new state, and the probable development in these positions, in accordance with international law and national practices in this area.

Mr REHN's conclusion was that there was generally a strong case for the Commission to make use of all the instruments at its disposal to support the economic and political development of the various States of the western Balkans, and to promote their future within Europe.

The Commission held a brief exchange of views during which the following points were raised:

- the vital importance for the EU to emphasise its insistence on respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities and of those belonging to these minorities;
- the sensitive nature of the issue of the recognition of the new state for a number of countries in the region, including certain Member States of the Union;
- the need to prevent phenomena that could arise in several Member States in connection with Kosovo's declaration of independence;
- the importance of stabilising the entire region of the western Balkans, particularly by confirming the European prospects of the countries concerned;
- the usefulness of certain projects that could bring the Balkan countries much closer, such as the Balkan Union in the field of transport, the inaugural conference of which was due to be held shortly in Belgrade;
- the importance for the Commission to restate the values on which the EU is based, particularly by intensive implementation of a number of several

Community policies, particularly in the areas of education, training and youth;

- the importance of keeping a careful watch over the communication aspects, so that the Commission's position would not be misinterpreted.

More generally, the Commission noted the importance of the EU's unremitting support for the countries of the western Balkans, something which would constitute a factor of peace and stability for the whole region.

The PRESIDENT concluded by thanking Mr REHN. He noted that the Member States were able to agree on a common position, and stressed the importance of supporting the European civilian mission which would be deployed in Kosovo and the request to the Commission to continue its efforts in the region, for instance in the negotiations with Croatia in the context of the European perspective offered to all the countries of the region.

The Commission took note of this information and of Mr REHN's note in SEC(2008)253.

15.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

vii) Preparation for the February part-session of Parliament – Oral questions

(point 3.4 of the IRG record)

- Questions H-1041/07, H-1043/07, H-1044/07, H-1045/07, H-1047/07, H-1049/07, H-1051/07, H-1053/07, H-1055/07, H-1057/07, H-1059/07, H-1061/07, H-1062/07, H-1063/07, H-1064/07, H-1066/07, H-1067/07, H-1069/07, H-1071/07, H-1072/07, H-1074/07, H-0002/08, H-0003/08, H-0004/08, H-0006/08, H-0008/08, H-0010/08, H-0012/08, H-0014/08, H-0015/08, H-0016/08, H-0018/08, H-0019/08, H-0020/08, H-0021/08, H-0022/08, H-0025/08, H-0026/08, H-0027/08, H-0030/08, H-0032/08, H-0033/08, H-0034/08, H-0035/08, H-0036/08, H-0037/08, H-0038/08, H-0039/08, H-0040/08, H-0042/08, H-0043/08, H-0044/08, H-0045/08,

H-0046/08, H-0048/08, H-0049/08, H-0051/08, H-0053/08, H-0054/08,
H-0055/08, H-0057/08, H-0060/08, H-0062/08, H-0063/08, H-0066/08,
H-0068/08, H-0070/08, H-0071/08, H-0073/08, H-0074/08

The Commission approved the draft answers in SP(2008)747 to /4, following the agreement reached between the Chefs de cabinet on further revisions of certain draft answers, set out in SP(2008)747/5 et seq.

**15.4. RELATIONS WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE,
THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, THE EUROPEAN
OMBUDSMAN AND NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS**

- viii) Commission's legislative and work programme for 2008 –
programming of opinions of Economic and Social Committee and
Committee of the Regions – List of optional opinions**
(point 4.1 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved the programming of the opinions of the Economic and Social Committee and of the Committee of the Regions as set out in annex to SC(2008)9 and SR(2008)6, for transmission to the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions respectively.

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The meeting closed at 15.47 hours.