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THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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## **PRESS RELEASE**

3292nd Council meeting

### **General Affairs**

Brussels, 11 February 2014

President

**Evangelos Venizelos**

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

# **P R E S S**

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Rue de la Loi 175 B – 1048 BRUSSELS Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319 Fax: +32 (0)2 281 8026  
[press.office@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:press.office@consilium.europa.eu) <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press>

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## **Main results of the Council**

### ***Preparation for the March European Council***

*The Council examined a draft annotated agenda for the European Council meeting to be held on 20 and 21 March. The next European Council will focus on economic policy: it will conclude the first phase of the European Semester, discuss industrial competitiveness and hold a debate on the draft framework for climate and energy between 2020 to 2030. Leaders will also look at the state of preparations of the upcoming EU-Africa summit.*

### ***Genetically modified maize***

*The Council could not reach a qualified majority either in favour or against a Commission proposal to authorise the placing on the market for cultivation of the genetically modified maize 1507, which is resistant to certain insects (butterflies pests). "The Hellenic presidency commits to hold a debate on GMOs in the Environment Council", said the president of the Council, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece, Mr. Venizelos.*

*In accordance with the applicable rules it is now up to the Commission to authorise the maize 1507.*

### ***Switzerland***

*The Council discussed the results of the recent Swiss popular vote on the initiative "against mass immigration". It underlined that the introduction of quotas on immigration from the EU citizens goes against the principle of free movement of persons between the EU and Switzerland as enshrined in the bilateral agreement in place.*

*Without discussion, the Council adopted: **Sabine Lautenschläger appointed vice-chairperson of the ECB supervisory board, CO2 emissions reduction from new light commercial vehicles and Council adopts directives for the reform of public procurement.***

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- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
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**PARTICIPANTS**

**Belgium:**

Mr Didier REYNDERS

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

**Bulgaria:**

Mr Kristian VIGENIN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Czech Republic:**

Mr Lubomír ZAORÁLEK

Minister of Foreign Affairs

**Denmark:**

Mr Martin LIDEGAARD

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Germany:**

Mr Michael ROTH

Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office

**Estonia:**

Mr Matti MAASIKAS

Permanent Representative

**Ireland:**

Mr Paschal DONOHOE

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

**Greece:**

Mr Evangelos VENIZELOS  
Mr Dimitrios KOURKOULAS

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs  
State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

**Spain:**

Mr Íñigo MÉNDEZ DE VIGO Y MONTOJO

State Secretary for the European Union

**France:**

Mr Thierry REPENTIN

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

**Croatia:**

Ms Vesna PUSIĆ

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign and  
European Affairs

**Italy:**

Mr Enzo MOAVERO MILANESI

Minister responsible for European Affairs

**Cyprus:**

Mr Ioannis KASOULIDES

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Latvia:**

Mr Edgars RINKĒVIČS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Lithuania:**

Mr Vytautas LEŠKEVIČIUS

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Luxembourg:**

Mr Jean ASSELBORN

Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Minister for  
Asylum and Immigration

**Hungary:**

Ms Enikő GYŐRI

State Secretary for EU Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Malta:**

Mr Louis GRECH

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for European Affairs  
and Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto

**Netherlands:**

Mr Frans TIMMERMANS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Austria:**

Mr Sebastian KURZ

Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

**Poland:**

Mr Piotr SERAFIN

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Portugal:**

Mr Bruno MAÇÃES

Secretary of State of European Affairs

**Romania:**

Mr George CIAMBA

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Slovenia:**

Mr Igor SENČAR

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Slovakia:**

Mr Peter JAVORČÍK

State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Finland:**

Mr Alexander STUBB

Minister for European Affairs and Foreign Trade

**Sweden:**

Ms Birgitta OHLSSON

Minister for EU Affairs

**United Kingdom:**

Mr David LIDINGTON

Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

.....

**Commission:**

Ms Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ

Vice President

Mr Tonio BORG

Membre

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**ITEMS DEBATED**

**Presidency programme**

The Hellenic presidency presented, in public session, its work programme for the duration of its term of office (January to June 2014) . This was followed by an exchange of views of the Council.

**Preparation for the March European Council**

The Council examined a draft annotated agenda for the European Council meeting to be held on 20 and 21 March 2014 (5153/14).

The spring European Council is expected to focus on:

- Growth, competitiveness and jobs; Heads of State or government are expected to conclude the first phase of the European Semester; discuss industrial competitiveness building on the Commissions recent Communication on the topic; and hold a first policy debate on a framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030.
- External relations: leaders will look at the state of preparations for the upcoming EU-Africa summit and have an in-depth policy debate on EU-Africa relations.

The Council will hold a further discussion, on the basis of draft European Council conclusions, at its meeting on 18 March 2014

**Genetically modified maize**

A Commission proposal for a decision to authorise the placing on the market for cultivation of the genetically modified maize 1507, which is resistant to certain insects (butterflies pests), was presented to the Council for adoption ([16120/13](#)).

No agreement was reached either in favour of or against the authorisation.

Following the submission of an initial application for authorisation of the maize 1507, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was consulted, as provided for by directive 2001/18. EFSA issued several favourable scientific opinions according to which the placing on the market of the maize 1507 is unlikely to have adverse effects on human and animal health or the environment.

On that basis, the European Commission drew up a proposal for authorising the maize and presented it to a regulatory committee (the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health, SCoFCAH). At its meeting in February 2009, the SCoFCAH was unable to reach the qualified majority necessary to deliver an opinion for or against the authorisation proposed by the Commission. In the absence of an opinion it was up to the Council to act on the Commission proposal within a three-month period (running from 12 November 2013).

Now that the Council could not reach a qualified majority neither for nor against the proposal, it is up to the Commission to authorise the maize 1507.

### **Any other business**

#### **Switzerland**

The Council had a discussion on the results of the recent Swiss popular vote on the initiative “against mass immigration”. Ministers were updated by the Presidency and the Commission and heard initial legal analysis from the Council legal service. The Council underlined that the introduction of quotas on immigration from the EU citizens goes against the principle of free movement of persons between the EU and Switzerland as enshrined in the bilateral agreement in place.

On behalf of the Council the presidency made the following statement:

"The Council of the EU respects the internal democratic procedure of Switzerland and the outcome of the referendum. On the other hand, the Council expects that the Swiss confederation will honour its obligations arising from its agreements and treaties with the European Union or within the frame of international public law. The four fundamental freedoms are an integral part of the EU-Switzerland relations. But the internal market and its four pillars are indivisible."

#### **Natural disaster in Slovenia, Croatia and Greece**

The Slovenian, Croatian and Greek delegations informed the Council about natural disasters in their countries. Slovenia and parts of Croatia were hit by severe devastation, caused by extreme ice storm and sleet. The Greek island Cephalonia was hit by a strong earthquake.



**Black Sea**

The Romanian delegation informed the Council about the results of the conference on the sustainable development of the blue economy of the Black Sea held in Bucharest on 30 January.

**Adriatic and Ionian region**

The presidency presented the outcome of a high level conference on Adriatic and Ionian region held in Athens last week.

**OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

**GENERAL AFFAIRS**

**Hercule III programme to counter fraud and protect taxpayers' money\***

The Council adopted a regulation setting up the Hercule III programme to counter fraud and protect the taxpayers' money in the years 2014 to 2020 ([39/13](#) + [5586/14 ADD I](#))<sup>1</sup>. This follows a first-reading agreement reached with the European Parliament.

Hercule III is aimed at preventing and combating fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities affecting the financial interests of the EU, including cigarette smuggling and counterfeiting. The programme provides for technical assistance, such as specialised equipment and information technology, training, including exchange of best practices, and other actions. The financial envelope of the programme amounts to EUR 104.9 million (in current prices) out of which at least 70% are earmarked for technical assistance and a maximum of 25% and 5% respectively for training and other actions.

Hercule III builds on the two precedent programmes Hercule and Hercule II covering the period 2004-2006 and 2007-2013 respectively.

**EU - Switzerland: Free movement of persons - Croatia**

The Council adopted a decision on the signing, on behalf of the European Union and its member states, of a protocol to the agreement with Switzerland, on the free movement of persons, regarding the participation of the Republic of Croatia as a contracting party, following its accession to the European Union ([14381/13](#)).

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<sup>1</sup> The Swedish delegation abstained and the UK delegation voted against.

**ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS**

**European Central Bank**

The Council adopted a decision appointing Sabine Lautenschläger as vice-chairperson of the newly-created supervisory board of the European Central Bank ([5933/14](#) + [COR 1](#) + [5932/14](#)).

Under the single supervisory mechanism (SSM) – one of the key elements of Europe's banking union – the ECB will have direct oversight of eurozone banks.

For more information see press release [6336/14](#).

**JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS**

**Readmission agreement EU-Azerbaijan**

The Council adopted a decision concerning the signature of the agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation ([15593/13](#), [15594/13](#))

The text of the Agreement will be published together with the decision on its conclusion.

**Europol - Appointment of a Deputy Director**

The Council decided to appoint Mr. Wilhelmus Martinus van Gemert as Deputy Director of Europol from 1 May 2014 to 30 April 2018 ([5209/14](#)).

**European Asylum Support Office**

The Council adopted a decision on the signing, on behalf of the European Union, of the Arrangement on the modalities of the participation in the European Asylum Support Office<sup>1</sup> of the Swiss Confederation ([18075/13](#), [18078/13](#)), the Principality of Liechtenstein ([18112/13](#), [18115/13](#)) the Republic of Iceland ([18122/13](#), [18123/13](#)) and the Kingdom of Norway ([18139/13](#), [18140/13](#)).

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation 439/2010 (*OJ L 132*, 29.5.2010, p. 11).

Following the signature, the Council also decided to forward the decision on the conclusion of the Arrangement to the European Parliament for its consent.

The European Asylum Support Office (<http://easo.europa.eu/>) plays a key role in the concrete development of the Common European Asylum System. It was established with the aim of enhancing practical cooperation on asylum matters and helping member states fulfil their European and international obligations to give protection to people in need.

## **CONSUMER PROTECTION**

### **Consumer programme for 2014-2020**

The Council adopted a regulation establishing a consumer programme for the years 2014-2020 ([PE-CONS 107/13](#)).

The programme is intended to contribute to growth by empowering citizens to play a full role in the single market through a high level of consumer protection. It contains specific objectives and eleven actions aimed at achieving these objectives with a view to facilitating the implementation of the European Consumer Agenda.

The Consumer Agenda, which was endorsed by the Council in October 2012<sup>1</sup>, is the EU's strategy to support consumers by ensuring the safety of the products and services made available to them, by informing and educating them, by supporting bodies that represent them, by strengthening their rights, by giving them access to justice and redress and by ensuring that consumer legislation is enforced.

The funding of the programme will reach nearly EUR 200 million for the seven-year period.

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<sup>1</sup> ([http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/intm/132794.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/intm/132794.pdf)).

**ENVIRONMENT**

**CO2 emissions from new light commercial vehicles**

The Council adopted a regulation amending regulation (EU) No [510/2011](#) to define the modalities for reaching the 2020 target to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from new light commercial vehicles ([PE-CONS 106/13](#), [106/13 COR1](#), [5584/14 ADD 1](#)).

From 2020, a target of 147 g CO<sub>2</sub>/km is set for the average emissions of new light commercial vehicles registered in the Union.

*For more information see press release [6265/14](#).*

**INTERNAL MARKET**

**Reform of public procurement**

The Council adopted a legislative package for modernisation of public procurement in the EU, which is made up of:

- a directive on public procurement (replacing directive [2004/18/EC](#)): ([PE-CONS 74/13](#) and [5862/14 ADD 1](#));
- a directive on procurement by entities operating in the utilities sectors: water, energy, transport and postal services (replacing directive [2004/17/EC](#)): ([PE-CONS 75/13](#)); and
- a directive on the award of concession contracts: ([PE-CONS 73/13](#) and [5860/14 ADD 1 REV 1](#)).

This review, which is one of the twelve priority actions of the *Single Market Act*, is a major overhaul of public procurement rules across the EU. It will improve a wide range of areas applying to the procurement of goods, works and services.

*For more information see press release [6337/14](#).*

## **Construction products**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption by the Commission of a regulation on the conditions for making a declaration of performance on construction products available on a website ([15823/13](#)).

The new regulation sets out the conditions governing the electronic processing of the declarations of performance in order that they may be made available on a website. Those conditions permit the use of new information technologies and reduce costs to manufacturers of construction products and the construction sector as a whole.

Regulation 305/2011, which lays down harmonised conditions for the marketing of construction products, obliges manufacturers to draw up a declaration of performance when a construction product that is covered by a harmonised standard or conforms to a European Technical Assessment issued for that product is placed on the market. A copy of that declaration must be supplied either in paper form or by electronic means.

The regulation is a delegated act pursuant to article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the act can enter into force, unless the European Parliament objects to it.

## **TRADE POLICY**

### **Anti-dumping - Dicyandiamide - China**

The Council adopted a regulation repealing the anti-dumping duty on imports of dicyandiamide originating in China following an expiry review pursuant to regulation 1225/2009 (the EU's "basic anti-dumping regulation") ([5274/1/14 REV 1](#)).

### **Generalised scheme of preferences - El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama**

The Council decided not to object to the adoption by the Commission of a regulation adding El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama to the list of countries benefiting from tariff preferences under the EU's special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance ("GSP+").

The regulation is a delegated act pursuant to article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. Now that the Council has given its consent, the act can enter into force unless the European Parliament objects.

## **Dual use items**

The Council confirmed an agreement reached with the European Parliament on a draft regulation aimed at enabling the adoption of delegated acts for the purpose of updating certain annexes of regulation 428/2009 on the control of exports, the transfer, brokering and transfer of dual use items (5480/14 + COR 1 + ADD 1 + COR 1).

Agreement with the Parliament was reached on 17 December. The Parliament had adopted its position at first reading in October 2012.

The Council's position at first reading will be adopted without discussion at a forthcoming meeting, after finalisation of the text. It will then be sent to the Parliament for adoption without amendment at second reading.

## **CUSTOMS UNION**

### **United Nations firearms protocol**

The Council approved the conclusion, on behalf of the EU, of the protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime ([12324/13](#)).

The Firearms Protocol, which entered into force in 2005, is the only legally binding instrument on small arms at the global level<sup>1</sup>.

## **AGRICULTURE**

### **Spirit drinks - Amendment of the list of geographical indications**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission's amendment to annex II to regulation 110/2008 on the definition, description, presentation, labelling and the protection of geographical indications of spirit drinks ([5178/14](#))

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/firearmsprotocol.html>

The amendment on annex II adjusts the specifications of the categories of some spirit drinks such as those from:

- category 16: spirits obtained by maceration and distillation for which the list of fruits and berries used in this category is extended;
- category 24: where the origin of ethyl alcohol used in aquavit is better defined.

This Commission regulation is subject to the so called regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the regulation, unless the European Parliament objects.

## **TRANSPORT**

### **Air operations of third country operators - requirements and procedures**

The Council decided not to oppose adoption by the Commission of a regulation laying down technical requirements and administrative procedures related to air operations of third country operators pursuant to regulation 216/2008 (16870/13).

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

## **TRANSPARENCY**

### **Public access to documents**

On 11 February 2014, the Council approved:

- the reply to confirmatory application No 01/c/01/14 (5048/14)
- the reply to confirmatory application No 02/c/01/14 (5051/14).



**APPOINTMENTS**

**Committee of the Regions**

The Council appointed Mr Erik FLYVHOLM, Mr Bent HANSEN and Mr Simon Mønsted STRANGE (Denmark) as members of the Committee of the Regions for the remainder of the current term of office, which runs until 25 January 2015 ([5664/14](#)).

**Article 255 panel**

The Council appointed the following persons as members of the panel provided for in article 255 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union for a period of four years from 1 March 2014 ([5475/14](#)):

- Mr Jean-Marc Sauvé
- Mr Luigi Berlinguer
- Ms Pauline Koskelo
- Lord Mance
- Mr Péter Paczolay
- Mr Christian Timmermans
- Mr Andreas Vosskuhle.

The article 255 panel's task is to give an opinion on candidates' suitability to perform the duties of judge and advocates-general of the Court of Justice and the General Court before the governments of the member states make the appointments.

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