



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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"I/A" ITEM NOTE

from Presidency

to: Permanent Representatives Committee / Council

Subject : Report on proceedings in the Council's other configurations

Delegations will find below a list of the most important decisions taken and issues currently under discussion in the Council's other configurations. This document should enable delegations to draw the Presidency's attention to any point which they believe has implications for the proper organisation of proceedings in the areas covered.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

At its **meeting on 10 November 2009** the Council discussed i.a.:

Exit Strategies - Support measures for the financial sector

The Council held an exchange of views on exit strategy as regards measures taken by member states to support the financial sector, focusing on methods and timing for the phasing-out of bank guarantee schemes which were put in place during the financial crisis.

It requested the Economic and Financial Committee to continue work on principles and on a tentative timeframe for the coordinated withdrawal of the support measures, whilst taking account of the situation in individual member states, and to report back as soon as possible.

Sustainability of public finances

The Council discussed the Commission communication 'Long-term sustainability of public finances for a recovering economy' and the associated report, and adopted conclusions underlining the need to return to sustainable fiscal positions, starting with the implementation of the agreed principles for the exit strategy endorsed by the Council in October 2009. It stressed i.a. that the adoption of measures to counteract the financial effects of the expected gains in longevity, such as the extension of working lives and an increase in retirement age in line with gains in longevity, is a key issue and should merit serious consideration in Member States and invited the Commission, together with the Economic Policy Committee and the Economic and Financial Committee, to further develop methodologies for assessing the long-term sustainability of public finances in time for the next Sustainability report. The Council also took note of an updated code of conduct for implementation of the EU's stability and growth pact. The new code will be applied in the preparation of the next batch of member state stability and convergence programmes.

Reduction of administrative burdens

The Council adopted conclusions acknowledging that important progress has been achieved both at EU level and in the Member States in taking the Better Regulation Agenda forward, but considers that more needs to be done by all parties concerned. Therefore, the Council called for reinforced joint efforts by all relevant EU institutions and the Member States to reach the agreed target of reducing the administrative burdens on business arising from EU legislation by 25 per cent by end

2012 across all 13 priority areas and with the aim of quickly increasing effects felt by businesses as soon as is practicable. Moreover it invited the Commission to continue to closely monitor progress and report annually to the spring European Council on the implementation of reduction measures as well as on significant changes in administrative burdens. The Council committed itself and invites the European Parliament to avoid adding unnecessary Administrative Burdens to legislative proposals in general. The Council looks forward to prioritizing the processing in all relevant Council formations of the reduction proposals that the Commission has already made and encourages the European Parliament to take a similar approach.

Statistics

The Council adopted conclusions endorsing the 2009 EFC Status Report on Information Requirements in the EMU. It welcomed i.a. the Report on the implementation of the Communication on reduction of response burden, simplification, and priority-setting providing an update of the commitments given and ongoing actions and reviewed the progress made with the efforts to enhance independence, integrity and accountability of the European Statistical System and the development of statistical governance structure.

Administrative cooperation in the field of taxation

The Council examined a draft directive aimed at strengthening cooperation between the member states in the field of taxation. It reached agreement on the text, whilst noting political reservations by the Austrian and Luxembourg delegations, apart from the need for further work on automatic exchange of information. It asked the Permanent Representatives Committee to re-discuss these issues so that a final position can be taken at the Council meeting on 2 December.

Excise duties on tobacco products

The Council reached political agreement on a draft directive aimed at updating EU rules on the structure and minimum rates of excise duties on tobacco products. The directive will be formally adopted without further discussion at a forthcoming Council meeting, once the legal text has been finalised.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS (Budget)

At its **meeting on 18 November October 2009** the Council discussed i.a.:

Management of the EU budget - annual report from the Court of Auditors

The Council took note of the presentation by the President of the Court of Auditors, Mr Vitor Caldeira, of the annual report from the Court on the implementation of the EU budget, which covers the financial year 2008. It asked the Permanent Representatives Committee to examine the report, with a view to drawing up a recommendation to the European Parliament on the discharge to be given to the Commission for implementation of the budget for 2008.

Council's second reading of the draft budget for 2010

Following its meeting with the European Parliament, and on the basis of the preparatory work by the Permanent Representatives Committee, the Council reached an agreement on the second reading of the draft general budget for 2010, which overall confirms its first reading as amended by amending letters Nos 1 to 2. The Council also agreed on the revised preliminary draft amending budget No 10 to the general budget for 2009, as agreed with the European Parliament at the conciliation meeting, as proposed by the Commission. Furthermore, the Council agreed on the revision of multiannual financial framework in order to secure the full financing of the EERP in 2010.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

At its meeting on 20 November 2009, the Council discussed i.a.:

Conservation of fisheries resources through technical measures

Following an in-depth examination of the proposed Council Regulation concerning the conservation of fisheries resources through technical measures, the Council agreed to continue work on this proposal under the next Presidency. The proposed Regulation aims to better conserve fish stocks by reducing discards and protecting vulnerable marine habitats on Europe's Atlantic coast, in the North Sea and the Skagerrak and Kattegat. Following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009, the work on this proposal will be continued under the co-decision procedure. At the same time the Council reached political agreement on a Council Regulation establishing transitional technical measures from 1 January 2010 to 30 June 2011, thus extending the transitional technical measures contained in Annex III to the 2009 TACs and Quotas Regulation.

Fishing opportunities in the Black Sea for 2010

The Council reached political agreement on the proposal for a Council Regulation fixing the fishing opportunities in the Black Sea for 2010. The agreed text provides in particular for a TAC of 96 tonnes for turbot, shared equally between Bulgaria and Romania, a TAC of 12.750 tonnes for sprat, a ban for turbot fishing from 15 April to 15 June, and the promotion of cooperation in fisheries management with third countries bordering the Black Sea.

ENVIRONMENT

At its meeting on 23 November 2009, the Council discussed the preparations for the Copenhagen climate conference (7-18 December 2009). Following presentations by the Danish and Polish environment ministers, Commissioner Dimas UNFCCC Executive Secretary de Boer, and Norwegian minister and chief negotiation on climate Hanne Bjurström on various aspects of the issue, on recent developments and the ongoing international talks, the Council held a policy debate with a view to the beginning of the negotiations at the Copenhagen Conference.

EDUCATION, YOUTH AND CULTURE

At its meeting on 26 and 27 November 2009, the Council discussed i.a.:

Education

Post 2010 Lisbon Strategy

The Council adopted messages from the EYC Council in the field of education as a contribution to the discussions on the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy. These messages underline that a more efficient and targeted investment in quality education and training, a strong role for education and training and a closer interaction between the three sides of the knowledge triangle (education, research and innovation) should be important elements of the post 2010 Lisbon Strategy.

Education of children with a migrant background

Following a policy debate on the integration of migrant children and pupils, the Council adopted conclusions on the education of children with a migrant background. In these conclusions, the Council i.a. invites the Member States to take the appropriate measures with a view to ensuring that all children are offered fair and equal opportunities irrespective of background, and the Commission to ensure that migration-related issues are adequately reflected in the Lifelong Learning programme as well as in the social protection and social inclusion process.

The role of education in the knowledge triangle

The Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States adopted conclusions on developing the role of education in a fully-functioning knowledge triangle. With a view to strengthening the role of education the Council identified the following seven priorities for action: developing more coherence between policies in the fields of education, research and innovation; accelerating pedagogical reform; developing partnership between universities and business and other relevant stakeholders; promoting an innovation culture in universities; creating incentives for universities to develop transferable knowledge, developing new approaches to quality assessment and developing the EIT as a model for the future.

Culture

European Year of Voluntary Activities

The Council adopted a Council Decision on the European Year of Voluntary Activities promoting active citizenship (2011). The overall purpose of the European Year is to encourage and support - notably through the exchange of experience and good practices - the efforts of the Community, the Member States, local and regional authorities to create the conditions for civil society conducive to volunteering in the European Union and to increase the visibility of voluntary activities in the EU.

Promoting a creative generation

The Council adopted conclusions entitled "Promoting a creative generation: developing the creativity and innovative capacity of children and young people through cultural expression and access to culture". In these conclusions, the Council identifies, with due regard to the principle of subsidiarity, six priorities with a view to promoting a creative generation in the European Union.

Youth

European cooperation in the youth field

Following a policy debate, the Council adopted a Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field. In this Resolution, the Council i.a. agreed that in the period up to and including 2018, the overall objectives of European cooperation in the youth field should be to create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market and to promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people.

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