NOTE

From: European Commission
To: Council (Competitiveness), 5 March 2009 (Any Other Business)
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Subject: Information Note to Ministers:
- Communication on external aspects of the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs;
  Reporting on market access and setting the framework for more effective international regulatory cooperation

The Communication aims at ensuring greater opportunities for EU businesses in third countries and brings together external and internal policies. It is also the first yearly market access report, giving an account of significant existing barriers in third country markets. Successful barrier removal will require an assertive articulation of European trade interest with one voice. The success of the EU’s actions will continue to depend very much on the serious commitment of all stakeholders.
Response to trade barriers must be coherent and targeted. The EU has different instruments at its disposal to overcome trade barriers and promote regulatory convergence. It needs to use all its instruments strategically and to ensure that there is a more integrated external policy agenda, which allows for trade-offs and win-win solutions. The Commission will ensure full exploitation of the potential of regulatory co-operation to anticipate trade challenges and ensure mutually beneficial cooperation at early stages of the legislative process. Beyond market access, regulatory cooperation offers further benefits in areas such as consumer protection, improving environmental standards, improving the evidence base for drawing up legislation and reducing the cost of doing business. The Communication makes clear that the Commission is committed to multilateral approaches, particularly the WTO mechanisms, but that it is prepared to pursue pragmatic approaches such as bilateral agreements when the multilateral instruments are lacking, or where progress in multilateral negotiations is too slow to resolve urgent problems.

It also makes clear that the Commission must establish priorities when it comes to activities which require long term resource commitments, such as regulatory dialogues. The USA, China, Russia and Japan are all priorities, as are Candidate Countries and partners of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The Communication sets out ways to remove regulatory obstacles and increase market access, to create growth and jobs. The Commission will pursue these objectives actively in 2009, including reflecting on how to further strengthen regulatory cooperation. These efforts will go hand in hand with the further development of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs post 2010.