



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2006) 1760 final

Brussels, 12 October 2006

MINUTES
of the 1760th meeting of the Commission
held in Brussels
(Berlaymont)
on Wednesday 4 October 2006
(morning)

PV(2006) 1760 final

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Single sitting: Wednesday 4 October 2006 (morning)

The sitting opened at 09.49 hours with Mr BARROSO, President, in the chair.

Present:

Mr BARROSO	President	
Ms WALLSTRÖM	Vice-President	
Mr VERHEUGEN	Vice-President	
Mr BARROT	Vice-President	
Mr KALLAS	Vice-President	Items 1 to 14
Mr FRATTINI	Vice-President	Items 1 to 14 (in part)
Ms REDING		
Mr DIMAS		
Mr ALMUNIA		Items 10 to 15
Mr BORG		
Ms GRYBAUSKAITĖ		Items 1 to 12 (in part)
Mr POTOČNIK		
Mr FIGEL'		
Mr KYPRIANOU		
Mr MICHEL		
Mr KOVÁCS		Items 1 to 11, and 13 to 15
Ms KROES		Items 1 to 10
Ms FISCHER BOEL		Items 1 to 13
Ms FERRERO-WALDNER		Items 1 to 14 (in part) and 15 (in part)
Mr McCREEVY		
Mr ŠPIDLA		
Mr MANDELSON		Items 1 to 13
Mr PIEBALGS		Items 11 (in part) and 12

Absent:

Ms HÜBNER

Mr REHN

The following sat in to represent absent Members of the Commission

Mr WATSON	A member of Ms Hübner's staff	Items 1 to 14
Mr PESONEN	Chef de cabinet to Mr Rehn	

The following also sat in

Mr THEBAULT	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the President	
Mr PETITE	Director-General, Legal Service	
Ms CORUGEDO STENEBOURG	DG Communication	
Mr LAITENBERGER	Commission Spokesman	Items 1 to 13
Ms CARVALHO	Acting Director-General, Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA)	
Mr ELLIS	Adviser in the President's Office	Items 13 to 15
Mr SALAZAR	A member of Mr Frattini's staff	Items 1 to 10
Mr QUEST	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Ms GRYBAUSKAITĖ	Items 12 (in part) to 15
Mr BRUNET	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr Kyprianou	Items 10 (in part) and 11
Ms BORCHMANN	A member of Ms Fischer Boel's staff	Items 14 and 15
Mr CHILD	Chef de cabinet to Ms Ferrero-Waldner	Items 14 (in part) and 15 (in part)
Mr KESTERIS	Chef de cabinet to Mr PIEBALGS	Items 13 to 15
Ms KRONBERGA	A member of Mr Piebalgs's staff	Items 1 to 11 (in part)
Ms AHRENKILDE	DG Communication – spokesman	Items 14 and 15

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2006) 1760/3 ; SEC(2006) 1233/2)

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(2006) 1760)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Friday 29 September.

**3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES AND SPECIAL MINUTES OF 1759TH MEETING
(26 SEPTEMBER)**

(PV(2006) 1759 ; PV(2006) 1759, PART II)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 1759th meeting.

4. MONITORING THE APPLICATION OF COMMUNITY LAW

STATE AID - RECAPITULATIVE LIST

(SEC(2006) 1272)

The Commission adopted the decisions in the recapitulative list in SEC(2006) 1272.

5. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

5.1. *WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED*

(SEC(2006) 1234 ET SEQ)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 25 and 29 September.

5.2. *SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES*

(SEC(2006) 1235 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expires between 2 and 6 October and of the "finalisation" written procedures initiated following the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet on 29 September.

5.3. *EMPOWERMENT*

(SEC(2006) 1236 ET SEQ)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 25 and 29 September.

5.4. *EMPOWERMENT CONCERNING THE PROCEDURE FOR FOLLOWING UP OPINIONS OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS*

(SEC(2006) 1252 AND /2)

The Commission granted empowerment as set out in SEC(2006) 1252 to Commission Member responsible for the institutional relations and communication strategy, in agreement with the Commission Members responsible for the matter to which the opinion relates.

**5.5. EMPOWERMENT FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE REGULATIONS
NECESSARY TO UPDATE THE COMMUNITY LIST OF AIR CARRIERS
SUBJECT TO AN OPERATING BAN WITHIN THE COMMUNITY
(SEC(2006) 1254)**

The Commission granted the empowerment as set out in SEC(2006) 1254 to the Commission Member responsible for transport.

5.6. DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation procedure between 25 and 29 September, as archived on the "Grefte 2000" (Registry) website.

**6. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS
(SEC(2006) 1237)**

**ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2006) 133)**

**6.1. BEPA - AMENDMENT OF ORGANISATION CHART
(SEC(2006) 1255)**

On a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided:

- to amend the organisation chart of the Bureau of European Policy Advisers by creating a new function of Director ;
- to approve the organisation chart as set out in the document distributed as SEC(2006) 1255.

These decisions would take effect from 1 January 2007.

**6.2. EXTERNAL RELATIONS DG – PROMOTION OF AN A*10 OFFICIAL
(C(2006) 4370)**

Having noted the information set out in point 2 of document PERS(2006) 133, the Commission, on a proposal from M. KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms FERRERO-WALDNER, adopted the decision on the promotion of M. Alessandro MISSIR DI LUSIGNANO to grade A*11, as set out in the document distributed as C(2006) 4370.

This decision entered into force on 1 September 2005.

The Commission expressed profound regret at the death of Mr Alessandro MISSIR DI LUSIGNANO and his wife in tragic circumstances in Rabat on 17 September. Without prejudice to the above-mentioned decision, it instructed the departments concerned to inform it of appropriate exceptional measures to make financial provisions for the future of the four young children left orphans by this tragedy.

**7. BETTER REGULATION AND THE CODIFICATION OF THE ACQUIS
COMMUNAUTAIRE
(SEC(2006) 1220 TO /3)**

The Commission:

- took note of the information note of the PRESIDENT, in agreement with Mr VERHEUGEN, distributed as SEC(2006) 1220/3 ;
- underlined the importance of the codification programme as a key component of the « better regulation » strategy, and the need to complete this programme by the end of 2008 ;
- asked the Legal Service to ensure that the programme is successfully completed in accordance with the indicative programme attached to the information note ;

- asked the Commission's departments to make every effort to ensure that the programme is completed and to avoid amending acts currently being codified ;
- asked the Secretariat-General, in liaison with the Legal Service and the other services, to monitor the planning of any amendments affecting implementation of the programme ;
- reported that the multiannual indicative programme would be transmitted, in due time and in the appropriate framework, to the European Parliament, to the Council and the national parliaments.

**8. COMMISSION DECISION ON A PROCEEDING UNDER ARTICLE 81 OF THE EC TREATY AND ARTICLE 53 OF THE EEA AGREEMENT (CASE COMP/C-2/38.681 – CANNES EXTENSION AGREEMENT)
(C(2006) 4350 TO /5)**

The Commission

- took note of the opinion of the advisory committee on restrictive practices and dominant positions of 18 September in C(2006) 4350/3 ;
- took note of the final report of the Hearing Officer of 18 September in C(2006) 4350/4 ;
- adopted, in the authentic languages (English, French and German), the decision set out in C(2006)4350 and /5, giving mandatory force to the commitments made by the companies to which this decision is addressed ;
- decided to notify the decision in C(2006) 4350 and /5 to the companies concerned, together with the final report of the Hearing Officer ;
- decided that the most important parts of the decision, together with the opinion of the Advisory Committee and the final report of the Hearing Officer, would be

published in the official languages in the Official Journal (with all business secrets removed) ;

- decided to publish the decision (with business secrets removed) on the Internet.

9. TRENDS IN THE MEMBER STATES

(SEC(2006) 1257)

The Commission took note of the information note from Ms WALLSTRÖM distributed as SEC(2006) 1257.

10. RELATIONS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

10.1. VISIT TO BULGARIA AND ROMANIA (SOFIA AND BUCHAREST, 26 TO 28 SEPTEMBER)

(SEC(2006) 1271)

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr REHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, distributed as SEC(2006) 1271.

10.2. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL ON THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ON THE PROCESSING AND TRANSFER OF PERSONAL DATA ON AIR PASSENGERS TO THE BUREAU OF CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION OF THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

(SEC(2006) 1276 ; SEC(2006)1274)

Mr FRATTINI informed the Commission of the state of play of the negotiations on the agreement with the United States concerning the processing and transfer of personal data on air passengers (*Passenger Name Records*). He

mentioned briefly the background to the negotiations, the reorganisation of the US authorities responsible for internal security and the US legislative initiatives on the exchange of data between these authorities. He reminded the meeting of the judgment of the Court of Justice of 30 May 2006 which led to the denunciation of the agreement in force since 2004 between the EU and the United States and to the launching of the negotiations currently in progress. He also mentioned the call by the European authorities responsible for data protection for a new agreement to be speedily reached.

Mr FRATTINI then drew attention to the EU's main objectives in these negotiations : to guarantee a high level of data protection equivalent to that provided under the former agreement and to make available the data needed to contribute effectively to combating terrorism. He said that assurances must be obtained from the US authorities as regards access to the data transferred and circulation of these data among the US security agencies or to non-member countries, as well as the periods during which the data are kept. He also mentioned the temporary nature of the new agreement, which would be of limited duration so that a long-term agreement could be negotiated between the EU and the United States by summer 2007. He also reminded that the role of the Commission and its services was to assist the Council Presidency in the negotiations, since the matter came under the « third pillar », but that the Commission had nevertheless become a very active player in these negotiations.

As regards the prospects for the conclusion of the agreement, Mr FRATTINI said that he was optimistic that the negotiations could be concluded in the next few days. He also spoke of the risks of failure to reach agreement : European airlines would no longer have a legal basis for ensuring data protection for their passengers and, in these circumstances, bilateral agreements could be concluded to the detriment of the legal protection and equality of the citizens of the 25 Member States.

Following Mr FRATTINI's presentation, the Commission held a detailed discussion particularly on the following points :

- the fact that the Council was responsible for the negotiations, although the Commission and its services had played an active and important role ;
- the importance of informing the European Parliament of the outcome of the negotiations ;
- its wish for the provisions of the new agreement to be as close as possible to those of the agreement concluded in 2004 ;
- the need for reciprocal arrangements between the United States and the EU, particularly as regards disclosure obligations with regard to sensitive data ;
- the importance of banning all transfers of data to non-member countries without express prior authorisation by the EU ;
- the advisability of limiting circulation of the data between the Bureau of customs and border protection of the United States and the US internal security agencies ;
- the advisability of limiting the period during which data are kept ;
- the need for a provision allowing the agreement to be applied retroactively between 30 September 2006 and the date on which it was formally concluded ;
- the negative repercussions of failure to reach an agreement, both for airlines and for passengers and their rights.
- as regards visa policy, the importance of ensuring, as quickly as possible, equal treatment for all EU citizens irrespective of their country of origin ;
- the importance, given that this is a long-term agreement to be concluded in 2007, of ensuring consistent and lasting solutions based on the principle of reciprocity ;

- beyond the present agreement, the considerable advantages of a comprehensive « open skies » agreement between the EU and the United States.

The PRESIDENT concluded by noting the Commission's unanimous support for the line advocated by Mr FRATTINI. He pointed out that since the Council had ultimate responsibility for the negotiations, there was no need to grant an empowerment.

The Commission took note of this information. It approved in principle the communication in SEC(2006) 1276, for transmission to the Council once the negotiations had been concluded.

10.3. DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE EU-RUSSIA BILATERAL AGREEMENT ON TRADE AND INVESTMENT (SOTCHI, 20 TO 22 SEPTEMBER)
(SEC(2006) 1260)

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr MANDELSON in SEC(2006) 1260.

11. OTHER INFORMATION

11.1. THE MAASTRICHT PRICE STABILITY CRITERION
(SEC(2006)1261)

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr ALMUNIA in SEC(2006) 1261.

**11.2. DRAFT COMMISSION DECISION AMENDING DECISION 2006/601/EC
OF 5 SEPTEMBER 2006 ON EMERGENCY MEASURES REGARDING
THE NON-AUTHORISED GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISM
“LL RICE 601” IN SOME RICE BASED PRODUCTS
(SEC(2006) 1275 ; C(2006) 4371 AND /2 ; SEC(2006) 1270)**

Mr KYPRIANOU presented the draft decision which he was tabling. He began by stressing the particularly sensitive nature of the question of genetically modified organisms for European public opinion and the need to maintain consumer confidence in the regulatory system governing the authorisation of such organisms.

Mr KYPRIANOU reminded the meeting of the background to this issue and the various stages which had led him to present this draft decision, which, given the failure of previous decisions to achieve satisfactory results, aimed ultimately to ensure systematic checks on consignments of rice imported from the United States. While recognising that there was no indication of any imminent risk to public health, he cited the Commission's limited room for manoeuvre, given that it had a duty to ensure that illegal products were not sold on the European market. He underlined the need for firm and decisive action showing that the Commission was determined to intervene when the legislation in force was at risk.

However, mindful of the commercial interests at stake here, Mr KYPRIANOU intended to allow the ongoing negotiations with the United States on the sampling method to continue for two weeks and not to forward the draft decision to the regulatory committee concerned until this period had elapsed. He pointed out that if the discussions led to a positive outcome the draft decision would be amended accordingly and would no longer provide for tighter controls but for the use of a common sampling method as agreed in the negotiations, in particular for obtaining the certificate of origin. Finally, he pointed out that, under the committee procedure, the Commission would in due course have to rule on the final decision. He concluded by asking for the support of all of the Members of the Commission for this pragmatic approach,

which preserved the system of Community authorisation while at the same time allowing for the possibility of finding a satisfactory outcome to the negotiations with the US authorities.

The Commission proceeded to discuss the matter, highlighting the following aspects :

- the merits of the proposed solution, the result of fruitful cooperation between several Members' *cabinets*, which would enable good trade relations to be maintained with the US while maintaining the credibility of the system of authorisation for genetically modified organisms ;
- the goodwill demonstrated by the US authorities, which had worked to find a mutually acceptable solution ;
- the importance to the Commission of strongly defending the legal framework in force and the need to react to the appearance on the European market of an unauthorised product ;
- the low level of risk to which consumers were exposed in the current situation, given the absence of any scientific basis establishing a clear danger associated with ingesting genetically modified rice, and the fact that the next rice deliveries were not due until mid-November ;
- the exact wording of the opinion issued by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which stated that the scientific data available were not sufficient in this instance to permit a detailed risk evaluation, in accordance with the Authority's guidelines ;
- the particularly sensitive nature of the question of genetically modified organisms in general ;
- the need not to water down the sampling method used at European level in the course of the negotiations.

The PRESIDENT fully supported Mr KYPRIANOU and welcomed the fact that the proposed course of action struck the correct balance between the demands of legality and proportionality, which were often difficult to reconcile. He also stressed the advantages of this solution for maintaining the credibility of the Community system based on the prior authorisation of any genetically modified food before it was placed on the market. Finally, he mentioned the importance of such an approach for reassuring European public opinion, which was very sensitive as regards genetically modified organisms, as to the rigour of the authorisation system in place, while offering the US and European authorities the possibility of together finding a technical solution to the current problem.

The Commission approved the draft decision amending Decision 2006/601/EC in SEC(2006) 1275 and took note of Mr KYPRIANOU's intention not to transmit the draft to the regulatory committee for the next 15 days, in order to enable the negotiations to continue between the United States and the Commission with a view to reaching an agreement on the method of sampling and analysis to be used when carrying out the tests required for obtaining a certificate, as provided for in Article 2 of Decision 2006/601/EC.

The Commission authorised Mr KYPRIANOU, at the end of the 15-day period, to transmit the draft to the committee and to continue the regulatory procedure if these negotiations did not result in an agreement with the United States. If they did produce an agreement, the Commission empowered Mr KYPRIANOU, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, to submit to the regulatory committee a draft decision amending Article 2 of Decision 2006/601/EC, so as to refer therein to the common sampling method resulting from the negotiations. This draft would not impose systematic monitoring by the Member States.

The Commission noted that it would be consulted on the final decision based on the opinion of the regulatory committee.

12. COMMISSION COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – GLOBAL EUROPE: COMPETING IN THE WORLD – A CONTRIBUTION TO THE EU'S GROWTH STRATEGY (COM(2006) 567 TO /3 ; SEC(2006) 1230 AND /2 ; SEC(2006) 1228 AND /2 ; SEC(2006) 1229)

Mr MANDELSON briefly presented the communication he was tabling, in agreement with Mr VERHEUGEN and Mr McCREEVY. He emphasised the special care that had been taken when drawing up the communication to strike a balance between the various interests, taking into account the main issues at stake. Mr MANDELSON highlighted the following three aspects:

- the complementarity between the multilateral and bilateral approaches in international trade negotiations, in order to ensure European competitiveness, while specifying the primacy of the multilateral framework ;
- the opportunity which this exercise provided to review all of the instruments of Community trade policy, particularly the anti-dumping measures, with a view to adapting them to the objective of promoting competitiveness and then using them to foster growth and employment ;
- the gradual blurring of the boundary between internal and external aspects of competitiveness policy, with interaction between them becoming increasingly crucial. This called for closer cooperation in future between the different departments involved within the Commission.

The Commission held an exchange of views which stressed the balanced nature of the communication under consideration. The following points were mentioned:

- the need to assess carefully, on a case-by-case basis, the merits of the multilateral framework or the bilateral framework, as well as the relative importance of the general reasons or economic and trade reasons behind the international agreements to be concluded ;

- the significance and topical relevance of a free trade agreement with the United States ;
- the priority to be given by the Commission to creating prosperity, stability and employment in Europe ;
- the discrepancy between the increasingly easy access to Community markets and the protectionist policies of certain international players to the detriment of European exports ;
- the need for an equitable approach to opening Community markets, avoiding both knee-jerk protectionism and asymmetric efforts ;
- the case for taking into account in the communication certain factors such as cultural diversity and compliance with the basic principles of social policy and environmental protection ;
- the multidisciplinary nature of competitiveness policy, which calls for closer cooperation between Commission departments.

After this exchange of views, the Commission approved the communication set out in COM(2006) 567/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and to national parliaments, together with the Annex, the impact assessment and the summary thereof in the staff papers distributed as SEC(2006) 1230/2, SEC(2006) 1228/2 and SEC(2006) 1229 respectively, the contents of which were noted.

13. RELATIONS WITH NON-MEMBER COUNTRIES (CONTINUED FROM ITEM 10)

DOHA DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Mr MANDELSON reported on the talks he had had with the US authorities in Washington the previous week on the progress with and prospects for the Doha

Development Agenda. The talks had been aimed in particular at improving mutual understanding following the suspension of talks in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in July. His meetings with various policy and decision-making bodies within the US Administration had enabled him both to assess the position of key players in the international trade negotiations and the prospects for progress in the coming months and to explain the European position in this matter more effectively.

Mr MANDELSON also mentioned the main constraints under which the US authorities were currently operating, namely the political timetable, with elections in mid-November 2006 and the expiry in June 2007 of the special negotiating powers granted by Congress to the White House, and the need to pass new agricultural legislation in 2007 that would be compatible with WTO provisions.

Mr MANDELSON shared with the Commission Members the messages and suggestions he had passed on to the people he had met in the US, particularly as regards access to markets for agricultural products and farm subsidies in the United States. All in all he thought that a more determined policy initiative would be needed in the US if the negotiating round was to produce a successful outcome.

The Commission held a brief exchange of views in which the Members considered the prospects of concessions on the US side in the current political climate.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr MANDELSON for his continuing commitment to this difficult dossier. While emphasising that responsibility for the suspension of the multilateral negotiations in July could not in any way be attributed to the EU, which had shown considerable flexibility throughout the process, he reminded the meeting that the Commission would continue to lend constructive support to the conclusion of the round of talks.

The PRESIDENT pointed to the apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, the excellent state of transatlantic relations in general and the constant willingness to cooperate and, on the other, the difficulties the two partners - the US and Europe - were currently experiencing on certain matters of common interest.

The Commission took note of this information and expressed its full support for the line set out by Mr MANDELSON.

14. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

14.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

i) Action to be taken on Parliament's opinions

(SP(2006) 4388)

The Commission decided to empower the Members responsible for the areas concerned, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms WALLSTRÖM and any other Commission Members concerned, to adopt the amended proposals for transmission to the European Parliament and the Council (SP(2006) 4388).

14.2. RELATIONS WITH THE COUNCIL

(SI(2006) 858)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2006) 858 relating to the Council meetings between Thursday 28 September and Wednesday 11 October.

ii) Preparations for the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting (5 and 6 October)

(SI(2006) 848)

Anti-dumping / Chinese and Vietnamese shoes

The Commission authorised Mr MANDELSON to accept a compromise solution and agree to reduce to two years the period of application of the measures proposed by the Commission, if such an approach would help to secure a majority in favour in the Council.

iii) Results of the Competitiveness Council (Brussels, 25 September)

(SI(2006)835)

The Commission confirmed its agreement on the final compromise concerning the proposal for a Parliament and Council Directive laying down rules on nominal quantities for pre-packed products, repealing Council Directives 75/106/EEC and 82/232/EEC and amending Council Directive 76/211/EEC, as set out in SI(2006) 835.

14.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT**iv) Results of the September II part-session**

(SP(2006) 4457)

The Commission took note of the information supplied in SP(2006) 4457 relating to Parliament's part-session in Strasbourg from 25 to 28 September.

v) Parliamentary vote on the two new Commission Members

Ms WALLSTRÖM reported that the Parliamentary hearings for the two new Bulgarian and Romanian Members were due to take place in November and December 2006. She also mentioned the decision of the Conference of Committee Chairmen to schedule the vote on the two new Commission Members for Thursday 4 January 2007, during an extraordinary meeting in Brussels. She regretted that Parliament's decision did not heed the Commission's call for the vote to be held before 1 January 2007, in order to avoid any hiatus between 1 January 2007 and the date of the Council decision.

Ms WALLSTRÖM also regretted that Parliament's Conference of Committee Chairmen had decided to hold additional mini part-sessions in Brussels without informing the Commission in advance. She felt that this sort of action was not in keeping with either the letter or the spirit of the framework agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission. She mentioned the need to take up this matter again in future meetings with the European Parliament's representatives, given its importance for relations

between Parliament and the Commission, and asked Commission Members to support this position.

The Commission held a brief debate in which the following questions were considered:

- the importance of compliance with the rules laid down in the framework agreement between Parliament and the Commission in contributing to the quality of interinstitutional relations ;
- the need to take into account their respective agendas and to ensure greater transparency and predictability in this area ;
- a recognition of the Commission's obligations vis-à-vis the Parliament ;
- the considerable constraints placed on Members of the Commission and their departments, given the resources available, as a result of the need for their frequent attendance in Parliament ;
- a desire for the date of the vote on the two new Commission Members to be reconsidered in consultation with the European Parliament.

The PRESIDENT concluded the debate by emphasising the need for greater attention to be paid to the agendas of all concerned and to the terms of the framework agreement and by confirming the Commission's willingness to cooperate with Parliament on these matters.

He noted that the European Parliament and the Commission agreed that the hearings and vote concerned the two new Members only. He also noted the Commission's unanimous support for Ms WALLSTRÖM and himself to reconsider with Parliament's leaders the question of the date of the vote on the two new Commission Members, given the high risk of absenteeism on that date. Finally he called on all Commission Members to try to attend the part-session when the vote would be held.

The Commission took note of this information.

15. RELATIONS WITH NON-MEMBER COUNTRIES (CONTINUED FROM ITEMS 10 AND 13)

VISIT BY THE PRESIDENT AND MR MICHEL TO SUDAN AND MEETING BETWEEN THE COMMISSION AND THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION (30 SEPTEMBER TO 2 OCTOBER)

Mr MICHEL reported on the visit he and the PRESIDENT had made to Khartoum and Darfur on 30 September and 1 October, which had been followed by a meeting between several Commission Members and the Commission of the African Union in Addis Ababa on 2 October 2006.

Mr MICHEL confirmed the gravity of the situation in Darfur and stressed the political significance of the visit by the PRESIDENT and himself, a mark of the Commission's determination to contribute actively to restoring peace in the region.

Mr MICHEL then spoke of the symbolic significance of the meeting between the European and African Commissions, the quality of their exchanges and the promising prospects that had been opened up in numerous areas during the meeting, for example with the signing of the administrative cooperation agreement between the two institutions. This committed the Members of the Commission to supporting the administration's efforts to ensure that the best possible use was made of the funds devoted to cooperation with the African Union.

The PRESIDENT endorsed the views expressed by Mr MICHEL and particularly his call for Members of the Commission to lend their expertise and support to the cooperation projects to be carried out with the Commission of the African Union.

The PRESIDENT stressed that above all everything had to be done to avoid another humanitarian disaster in Darfur. The commitment of young Europeans on the ground seemed to him to encapsulate the sense of mission and global awareness among Europe's young people.

The Commission took note of this information.

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The meeting closed at 12.34.