



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2007)1798 final

Strasbourg, 4 September 2007

MINUTES

of the 1798th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 29 August 2007

(morning)

—

PV(2007)1798 final

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Attendance list	4-6
1. AGENDAS (OJ(2007)1798/3 ; SEC(2007)1034/2).....	8
2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET (SEC(2007)1798)	8
3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES AND SPECIAL MINUTES OF 1797TH MEETING (18 JULY 2007) (PV(2007)1797 AND /2; PV(2007)1797, PART II).....	8
4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS (SEC(2007)1023).....	9
4.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS	9
4.2. RELATIONS WITH THE COUNCIL	10
4.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT.....	10
5. MONITORING THE APPLICATION OF COMMUNITY LAW	11
INFRINGEMENTS – URGENT CASE (SEC(2007)1095).....	11
6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS.....	11
6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2007)1035 ET SEQ.).....	11
6.2. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2007)1036/2).....	11
6.3. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2007)1037 ET SEQ.).....	12
6.4. DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS	12
7. POLICY DEBATE ON THE EUROPEAN UNION AGENCIES (SEC(2007)1049 AND /2).....	12

8. OTHER BUSINESS.....	17
8.1. ANTI-DUMPING PROCEEDING CONCERNING IMPORTS OF INTEGRATED ELECTRONIC COMPACT FLUORESCENT LAMPS (CFL-I) ORIGINATING IN CHINA (SEC(2007)1082).....	17
8.2. RECENT DISTURBANCES ON THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL MARKETS (SEC(2007)1096).....	21
8.3. THE COMMISSION'S RESPONSE TO THE VARIOUS EMERGENCIES DURING THE SUMMER, INCLUDING THE DEVASTATING FIRES IN GREECE – EU CIVIL PROTECTION MECHANISM.....	22
8.4. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO THE OUTBREAK OF FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM (SEC(2007)1097).....	24
9. RELATIONS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES.....	24
9.1. ELECTION OF THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE TURKISH REPUBLIC	24
9.2. VISIT TO CHINA (21-26 JULY 2007) (SEC(2007)1077).....	25

Single sitting: Wednesday 29 August 2007 (morning)

The sitting opened at 09.17 hours with Mr BARROSO, President, in the chair. Item 9 was chaired by Ms WALLSTRÖM.

Present:

Mr BARROSO	President	Items 1 to 8
Ms WALLSTRÖM	Vice-President	
Mr VERHEUGEN	Vice-President	
Mr KALLAS	Vice-President	
Ms REDING		Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr DIMAS		
Mr ALMUNIA		Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Ms HÜBNER		Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr BORG		
Ms GRYBAUSKAITĖ		
Mr POTOČNIK		
Mr FIGEL'		
Mr KYPRIANOU		
Mr REHN		Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr MICHEL		Items 1 to 7 (in part)
Mr KOVÁCS		
Ms KROES		Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Ms FISCHER BOEL		
Ms FERRERO-WALDNER		Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr ŠPIDLA		
Mr MANDELSON		
Mr PIEBALGS		
Ms KUNEVA		
Mr ORBAN		

Absent:

Mr BARROT

Vice-President

Mr FRATTINI

Vice-President

Mr McCREEVY

(29 August 2007)

The following sat in to represent absent Members of the Commission:

Mr SAGREDO	A member of Mr BARROT's staff
Ms SCHMITT	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr FRATTINI
Mr POWER	Chef de cabinet to Mr McCREEVY

The following also sat in:

Mr VALE DE ALMEIDA	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr PETITE	Director-General, Legal Service	
Mr SØRENSEN	Director-General, Communication DG	
Mr LAITENBERGER	Commission Spokesman	Items 1 to 8 (in part)
Ms AHRENKILDE	Communication DG – Spokesman's Service	Items 8 (in part) and 9
Mr GASPAR	Acting Director-General, Bureau of European Policy Advisers	Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr THEBAULT	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 7 and 8 (in part)
Ms MARTINHO	Chief adviser in the PRESIDENT's office	Items 8 (in part) and 9
Mr KLAUS	A member of the PRESIDENT 's staff	Item 8 (in part)
Ms ERLER	Chef de cabinet to Mr VERHEUGEN	Item 8 (in part)
Mr THOMAS	Chef de cabinet to Mr ALMUNIA	Item 8 (in part)
Mr PESONEN	Chef de cabinet to Mr REHN	Item 9 (in part)
Mr LEVIE	A member of Mr MICHEL's staff	Items 8 and 9
Mr FRASER	Chef de cabinet to Mr MANDELSON	Item 8 (in part)

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

(29 August 2007)

The PRESIDENT paid tribute to Mr Jean-Pierre PIERARD and Mr Michel GAUCHE, officials of the External Relations Directorate-General assigned to the External Service, who had been killed on 9 August in an air crash in Moorea, French Polynesia, during a mission to assess a project financed by the European Development Fund.

Mr Jean-Pierre PIERARD and Mr Michel GAUCHE had devoted much of their life with dedication and effectiveness to helping the poorer persons and countries.

On behalf of the Commission, the PRESIDENT extended his sincere condolences to the families of Mr Jean-Pierre PIERARD and Mr Michel GAUCHE.

The PRESIDENT also paid tribute to Mr Gaston THORN, former President of the Commission from 1981 to 1985, who died on 26 August 2007.

Mr Gaston THORN, a European leader, helped to consolidate the foundations of the European project and to open up new avenues of integration (Single European Act) during a difficult period in the European integration process, and was instrumental in the second (Greece) and third (Spain and Portugal) enlargements which tied these countries to Europe and democracy.

On behalf of the Commission, the PRESIDENT offered his sincere condolences to Mr Gaston THORN's family.

The PRESIDENT finally paid tribute to Mr Raymond BARRE, former Vice-President of the Commission from 1967 to 1973, who died on 25 August 2007.

Mr Raymond BARRE, a convinced European and reputed economist, laid the foundations for economic and monetary union and the euro with his two reports in February 1969 and March 1970, widely known as the "Barre plans".

On behalf of the Commission, the PRESIDENT offered his sincere condolences to Mr BARRE's family.

* * *

The PRESIDENT welcomed the Commission Members back after the holidays and called on them to make an active contribution to the work of the Commission, which would have a particularly heavy agenda in the months ahead.

* * *

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2007)1798/3 ; SEC(2007)1034/2)

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(2007)1798)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 27 August 2007.

**3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES AND SPECIAL MINUTES OF 1797TH MEETING
(18 JULY 2007)**

(PV(2007)1797 AND /2; PV(2007)1797, PART II)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 1797th meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(SEC(2007)1023)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group held on Thursday 19 July (SEC(2006)1023).

It paid particular attention to the following:

4.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

i) Preparation for September I part-session of Parliament

(point 1.2 of the record of the IRG)

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

- Control of the acquisition and possession of weapons (Directive) – KALLENBACH report – 2006/0031 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2007)3815 and /2 and authorised Mr VERHEUGEN to pursue contacts with Parliament and the Council in order to reach agreement at first reading, provided the observations of the Legal Service were taken into account.

- Inland transport of dangerous goods (Directive) – LIBERADZKI report – 2006/0278 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2007)3816 authorised Mr BARROT to continue contacts with Parliament and the Council with a view to securing agreement at first reading.

- Establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS) by reason of the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union (Regulation) – GALEOTE QUECEDO report – 2007/0038 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2007)3817.

4.2. RELATIONS WITH THE COUNCIL

ii) Programming of Council business (SI(2007)762)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2007)762 on the Council meetings between 26 July and 5 September.

4.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

iii) Action taken on Parliament's legislative opinions and non-legislative resolutions (point 3.4.2 of the record of the IRG)

The Commission approved document SP(2007)3798 and /2 on the action taken on Parliament's legislative opinions and non-legislative resolutions adopted at its June I and II part-sessions, for transmission to Parliament.

iv) Action taken on Parliament's non-legislative resolutions (point 3.4.3 of the record of the IRG)

The Commission approved documents SP(2007)3608 and /2 on the action taken on Parliament's non-legislative resolutions adopted at its May II part-session, for transmission to Parliament.

v) Action taken on Parliament's non-legislative resolutions

(point 3.4.4 of the record of the IRG)

The Commission approved document SP(2007)3819 on the action taken on the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its June I part-session, for transmission to Parliament.

5. MONITORING THE APPLICATION OF COMMUNITY LAW

INFRINGEMENTS – URGENT CASE

(SEC(2007)1095)

The Commission adopted the decision in SEC(2007)1095.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2007)1035 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 16 July and 24 August 2007.

6.2. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2007)1036/2)

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expired between 27 and 31 August 2007.

6.3. EMPOWERMENT**(SEC(2007)1037 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 16 July and 24 August 2007.

6.4. DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation procedure between 16 July and 24 August 2007, as archived in Greffe 2000 (Registry).

7. POLICY DEBATE ON THE EUROPEAN UNION AGENCIES**(SEC(2007)1049 AND /2)**

The PRESIDENT introduced the policy debate by reminding the meeting of the role of the agencies in the EU decision-making process and their place in the institutional framework, their importance for the budget and Community jobs, and their diversity in terms both of their function, whether regulatory or executive, and of their structure and governance. This diversity, however, means that it is necessary to take an overview of the sector and not seek a single model. He also emphasised the key role of the various institutional players, in particular the Parliament and the Council, in setting up and managing the agencies, and the challenge posed by the sharing of responsibilities between the agencies and the Commission, which often leads to confusion and criticism.

He highlighted three aspects in particular:

- management of the agencies, whose tasks (support to the internal market, providing expertise and advice, supporting the implementation of Community policies and the management of European funds) must be carried out in compliance with high quality standards;

- their political responsibility as public bodies in terms of their results and working methods, whose scope must be clearly defined with respect to the responsibility of the Commission;
- the interinstitutional dimension of the agencies, which were perceived differently by Parliament and the Council and by their sectoral components, an issue which raised specific issues in the context of the annual budgetary procedure.

The PRESIDENT then raised the three questions he wished to address during the policy debate:

- the results achieved by the agencies and the need for a common approach to evaluating their activities;
- the need to attain a balance between the agencies' freedom of action and the Commission's responsibility, particularly in view of the Commission's participation in the agencies' decision-making bodies;
- the clarification of the agencies' tasks and of their effective contribution in order to ensure joint ownership and a common definition of their place and their role in European governance, as well as recognition of them as useful and effective institutional instruments.

The PRESIDENT reminded the meeting that the proposal to launch an interinstitutional initiative was in answer to the ultimate need for a common approach. The Commission should confirm its commitment to taking a rigorous approach to the agencies and should limit the proposals for the creation of new agencies to those already in progress.

Lastly, he mentioned the need for a clear definition of the sharing of roles and responsibilities with the other bodies (the joint ventures such as ITER, the joint technological initiatives or the European Institute of Technology) which, while not agencies, had an important partnership role with the private sector and other sectors.

The PRESIDENT asked the Commission members to pool their experience of working with the agencies for which they were responsible and to work together in laying down a coherent line of conduct with respect to the agencies.

After this presentation, the Commission held an in-depth discussion during which the following aspects in particular were raised:

Interinstitutional initiative

- recognition of the importance and utility of an interinstitutional initiative based on joint ownership, clarification of the sharing of political responsibilities, improvement of the public perception of the agencies and harmonious cooperation between the institutions;
- the need for the Commission to carry out an overall assessment and establish a coherent line of conduct, and the appropriateness of drafting a communication addressing the main issues and defining a clear and coherent policy framework for responsibility-sharing;
- pending the results of the interinstitutional initiative, the possibility of pooling experiences and resources, in particular in order to improve coordination between the agencies;
- the real chances or otherwise of success of the interinstitutional initiative in the light of the proposal for an interinstitutional agreement drawn up in 2005 by the Commission;
- the appropriateness of launching this debate and of taking initiatives with respect to the agencies in conjunction with the review of the single market and of the budget.
- the budgetary dimension of outsourcing and the need to prepare a sound and comprehensive position for the Commission with a view to the next stages of the 2008 budgetary procedure;

Sharing of responsibilities

- the need to ensure, within the agencies, a balance between political and financial responsibilities on the one hand and the means of exercising decision-making and control authority on the other;
- the importance of drawing a clear distinction between the competences of the agencies with respect to the essential competences of the Commission;
- the cross-cutting nature of the creation, management and possible closure of the agencies particularly with regard to human resources, internal audit and infrastructure; in this context, the sensitive nature of management of the agencies, particularly as regards transparency, the budget and human resources, and the need for the Commission to adopt a consistent and coordinated approach to their management;

The utility of the agencies

- recognition of the utility and effectiveness of the expertise and technical support provided by the existing agencies;
- the advisability or otherwise of outsourcing of responsibilities and resources by public institutions;
- the need to establish criteria for the creation of new agencies guaranteeing flexibility, efficiency, autonomy and responsibility, and for a clear division of competences;
- the need to continue and conclude the current process of setting up new agencies, based on demonstrated sectoral needs, in particular in the areas of energy and research;
- the need for clear criteria and assurances as to the sustainability of the necessary resources in view of the closure of agencies which have already successfully accomplished their mission (e.g. the European Agency for Reconstruction);

- the appropriateness of assessing the existing agencies and future needs with particular regard to new political challenges such as climate change, migration and the terrorist threat;

Diversity and operation of the agencies

- the importance, in texts and interinstitutional discussions, of drawing a clear distinction between the regulatory and executive agencies, and of possibly proposing a different name for the executive agencies; in particular, the need to differentiate between the problems of governance, responsibility-sharing, budget and human resources posed by each type of agency;
- the appropriateness, with regard to the regulatory agencies, of conducting a more detailed analysis of the existing problems and possible solutions;
- the appropriateness of assessing the added value of the agencies with regard to the "better regulation" initiative, particularly in respect of the functioning of the single market, and of drawing up a list of strengths, weaknesses and potential in this regard;
- the appropriateness of encouraging self-financing by certain agencies whose activities generate revenues;
- the difficulties of recruiting highly qualified personnel for the agencies owing to the current regulations;
- the appropriateness of drawing up an annual mission statement for each agency setting out its role, sharing of responsibilities and the limits of its competences;
- the appropriateness of the participation by the agencies in the Commission's communication objectives.

The PRESIDENT thanked the Commission Members for their participation in this interesting and valuable debate. He noted that there was broad consensus on the utility of the agencies, since they represented an important asset for the European

Union and had a good track record. However, he highlighted the problems posed, particularly the definition of the powers of the agencies and those of the Commission, the Commission's responsibility and authority and, consequently, issues of transparency, clarity and legitimacy.

He was in favour of continuing the preparation of the interinstitutional initiative which, while it did not initially constitute a proposal for an interinstitutional agreement, envisaged the involvement of the other institutions and joint ownership of the issues to be debated. He considered that it was appropriate to consider drawing up a communication.

At all events, the PRESIDENT considered that it was necessary to draw a clear distinction between the regulatory and executive agencies, define the common principles for creation and governance for each type of agency, clearly determine the Commission's responsibilities, launch an internal process for evaluating the agencies in accordance with the principles of the "better regulation" drive and place the proposals concerning the agencies in a global context.

The Commission took note of the results of the policy debate and of the information note from the PRESIDENT in SEC(2007)1049/2.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

8.1. ANTI-DUMPING PROCEEDING CONCERNING IMPORTS OF INTEGRATED ELECTRONIC COMPACT FLUORESCENT LAMPS (CFL-I) ORIGINATING IN CHINA (SEC(2007)1082)

Mr MANDELSON began by drawing attention to the complexity of this case, the importance of its outcome for the enterprises concerned and its links with the Commission's energy efficiency strategy. He emphasised the need to present a proposal to the Council, even if the results of the public consultation

on the Green Paper "Global Europe: Europe's trade defence instruments in a changing global economy" were to be submitted to the Commission in the coming months.

He mentioned briefly the background to this dossier, in particular the dumping practices observed with regard to imports of integrated electronic compact fluorescent lamps from China, which in 2001 had led the Commission to impose anti-dumping measures.

Mr MANDELSON wondered about the appropriateness of extending these measures for an additional period of five years, since demand for lamps of this kind was increasing. In this regard, he mentioned the Commission's energy strategy, which encouraged the use of low energy light bulbs, and the fact that production in the EU of this type of light bulb could meet only 25% of European demand.

He went on to explain that under current regulations, anti-dumping measures were not extended if they were opposed by Community producers representing over 50% of Community production. In this case, three out of four producers, representing 52% of Community production, had opposed the extension of anti-dumping measures. The fourth producer had challenged the application of the concept of Community producer to one of these three enterprises, the value of whose imports from China of the product in question exceeded that of its European production.

Mr MANDELSON told the meeting that the regulations in force left the Commission a margin of discretion for applying the concept of Community producer. It permitted but did not oblige the Commission to exclude an enterprise whose imports of the product concerned exceeded its production in the European Union. To determine whether an enterprise was a Community producer it was necessary to take into account not only the relation between its imports of the product and the total value of its sales of the product in the European Union, but also additional factors such as research and development activities, investments, the registered office or distribution of employment.

After consideration of all the factors involved, in particular the level of investments in research and development, Mr MANDELSON concluded that the enterprise in question should be considered a Community producer and therefore could not be excluded. However, he acknowledged that this had been contested and that it would subsequently need to be examined in depth in a broader context.

More generally, he drew the Members' attention to the growing complexity of international trade and of the chains of supply which caused enterprises, in particular in high-technology sectors, to resort to production sites outside the EU. These developments should be taken into account in any modification of the concept of Community producer in the context of the review of the trade defence instruments.

In conclusion, Mr MANDELSON reminded the meeting that the deadlines for this case made it necessary to take a decision that day, failing which the anti-dumping duties would expire automatically and the Commission would risk being involved in legal proceedings. On the basis of an adversarial evaluation of the general Community interest and while retaining the concept of Community producer, he proposed ending the current anti-dumping measures in one year's time, i.e. extending them for a year in order to give the Community producers time to adapt.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr MANDELSON for the careful handling of this complex and highly sensitive matter. He considered that this last proposal was balanced and took account of all the arguments.

He confirmed the Commission's obligation to submit a proposal to the Council, stressing that this would not prevent the results of the review of the trade defence instruments, or of the possible review of the concept of Community producer, from being taken into consideration.

The PRESIDENT shared Mr MANDELSON's view that the proposal should be based on the general Community interest, taking into consideration not

only the impact on consumers and the links with European strategy in the area of climate change, but the need to protect jobs in European industry and research.

A discussion followed during which the following questions were raised in particular:

- the importance of the role and place of European enterprises in the world economy with respect to this issue;
- the importance of issues such as the protection of jobs in European industry and research, and the evolution of the prices paid by consumers;
- the positive effects of the opening up of European companies to the world market, the globalisation of their production and the outsourcing of certain types of job, all of which factors generate additional growth and employment in Europe;
- the need to comply with the anti-dumping rules in force and with fair and equitable trading conditions, despite the significant contribution made by compact fluorescent lamps in combating climate change;
- the advisability of taking into consideration the increasing globalisation of industrial production, research and development when reviewing the Community trade defence instruments, in particular the concept of Community producer;
- the need to define a strategy that would envisage applying the production, employment and environmental protection standards currently in force in the European Union to non-EU countries.

The PRESIDENT concluded the discussion by noting the need for the Commission to take a clear decision on these matters that day and to reach broad agreement on the proposal presented by Mr MANDELSON. He also announced that a debate would be held on the European trade defence

instruments before the Commission was informed of the results of the public consultation on this matter.

The Commission decided, in the general Community interest and without alteration to the concept of Community producer, to end the current anti-dumping measures in a year's time, after which it would submit a proposal to the Council concerning the extension of these measures. It empowered Mr MANDELSON, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, to finalise the exact legal terms of the proposal.

8.2. *RECENT DISTURBANCES ON THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL MARKETS*

(SEC(2007)1096)

Mr ALMUNIA pointed out that the International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank's reports on financial stability, in April and June 2007 respectively, and the Commission's economic forecasts since 2006 had already predicted that the specific problems of the subprime mortgage market would spread to the entire international financial system. However, it had been impossible to anticipate the timing and scale of the turmoil that erupted on the American market on 23 July and then spread to the international financial markets.

In the short term two questions needed to be answered: what impact might the crisis have on the real economy and what implications, if any, would it have for the prudential supervision of financial institutions.

As regards the first question, Mr ALMUNIA felt that it was still too early to quantify the impact on the economy at all accurately. He did, however, refer to initial impressions as regards growth in Europe and the United States, the conditions and volume of consumer and business loans in the Member States and market confidence. He mentioned the volatility of the stock exchanges and acknowledged that European growth would experience some problems in

2008 rather than 2007, but stressed that the European economy was fundamentally sound.

Referring to the information note from Mr McCREEVY, distributed as SEC(2007)1096, Mr ALMUNIA briefly summarised the lessons to be learnt from the workings of the prudential supervision and risk management mechanisms and the current regulations, as well as the role of the rating agencies in the growth of the credit derivatives market.

Mr ALMUNIA concluded by announcing that the Commission's next economic forecasts, due to be published on 11 September 2007, would give a more accurate evaluation of the impact of the crisis on the real economy, and that all of these questions would be examined during the informal meetings of the Eurogroup and the Ministers of Economic and Financial Affairs due to take place in Porto on 14 and 15 September 2007.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr ALMUNIA and Mr McCREEVY for their preliminary analysis and stressed that the European economy remained fundamentally sound. He hoped that the Commission would in due course have an opportunity to discuss the implications of these events on the working of the financial supervision mechanisms.

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr McCREEVY in SEC(2007)1096.

8.3. *THE COMMISSION'S RESPONSE TO THE VARIOUS EMERGENCIES DURING THE SUMMER, INCLUDING THE DEVASTATING FIRES IN GREECE – EU CIVIL PROTECTION MECHANISM*

Mr DIMAS reported on the extensive forest fires in southern Europe this summer, particularly in Greece, where they had caused serious loss of life and massive destruction. He gave detailed figures for the surface area of agricultural land and forest affected in various regions of the country and

indicated the possible causes of the disaster, while making it clear that investigations were still under way.

Mr DIMAS described the very positive response of the European Union and its Member States to Greece's calls for assistance, following activation of the European civil protection mechanism, which operates under the auspices of the Commission. The contribution of a very large number of Member States, reflecting their capacity to deal with forest fires, was a fine example of European solidarity.

He also mentioned the efforts and measures that would be necessary once the fires had been put out. A member of the Greek Government had visited Brussels that week to discuss with various Commission Members the possibilities for assistance in the reconstruction phase, particularly under the European Solidarity Fund. In addition, Ms HÜBNER, whom Mr DIMAS thanked for her efforts, would be meeting the Greek authorities in Athens in the next few days. He referred here to the Greek Government's preliminary estimates, which at this stage indicated that the economic cost of the fires amounted to four billion euros, or 2% of Greece's gross domestic product. The social, psychological, environmental and ecological impact of the disaster, which was equally great, would also have to be added to this estimate of the economic cost.

Mr DIMAS also announced that the Commission might soon be called upon to consider proposals to strengthen the civil protection and forest fire prevention mechanism. He felt that the current situation in Greece showed how important it was to take changing climate conditions into account and adapt to them.

The PRESIDENT then briefed the Commission on his recent telephone conversation with the Greek Prime Minister, Kostas Karamanlis. He had conveyed the Commission's solidarity with and condolences to the Greek people and particularly the bereaved families. Like Mr DIMAS, he praised the efficiency and speed of the assistance given to Greece by its European

(29 August 2007)

partners under the European civil protection mechanism. He felt that the time had come to strengthen these instruments in the light of the human tragedy and ecological disaster currently affecting Greece and the huge economic impact on numerous households and villages. Solidarity would continue to be needed after the fires were out, and in this spirit the Commission would waste no time in examining all of the measures that could alleviate the consequences of the fires, either under the European Solidarity Fund or by making full use of the Commission's discretionary powers, particularly in the area of the Structural Funds.

The Commission took note of this information.

**8.4. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO THE OUTBREAK OF FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM
(SEC(2007)1097)**

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr KYPRIANOU in SEC(2007)1097.

9. RELATIONS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

9.1. ELECTION OF THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE TURKISH REPUBLIC

Mr REHN reported on the election on Tuesday 28 August 2007 of Mr Abdullah Gül as President of the Turkish Republic, after the third round of voting. He was sworn in at a ceremony later the same day. Mr REHN stated that, contrary to what had happened in the spring, the presidential election had proceeded without any disruption and with a very high level of participation by all the political parties represented in the Turkish Parliament. This was undoubtedly the result of the clear victory of Mr Gül's Justice and Development Party (AKP) in July's general election, when it won 47% of the votes. The Turkish armed forces had exercised considerable discretion during

the successive ballots of the past few weeks. Mr REHN concluded that, with the election of Mr Gül, the political crisis in Turkey seemed to have passed and the reforms could therefore go ahead.

As far as Turkey's European prospects were concerned, Mr REHN reminded the meeting that, since the general election, the Turkish Parliament had been dominated by a majority that was clearly in favour of reform. Mr Gül had also demonstrated a constructive attitude to reform, particularly in the statement he released on Tuesday after his election, not least as regards the need to find a comprehensive solution to the problem of Cyprus. Turning to the future of the accession negotiations with Turkey, Mr REHN expressed the hope that they could now continue, in line with the decisions already taken in the past. However, he would like the Commission to have a policy debate on the terms of such negotiations in the near future.

During a brief exchange of views, the Commission considered the circumstances of Mr Gül's election and welcomed any positive effect this might have on the accession negotiations.

The Commission took note of this information.

9.2. VISIT TO CHINA (21-26 JULY 2007)
(SEC(2007)1077)

Ms KUNEVA reported on the results of her visit to China from 21 to 26 July 2007.

She mentioned the serious safety problems that had been detected in certain products from China, such as toys and contaminated toothpaste. During her visit to the Chinese authorities she had conveyed the Commission's close interest in these cases and the concern they were causing among European consumers. The representatives of the central and provincial governments had responded positively to the Commission's demands, which had been made

(29 August 2007)

transparently and in a constructive spirit, but firmly, in order to ensure that European consumers were fully protected.

She also drew the Commission's attention to a number of events of importance to relations with China, such as the Chinese Communist Party congress, the EU-China summit and the Olympic Games in 2008. These events would be useful occasions for furthering cooperation between the EU and China as regards product safety.

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

- product safety and particularly the safety of toys were highly sensitive issues for the public;
- the importance of pursuing the dialogue and cooperation with China on product safety, in the interests of protecting European consumers;
- the Commission's determination that China should honour its international commitments in this area;
- the importance of strengthening cooperation on product safety with other non-member countries, particularly the United States;
- the links between these cases and the revision of the Directive on the safety of toys;
- the importance of questions of food safety in EU-China relations.

The Commission took note of this information and Ms Kuneva's briefing note, distributed as SEC(2007)1077.

*

* *

The meeting closed at 13.19 hours.