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SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

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MINUTES
of the 1824th meeting of the Commission
held in Brussels
(Berlaymont)
on Wednesday 2 April 2008
(morning)

PV(2008)1824 final

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Single sitting: Wednesday 2 April 2008 (morning)

The sitting opened at 09.09 hours with Mr Barroso, President, in the chair.

Present

Mr BARROSO	President	
Ms WALLSTRÖM	Vice-President	Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr VERHEUGEN	Vice-President	Items 7 to 9 (in part)
Mr BARROT	Vice-President	
Mr KALLAS	Vice-President	
Ms REDING		Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr DIMAS		
Mr ALMUNIA		
Ms HÜBNER		
Mr BORG		
Ms GRYBAUSKAITĖ		
Mr POTOČNIK		
Mr FIGEL'		
Mr REHN		Items 1 to 10
Mr KOVÁCS		
Ms KROES		Items 1 to 10
Ms FISCHER BOEL		
Ms FERRERO-WALDNER		Items 1 to 10
Mr McCREEVY		Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr ŠPIDLA		
Mr MANDELSON		Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr PIEBALGS		Items 8 (in part) and 9 (in part)
Ms KUNEVA		
Mr ORBAN		
Ms VASSILIOU		Items 1 to 10

Absent

Mr FRATTINI

Vice-President

Mr MICHEL

Member

(2 April 2008)

The following sat in to represent absent Members of the Commission

Mr STUCKENS	A member of Mr MICHEL's staff
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The following also sat in

Mr VALE DE ALMEIDA	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Ms DURAND	Acting Director-General, Legal Service	
Mr SØRENSEN	Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr LAITENBERGER	Commission Spokesman	Items 7 (in part) to 10
Ms AHRENKILDE	Spokesperson's Service, DG Communication	Items 9 (in part) to 11
Mr GASPAR	Acting Director-General, Bureau of European Policy Advisers	
Mr THEBAULT	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 8 (in part) to 10
Ms MARTINHO	Chief adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 9 (in part) to 10
Mr ANDRESEN GUIMARÃES	A member of the PRESIDENT 's staff	Item 9 (in part)
Mr PRONK	Adviser in Ms REDING's office	Items 9 (in part) to 11
Mr PESONEN	Chef de cabinet to Mr REHN	Items 8 (in part) to 10
Mr KARNITSCHNIG	A member of Ms FERRERO- WALDNER's staff	Items 8 to 10
Mr HILL	A member of Mr MANDELSON's staff	Items 9 (in part) to 11
Mr GARCÍA PORRAS	A member of Mr PIEBALGS's staff	Items 1 to 8 (in part)

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

The PRESIDENT began by referring to Ms VASSILIOU's public hearing before Parliament, which had taken place on 1 April. Praising the quality of Ms VASSILIOU's performance and noting the very warm welcome she had received from MEPs, he offered her his sincere congratulations. He was joined in this by all the Commission Members.

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1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2008)1824/3; SEC(2008)372/2)

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(2008)1824)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 31 March.

3. MINUTES OF 1823RD MEETING (19 MARCH)

(PV(2008)1823)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 1823rd meeting.

4. MONITORING THE APPLICATION OF COMMUNITY LAW

***STATE AID – INDIVIDUAL CASES – RECAPITULATIVE LIST
(SEC(2008)419 AND /2)***

The Commission adopted the decisions in the recapitulative list SEC(2008)419/2.

5. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

***5.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2008)373 ET SEQ.)***

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 17 and 28 March.

***5.2. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES
(SEC(2008)374 AND /2)***

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expired between 31 March and 4 April and of the "finalisation" written procedures initiated following the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet on 31 March.

***5.3. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2008)375 ET SEQ.)***

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 17 and 28 March.

5.4. *DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS*

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation procedure between 17 and 28 March, as archived in "Greffé 2000" (Registry).

6. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2008)376)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2008)57)

PERSONNEL AND ADMINISTRATION DG – SPECIAL ADVISERS TO COMMISSION MEMBERS – 1 APRIL 2008 TO 31 MARCH 2009

(PERS(2008)58)

Having noted the information at point 1 of PERS(2008)57, the Commission, on a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided:

- to authorise Mr KALLAS to adopt the list of special advisers to Commission Members set out in PERS(2008)58;
- to authorise the Director-General for Personnel and Administration to implement that decision by signing contracts of employment on behalf of the authority empowered to conclude contracts of employment.

This decision would take effect from 1 April 2008.

7. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – "DEBATE EUROPE" – BUILDING ON THE EXPERIENCE OF PLAN D FOR DEMOCRACY, DIALOGUE AND DEBATE
(COM(2008)158 TO /4; SEC(2008)377)

Ms WALLSTRÖM introduced the communication, the first objective of which was to draw lessons from "Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate", adopted by the Commission in October 2005 in response to a call from the Council for a period of reflection on how best to take the institutional reform forward.

The document also set out to continue in 2008 and 2009 the communication strategy introduced by Plan D, albeit with certain adaptations, particularly in view of the process of ratifying the Treaty of Lisbon and the 2009 European elections. The aim was to arouse public interest, inform citizens about European integration and enable them to play an active part in the debate on the EU and its future development.

Ms WALLSTRÖM pointed out that the main objectives set in connection with Plan D, i.e. "listening better", "explaining better" and "going local", still applied. They were long-term objectives; as early as June 2006 the European Council had noted in its conclusions that the Union's commitment to becoming more democratic, transparent and effective would go beyond the period of reflection.

For the latest initiative - "Debate Europe" - she stressed the importance of adopting a bottom-up approach, with Member States and local information relays playing a crucial role. She outlined the main measures proposed to pursue these objectives, in particular the cofinancing of public consultations at European and national level through calls for proposals, an increase in the capacity of the Commission's Representations in the Member States and information relays, greater synergy and coordination between various programmes to promote active citizenship, and closer interinstitutional cooperation between the EU and the Member States.

Lastly, Ms WALLSTRÖM explained other facets of this latest initiative: building on certain Plan D measures that had been particularly successful, such as debates on the internet, exploiting pilot information networks and stepping up cooperation between the Commission and its Representations in the Member States on the one hand and the other institutions, in particular Parliament and its information offices, on the other. In this context the Commission attached great importance to local action and cooperation with the media.

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

- the relevance of the lessons drawn from Plan D but also of the debate on the draft constitution in 2005;
- the importance of this initiative addressing specific aspects of the current public debate on the ratification of the Treaty of the Lisbon in the Member States;
- in the run-up to the 2009 European elections, the value of a public debate centred on European rather than national issues;
- the wish that the media would place more emphasis on coverage and discussion of European issues;
- the need to continue and build on the very positive experience of the "Back to School" project that had been organised several times since January 2007 in Member States holding the Council Presidency, whereby a large number of Commission officials went back to schools in their home Member State;
- the major potential contributions of European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008 and European Year of Creativity and Innovation in 2009;
- the importance of the follow-up to this initiative by the Commission and all its departments.

Winding up the discussion, the PRESIDENT thanked Ms WALLSTRÖM and the departments under her responsibility for this new initiative which, he stressed, was

important for the dialogue with citizens and for the Commission communication on its strategy of a Europe that produced results for its citizens.

He expressed a wish for the Commission Members to work together, with the help of Ms WALLSTRÖM, to produce a report in due course on the results of the present Commission. He also asked all Commission Members to pursue their contacts with the other institutions, with the authorities and the parliaments of the Member States, with the media, but above all with citizens, and to take an active part in the debate to be launched at all levels following the communication being tabled that day.

Lastly, the PRESIDENT proposed that matters relating to the communication strategy be discussed by the Commission at a forthcoming policy debate.

The Commission approved, subject to a final linguistic check of Annexes 3 and 4, the communication in COM(2008)158/4, for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and to the national parliaments.

8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY IN 2007

(COM(2008)164 AND /2; SEC(2008)391; SEC(2008)392; SEC(2008)393; SEC(2008)394; SEC(2008)395; SEC(2008)396; SEC(2008)397; SEC(2008)398; SEC(2008)399; SEC(2008)400; SEC(2008)401; SEC(2008)402; SEC(2008)403; SEC(2008)420)

Ms FERRERO-WALDNER presented the communication on the implementation of the European neighbourhood policy, which the Commission was to approve by "finalisation" written procedure due to terminate on Thursday 3 April 2008 (E/540/2008). She began by thanking all the Commission Members for their support

in the preparation of the file, which, in addition to the communication itself, comprised a sectoral report and 12 country progress reports.

She highlighted the quality and balance of this series of reports, which assessed the performances of the partner countries in relation to the plans of action agreed under the European neighbourhood policy, and pointed out that these annual reports were a central component of the partnership arrangements with the countries concerned with a view to promoting the reforms and gradually bringing them closer to the European Union. She considered that the reports would help in intensifying the European neighbourhood policy and in guiding the partner countries individually in their political and economic modernisation efforts. It was important that each of the countries be treated on its own merits in the light of the efforts made.

In this connection, Ms FERRERO-WALDNER highlighted the contrasting picture offered by the reports, some of which recorded impressive progress while in others advances were limited. She noted that, even though the effects of the European neighbourhood policy were in general beginning to become apparent on the ground, the degree to which the countries concerned assumed ownership of the programme of reforms was decisive for their success.

From the European side, the time has come for improvement and intensification of the European neighbourhood policy, whose incentives needed to be made even more attractive and implementation more effective; she reminded the meeting of the proposals made in the December 2007 communication "A strong European neighbourhood policy" as regards economic integration, mobility or conflict resolution.

She then referred to the considerable progress noted in the reports on four countries: Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Morocco and Israel. The joint work on implementing the plans of action for these countries had demonstrated their ability and their political will to go further, and it now seemed appropriate to propose that relations with these four countries be strengthened, in the shape of an "advanced status" for Morocco, a "special status" for Israel and new agreements with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

Ms FERRERO-WALDNER concluded with a call for a strategic debate to fine tune and optimise the neighbourhood policy, so as to respond to the challenges arising both to the east and the south of the European Union. She mentioned in particular work on the creation of a Union for the Mediterranean, which offered the Commission a further opportunity to step up Union action towards neighbouring countries. Her departments were already in the process of preparing concrete proposals that would be presented over the coming months.

The ensuing discussion highlighted the following points:

- the importance of providing a positive reaction to the efforts made by the partner countries to take forward reforms, and the support that should therefore be given to the planned intensification of relations with four of them;
- the wide differences that still remained between the partner countries in terms of application of democratic values in particular, and hence the case for a differentiated plan of progression;
- the particularly positive nature of the development of EU relations with Israel and the notable willingness of that country to move closer;
- the economic prospects that the European neighbourhood policy could offer in the long term, with the creation of a large market that would be better able to contend with the increased competition resulting from globalisation;
- the benefits, at all events, of offering partner countries clear and concrete prospects, such as an economic integration area;
- examples of integration provided by research or higher education, which brought together Member States and associated members in an area extending beyond the borders of the Union;
- the important work done under the neighbourhood policy in the field of energy, particularly as regards securing energy supplies and combating energy poverty, and the key role that energy could play in future in market integration;

- the interest in promoting the development of links and integration dynamics between the beneficiary countries of the neighbourhood policy, and the fact that the EU could serve as a model for this purpose;
- the role of the European neighbourhood policy in peacekeeping and stability in certain regions, and its importance as a driving force behind economic and political reforms;
- the part the policy plays in spreading Europe's influence in the world and the wish that the budget available for it would in future be a better reflection of this importance;
- the parity to be maintained between the southern and eastern dimensions of the neighbourhood policy and the efforts that would have to be made for the eastern dimension once the Union for the Mediterranean has been launched;
- the useful lessons to be learned from operation of the Barcelona system for building the Union for the Mediterranean;
- the interaction between neighbourhood policy and enlargement policy;
- the mutual benefits of the neighbourhood policy for the partner countries and for the Union;
- the value of an in-depth and collective discussion on this policy and the strategic picture as part of a general policy debate;
- similarly, the urgent need for a discussion on the work of preparing the Union for the Mediterranean.

The PRESIDENT in turn pointed to the importance of varying the pace of advances in relations with partner countries in the light of the progress made in implementing the action plans.

As regards the debate to be held on the future of the neighbourhood policy, he noted that Ms FERRERO-WALDNER was working on this, on the basis of the December

communication, but pointed to the need that for discussion to come only when the ground had been sufficiently prepared and genuinely new ideas were forthcoming.

But he did agree on the urgent need to address the question of the Union for the Mediterranean, in response to the remit from the European Council on 13 and 14 March asking the Commission to present proposals for an outline framework ahead of the Paris summit on 13 July. These proposals were already being prepared within the departments of Ms FERRERO-WALDNER and would be presented to the Commission as soon as possible, but he understood the need for the Commission to have a general discussion before they were finalised, and also the usefulness of submitting to the Member States very quickly a series of principles that would underlie the proposals.

He therefore suggested that Ms FERRERO-WALDNER first produce an informal document for an exchange of views between the Commission Members in the weeks ahead, before being sent to the Member States, on the understanding that the formal proposal could be tabled for Commission approval during May.

He gave an assurance that a more general debate on the future of the broad neighbourhood policy would be programmed later. The European neighbourhood policy still had a bright future and deserved the Commission's full attention.

Ms FERRERO-WALDNER thanked the Commission Members for the interest they had shown in the neighbourhood policy. She took note of the suggestions made as regards common economic prospects with the neighbouring countries, remembering the expectations some of them entertained in terms of accession. She too was particularly pleased with the intensification of relations with Israel, which would bring benefits for both sides.

As regards the eastern dimension, she reminded members of the creation of the synergy for the Black Sea and pointed to the importance of giving substance to this cooperation framework, highlighting the responsibility borne by the Member States.

As regards the southern dimension, she referred to the obstacles to regional cooperation deriving from the Middle East conflict and the Western Sahara issue, and saw in the Union for the Mediterranean a means of bringing the sides closer. As for the practical arrangements for this Union, she mentioned the work in progress and in particular the tricky question of the secretariat and the institutional and financial aspects.

The PRESIDENT concluded the discussion with a reference to the complexity of the neighbourhood policy. As regards the southern dimension, he too noted the structural difficulties that had so far hampered efforts to establish cooperation between Arab countries, and particularly the Middle East peace process. On the eastern dimension, he referred to the different lines taken by the Member States in respect of the aspirations of certain neighbouring countries to integrate the EU. He emphasised that, on these two fronts, the European neighbourhood policy alone could not resolve everything.

The Commission took note of this information and of the conclusions and line taken by the PRESIDENT.

9. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

9.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

i) Preparation of agreement at first reading

(SPI(2008)21)

- Implementation of the deployment and commercial operating phases of the European satellite radionavigation programme – GALILEO Programme (Regulation) – BARSÍ PATAKY report – 2004/0156 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)21 and authorised Mr BARROT to continue contacts with Parliament and the Council with a view to securing agreement at first reading.

9.2. RELATIONS WITH THE COUNCIL

ii) Programming of Council business

(SI (2008)196)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2008)196 on the Council meetings between 27 March and 9 April.

iii) Results of the "Gymnich" informal Foreign Ministers' meeting (Brdo, 28 and 29 March)

(SEC(2008)438)

Relations with China

Ms FERRERO-WALDNER reported on the main results of the informal meeting of Foreign Ministers on 28 and 29 March, which had focused in particular on the situation in the Middle East, relations with Russia, the Western Balkans and the situation in Tibet.

In particular she reported on the thrust of the debate on the situation in Tibet. The Ministers had expressed deep concern at the events in Tibet, condemned all forms of violence and any treatment of prisoners that was not in line with international rules and standards, and asked the Chinese authorities to begin a constructive and substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama.

The Foreign Ministers did not share the view that this was a domestic Chinese matter, given the major human rights and minority rights issues involved and the specific questions relating to the protection of Tibetan culture and tradition.

Ms FERRERO-WALDNER saw the visit to China of the PRESIDENT and several Commission Members on 24, 25 and 26 April as a useful and important opportunity to discuss the matter with representatives of the Chinese authorities and express the EU's growing concern at the situation in Tibet.

There was an exchange of views, during which the Commission looked in particular at the following aspects:

- the sensitive nature of the Tibetan issue for European public opinion and the importance of working out a coherent approach at EU level;
- the usefulness of adopting a balanced approach within the Union, stressing the challenges arising from the human rights situation in China, the democracy gap and action to combat climate change, while encouraging dialogue and cooperation with China;
- the importance of not disengaging from dialogue with the Chinese authorities and, on the contrary, the value of using bilateral relations between the EU and China to ensure that the Chinese authorities acted with moderation;
- the sensitivity required in handling relations with the Dalai Lama, the moderate and conciliatory position he had adopted, and the need to encourage dialogue with the Chinese authorities so as to ensure respect for Tibet's cultural and religious autonomy;
- the importance of showing a pragmatic attitude and of taking the opportunity of the visit to China to address key questions, but also specific sectoral dossiers, particularly on customs cooperation;
- while remaining open to dialogue, the importance of defining a clear position regarding respect for human rights and China's trade policy; consequently, the question of what dimension should be given to the Commission's visit to China;
- the cross-cutting nature of the partnership with China, which required a strategic, open and coherent vision in order to help China tackle the economic challenges it faced, particularly as regards sustainable development and action to curb the environmental effects of its development; in this connection, the timeliness of the Commission's visit

to China, which should be an opportunity to identify specific, tangible measures and to launch the new mechanism for high-level trade talks approved at the last EU-China summit in November 2007;

- the relevance of relations with China to discussions in the Transatlantic Economic Council, which had met on 31 March, and the interest expressed by the United States in developing with the EU a coherent approach towards China;
- the need to define a common position regarding participation at the Olympic Games in Beijing in August 2008, which should not be called into question, and the scope for using the Games to highlight the importance of respecting certain values.

In conclusion, the PRESIDENT stressed the need to develop a strategic approach which made no secret of the concerns over respect for fundamental rights, yet recognised the vital role China must play in combating climate change and dealing with global issues, notably in the security field. He mentioned the openness displayed by Chinese representatives during recent contacts with the Commission, and also the wider context of EU-Chinese relations surrounding the Commission's forthcoming visit to China and the importance of taking this opportunity to highlight the serious concerns of the Commission and the EU as a whole at the human rights situation in China.

He also announced that preparations for the visit to China would be discussed by the "External Relations" group of Commission Members that day (2 April).

The Commission took note of these observations and of Ms FERRERO-WALDNER's briefing note in SEC(2008)438.

Situation in the Western Balkans

Mr REHN then briefed the Commission on some of the other items discussed at the informal meeting of Foreign Ministers.

Regarding the Western Balkans, Mr REHN noted that the Foreign Ministers had welcomed the Commission's communication of 5 March. He also reported on his recent meeting with the Serbian Prime Minister, Mr Vojislav Koštunica, and mentioned the parliamentary elections to be held in Serbia on 11 May.

M. REHN then reported on his talks with the Foreign Ministers of Cyprus, Mr Markos Kyprianou, and Turkey, Mr Ali Babacan, and the planned opening of the Ledra Street crossing between the two parts of Nicosia on 3 April.

The Commission took note of this information.

9.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

iv) Results of the meeting of Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control – Discharge to the Commission on the implementation of 2006 budget (Brussels, 25 and 26 March 2008)

(SP(2008)1778; SP(2008)1789)

Mr KALLAS reported on the results of the vote in Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control (COCOBU) as regards the discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget for the 2006 financial year. He welcomed the positive outcome, with 31 members of COCOBU voting in favour of granting discharge to the Commission, three voting against and two abstaining.

He also mentioned the next stages of the discharge procedure, particularly the referral to Parliament in a plenary session scheduled for 22 April. Special attention should be given, between now and the presentation of the final Commission report in 2009, to the implementation and monitoring of the commitments made by the Commission to the discharge authority.

Mr KALLAS thanked for their excellent work the PRESIDENT and the Commission Members most directly involved, particularly Ms HÜBNER, Ms FERRERO-Waldner and Mr ŠPIDLA, the departments under their responsibility, the Secretariat-General and the Directorate-General for Budget.

Lastly, he drew attention to the conclusions to be drawn from the 2006 discharge procedure for future discharge exercises, particularly as regards the preparatory work in connection with the process, coordination within the Commission and its departments, the quality of the annual activity reports and the identification of possible problems.

In particular, he thought that constructive and close cooperation between the Commission and the Court of Auditors and the discharge authority would also be desirable for future exercises.

The PRESIDENT then thanked Mr KALLAS, and all the Commission Members and departments involved, for their close and effective cooperation, which had brought this very important file to a successful conclusion. He endorsed entirely Mr KALLAS's remarks on the quality of cooperation with the Court of Auditors and the discharge authority and on the importance of actively monitoring the file.

He asked the Commission Members and all departments to help implement the commitments entered into by the Commission in the context of the 2006 discharge procedure and carry out the preparatory work for future discharge exercises.

The Commission took note of this information.

10. RELATIONS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

10.1. SITUATION IN TURKEY

Mr REHN commented on the political situation in Turkey, giving an overview of recent developments resulting from the decision by its Constitutional Court that an indictment filed by the chief prosecutor at the Court of Appeal seeking a ban on the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) was admissible.

He reminded the meeting of the guidelines on the prohibition and dissolution of political parties published by the Venice Commission for Democracy through Law. He mentioned also the political consequences of this situation, which were indicative of the competing visions of Turkey's future and drew attention to the need to encourage civil society and the media to take part in the democratic debate. Referring to statements by the authorities of several Member States, he emphasised the need to promote respect for democratic principles, political dialogue and the continuation of reforms.

The Commission held a brief exchange of views, during which it focused on the ambiguous legal implications of the developments in Turkey.

The PRESIDENT discussed the complex nature of the questions raised by the case before the Constitutional Court and recommended that the various legal implications of the situation be analysed thoroughly. He stressed the importance of encouraging a political culture of tolerance, promoting democratic values and respect for the rule of law and sending a clear message of encouragement to democrats and reformers during the visit to Turkey.

The Commission took note of this information.

**10.2. VISIT TO INDIA (MUMBAI AND DELHI, 24 TO 27 MARCH 2008)
(SEC(2008)429)**

The Commission took note of the information note from Ms REDING distributed as SEC(2008)429.

11. TRENDS IN THE MEMBER STATES

As regards the latest developments in the Lisbon Treaty ratification process, Ms HÜBNER discussed the situation in Poland and its parliament's favourable vote on the draft ratification law the day before. She also discussed the situation in the Czech Republic, having recently returned from a visit there. Mr FIGEL described recent developments concerning the debate in Slovakia.

Note was also taken of the resignation of Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern, effective as from 6 May. At the time, the possible effects of his resignation on the Irish referendum procedure were not yet clear.

The Commission took note of this information.

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The meeting was closed at 12.28.