



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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PRESS RELEASE

2882nd Council meeting

Economic and Financial Affairs

Brussels, 8 July 2008

President

Christine LAGARDE

Minister for Economic Affairs, Finance and Employment of
France

P R E S S

Main results of the Council

*The Council took a Decision on the **adoption by Slovakia of the euro as from 1 January 2009** and set the permanent conversion rate for the Slovak koruna to the euro. The Decision will extend the euro area from 15 to 16 Member States, allowing six months for Slovakia to prepare for the changeover.*

*The Council concluded an **excessive deficit procedure concerning Poland** and at the same time opened a procedure concerning the **United Kingdom**. It adopted opinions on **Belgium's** stability programme and **Poland's** convergence programme.*

In the course of a discussion on the rise in oil prices, it reached political agreement on the weekly publication of oil stocks.

*The Council also adopted conclusions on IASB governance and on initiatives taken following the recent turmoil on the financial markets, concerning in particular transparency and **rating agencies**, including their registration at European level.*

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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PARTICIPANTS

The governments of the Member States and the European Commission were represented as follows:

Belgium:

Mr Didier REYNDERS

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Institutional Reforms

Bulgaria:

Mr Plamen Vassilev ORESHARSKI

Minister for Finance

Czech Republic:

Mr Miroslav KALOUSEK

Minister for Finance

Denmark:

Mr Claus GRUBE

Permanent Representative

Germany:

Mr Peer STEINBRÜCK

Federal Minister for Finance

Estonia:

Mr Ivari PADAR

Minister for Finance

Ireland:

Mr Bobby McDONAGH

Permanent Representative

Greece:

Mr Georgios ALOGOSKOUFIS

Minister for Economic Affairs and Finance

Spain:

Mr David VEGARA FIGUERAS

State Secretary for Economic Affairs

France:

Ms Christine LAGARDE

Minister for Economic Affairs, Finance and Employment

Italy:

Mr Giulio TREMONTI

Minister for Economic Affairs and Finance

Cyprus:

Mr Charilaos STAVRAKIS

Minister for Finance

Latvia:

Mr Mārtiņš BICEVSKIS

State Secretary, Ministry of Economic Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Rimantas ŠADŽIUS

Minister for Finance

Luxembourg:

Mr Jean-Claude JUNCKER

Mr Jeannot KRECKÉ

Prime Minister, Ministre d'Etat, Minister for Finance
Minister for Economic Affairs and Foreign Trade,
Minister for Sport

Hungary:

Mr János VERES

Minister for Finance

Malta:

Mr Tonio FENECH

Minister for Finance, the Economy and Investment

Netherlands:

Mr Wouter BOS

Minister for Finance, Deputy Prime Minister

Austria:

Mr Christoph MATZNETTER

State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Finance

Poland:

Mr Jan VINCENT-ROSTOWSKI

Minister for Finance

Portugal:

Mr Emanuel AUGUSTO SANTOS

State Secretary for the Budget, attached to the Minister for Finance

Romania:

Ms Alice BITU

State Secretary, Ministry of the Economy and Finance

Slovenia:

Mr Andrej BAJUK

Minister for Finance

Slovakia:

Mr Ján POČIATEK

Minister for Finance

Finland:

Mr Veli-Pekka NUMMIKOSKI

State Secretary, Ministry of Finance

Sweden:

Mr Anders BORG

Minister for Finance

United Kingdom:

Mr Alistair DARLING

Chancellor of the Exchequer

.....
Commission:

Mr Joaquín ALMUNIA

Member

Mr Charlie McCREEVY

Member
.....

Other participants:

Mr Lucas PAPADEMOS

Vice-President of the European Central Bank

Mr Philippe MAYSTADT

President of the European Investment Bank

Mr Xavier MUSCA

Chairman of the Economic and Financial Committee

Mr Christian KASTROP

Chairman of the Economic Policy Committee

ITEMS DEBATED

PRESIDENCY WORK PROGRAMME

The Council took note of the presentation by the French Presidency of a programme of work in the field of economic and financial affairs to be undertaken during its term, from July to December 2008 (11204/08). It exchanged views on this subject.

In its programme the Presidency pays particular attention to:

- putting forward responses to Europeans' concern at the economic situation against a background of high oil prices and risks for the environment;
- boosting confidence in the European financial system, gearing it to the reality of financial integration in Europe and arranging for effective supervision of pan-European financial groups;
- ensuring that economic and monetary union functions properly;
- continuing with integration of the internal market, particularly as regards financial services and taxation;
- on budget issues, finalising the EU budget for 2009.

ADOPTION OF THE EURO BY SLOVAKIA

The Council adopted:

- a Decision on the adoption by Slovakia of the euro as its currency as from 1 January 2009;
- a Regulation setting the permanent conversion rate for the Slovak koruna to the euro, and consequently amending Regulation No 2866/98 accordingly;
- a Regulation adjusting certain technical provisions on the euro and amending Regulation No 974/98.

The Decision will enlarge the euro area to 16 Member States as from 1 January 2009, allowing six months for Slovakia to prepare for the changeover. Euro notes and coins will be issued in Slovakia at the same time as adoption of the euro.

The conversion rate is set at 30,1260 Slovak koruna to the euro.

Fifteen of the EU's 27 Member States currently use the euro as their currency: Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Austria, Slovenia and Finland. Euro notes and coins were introduced in 12 of those countries on 1 January 2002, in Slovenia on 1 January 2007 and in Cyprus and Malta on 1 January 2008.

STABILITY AND GROWTH PACT – IMPLEMENTATION

Belgium and Poland: Stability and convergence programmes

The Council adopted opinions on the annual updates:

- by Belgium of its stability programme (8962/08);
- by Poland of its convergence programme (8631/08).

Under the EU's stability and growth pact, Member States having the euro as their currency are required to present stability programmes; those not participating in the single currency are required to present convergence programmes. They update them every year, and each time the Council adopts an opinion.

The programmes set out the Member States' medium-term budgetary objectives and the main assumptions concerning economic variables. The aim is to ensure sound government finances as a means of strengthening the conditions for price stability and for sustainable growth conducive to job creation.

The Council evaluated the updated programmes of the other 25 Member States at its meetings on 12 February and 4 March 2008.

Poland: Excessive deficit procedure

The Council adopted a decision, Article 104(12) of the Treaty, repealing the decision it had taken in July 2004 under Article 104(6) concerning the existence of an excessive government deficit in Poland (11029/08).

Poland has, in a sustainable manner, brought its deficit below the level of 3 % of gross domestic product (GDP), which is the reference level set by the Treaty.

For further information, see Press Release 11493/08.

United Kingdom: Excessive deficit procedure

The Council adopted, under Article 104(6) of the Treaty, a decision on the existence of an excessive government deficit in the United Kingdom and a recommendation, under Article 104(7), on action to be taken for its correction.

The decision is based on information received from the UK authorities to the effect that the deficit should reach 3,2 % of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2008-09, i.e. above the 3 % reference value set by the Treaty.

The Council's recommendation gives the United Kingdom a period of six months to take corrective measures. The United Kingdom is required to put an end to its excessive deficit by the 2009-10 financial year at the latest, with at least a 0,5 % of GDP improvement in structural balance during the 2009-10 financial year.

RISING OIL PRICES

The Council was informed of the Presidency's intentions concerning the Council's role, in its Economic and Financial Affairs configuration (Ecofin), in implementing the conclusions of the European Council on 19 and 20 June 2008 concerning trends in the petroleum markets.

The Presidency put forward a note describing the way it was proposed to organise the work of the Ecofin Council over the next six months (11225/1/08 REV 1). The Council's other configurations will also contribute to this work.

The Council held an exchange of views, and in particular reached a political agreement on publishing information on oil stocks on a weekly basis.

At its meeting in June, the European Council expressed concern about the continued rise in oil and gas prices and the social and economic consequences. It invited the Presidency, in cooperation with the Commission, to examine the feasibility and impact of measures to limit the effects of the sudden price increases and to report back before the October European Council.

A Commission communication of 13 June provides a basis for discussion on the way in which Europe may be able to adapt to higher oil prices in the next few years (10824/08).

The topics to be considered by the Ecofin Council, with a view to the European Council's meetings in October and December, include:

- the functioning of the markets, in particular as regards the understanding of price changes, and the means of improvement, especially as regards the transparency of commercial oil stocks;
- the role of the financial instruments (of the Commission and the European Investment Bank) in the improvement of energy efficiency, in the use of renewable energy sources and in a more environmentally-friendly use of fossil fuels;
- measures likely to alleviate the impact of rising oil prices.

INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTING STANDARDS – Council conclusions

The Council examined the latest developments concerning the ongoing reform in the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) and adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council recognises the efforts made by the IASCF Trustees to enhance the IASCF's governance since the completion of the last constitutional review and to strengthen the ability of the IASB to better take into account the public interest. It considers that the ongoing review of the IASCF constitution offers an important opportunity to introduce changes to further enhance the legitimacy and acceptability of international accounting standards developed by the IASB. The current financial turmoil illustrates the importance of a robust and legitimate independent international accounting standard-setting process, which is responsive to the public interest and consistent with the objective of ensuring financial stability.

The Council welcomes the proposals that have been made in this direction by the IASCF and considers that the further reform of the IASCF and IASB's governance and public accountability should be made according to the following key principles:

- The public accountability of the IASCF should be enhanced through the creation of an effective Monitoring Board, which should have sufficient powers to provide the necessary oversight of the IASCF ; it should first ensure that Trustees effectively discharge their oversight role towards the IASB, play an active role in the selection of Trustees and approve their final selection. The members of the Monitoring Body should be able to further refer issues of public interest, including those related to financial stability and prudential requirements, and matters of overall strategy for consideration by the IASB. The Monitoring Board should thus remain in close relation with the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, who should be put in charge, under the IASCF constitution, to ensure that all views and concerns of public interest representatives are fully addressed by the IASB Board;
- The Monitoring Board should be composed of relevant authorities responsible for public interest related to the adoption and endorsement of accounting standards in their respective jurisdictions, including the global body representing authorities responsible for financial stability or key authorities involved in financial stability. The European Commission shall propose mechanisms to ensure that it represents the co-ordinated position of all relevant European institutions and bodies, and Member States;

- The IASB must achieve greater transparency and legitimacy of its standard-setting and agenda-setting processes, in particular through more systematic public consultations about the IASB's work programme, including the IASB-FASB convergence agenda and more field testing. The effectiveness of the Standards Advisory Council should be enhanced; the role of impact assessments as a mandatory part of the IASB's due process should be formalised; and, possible changes to the terms of service of IASB members should be considered, including a possible term limitation for the chairman of the IASB. The views of public authorities, in particular those charged with financial stability and prudential regulation, should be adequately reflected in the IASB's standard-setting process.
- Members of the IASB should reflect an appropriate balance of practical and technical expertise, as well as a diversity of geographical experience in order to contribute to the development of high quality, global accounting standards. The role of the EU as the largest jurisdiction applying international financial reporting standards should be properly reflected.
- The Council emphasises the urgency of enhancing the EU's ability to contribute in a timely and consistent manner to the international accounting debate. It therefore welcomes efforts to enhance the role of the European Financial Reporting Advisory Group (EFRAG), especially in relation to timely upstream input to the IASB's agenda-setting process. EFRAG's governance arrangements should ensure a balanced representation of all European stakeholders. EFRAG should establish effective and transparent procedures ensuring that it operates in the public interest and in a manner consistent with the EU's financial reporting policy. The Council welcomes recent progress to reform EFRAG's structure of governance in this direction.

The Council urges all parties concerned to finalise these arrangements before the end of 2008 and will address these matters by that date. Realization of these objectives would help to secure appropriate funding for both the IASCF and EFRAG, both of which are urgently needed.

The Council invites the Commission and the Economic and Financial Committee to report to the Council on a regular basis on progress made in improving governance of the IASCF, IASB and EFRAG."

FINANCIAL MARKETS – *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

" The Council has reviewed recent market developments and progress made in the implementation of the road map on the financial market turmoil concerning market transparency and the role of rating agencies.

1. Transparency

The Council recalls that prompt and full disclosure by banks and other financial institutions of their exposures to distressed assets and off-balance sheet vehicles and of their write-downs and losses is essential to bring back confidence in the markets. In this respect, the Council underlines that the upcoming mid-year results need to be as comprehensive, legible and comparable as possible.

The Council

- welcomes CEBS' reports, issued mid June 2008, on banks' transparency on activities and products affected by the recent market turmoil and on issues regarding the valuation of complex and illiquid financial instruments,
- takes note of the need to enhance consistency of banks' disclosure practices, as well as of the valuation of exposures and their accounting,
- welcomes the guidance provided by CEBS,
- calls on banks to implement these guidelines, in a way consistent with their exposures and involvement in the activities affected by the crisis, and
- invites CEBS and supervisors to monitor this implementation following the publication of banks' mid-year results and to report back to the FSC/EFC and Ecofin in November.

The Council also calls on international standard setters to take into consideration CEBS' report on issues regarding valuation of complex and illiquid financial instruments in their work programmes. It looks forward to the review by CEBS of its recommendations on banks' disclosure in 2009 within the scope of pillar III of the Capital Requirements Directive and of its recommendations on valuation and accounting.

The Council also welcomes the initiatives undertaken by the industry to improve transparency for investors, markets and regulators of securitized markets. It takes note of the commitments to develop good practices guidelines on securitisation disclosure, to issue on a quarterly basis an Industry Market Data Report, to supplement it with specific information on the secondary market and to implement initiatives to enhance information to investors. The Council invites the Commission to closely monitor the implementation of these initiatives and to report back to the EFC and the Ecofin in early September.

2. Rating agencies

The Council considers that, given the central role ratings play in structured finance as well as their role in the European financial services regulation, it is of high importance to address the concerns that have been raised in the context of the financial turmoil concerning the transparency of the rating processes, risk of conflicts of interest related to the remuneration models of the rating agencies, accountability and the quality of ratings. The Council fully supports the FSF recommendations in this field, in particular differentiated ratings and better information on the risk characteristics of structured products.

The Council welcomes the revision by IOSCO of its Code of Conduct at the international level, and CESR's and ESME's reports on rating agencies. The Council considers that the revisions to the IOSCO Code of Conduct provide a minimum benchmark for the actions that credit rating agencies should take to address concerns about their activities in the market for structured products. In this context, the Council takes note of the additional steps undertaken in this field by the rating agencies to better address the governance concerns and improve transparency concerning the value and limitations of the ratings.

However, the Council shares the Commission view that the current initiatives do not fully address the challenges posed, that further steps are needed and that regulatory changes might be necessary.

The Council supports the objective of introducing a strengthened oversight regime for rating agencies and notes in this regard the preliminary views by the Commission as well as the proposals by CESR and ESME. The Council supports an enhanced European approach and the objective of strengthening international cooperation to ensure a stringent implementation of internationally approved principles. To this end, and without prejudice to consideration of its practical application, the Council supports the principle envisaged by the Commission that the rating agencies should be subject to an EU registration system.

The Council would also welcome intensified competition by entry into the market of new players.

The Council underlines that any further steps take into consideration the principles of the IOSCO Code of conduct and further international developments on credit rating agencies oversight and regulation. The Council looks forward to concrete Commission proposals in the autumn of 2008."

MEETINGS IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL

– Eurogroup

Ministers from Member States in the euro area took part in a meeting of the Eurogroup on 7 July.

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Over lunch, Ministers were briefed on the outcome of the G8 Finance Ministers meeting in Osaka on 14 June and on preparations for the Summit for the Mediterranean in Paris on 13 July. They were also briefed on the Eurogroup discussions on 7 July.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

European Central Bank auditors

The Council adopted a Decision appointing Pricewaterhouse Coopers Aktiengesellschaft Wirtschaftsprüfungsgesellschaft as the external auditors of the European Central Bank (ECB) for the financial years 2008 to 2012 (10033/08).

The accounts of the ECB and national central banks in the Eurosystem have to be audited by independent external auditors appointed on the recommendation of the ECB's Governing Council and approved by the Council of the EU.

COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

Belarus - Restrictive measures - Technical adaptations

The Council adopted a Regulation amending Regulation No 765/2006 concerning restrictive measures against President Lukashenko and certain officials of Belarus (10121/08).

Regulation No 765/2006 has been aligned, for the sake of clarity, with recent developments in sanctions practice regarding the identification of competent authorities, liability for certain infringements and public notice regarding procedures for maintenance of certain lists.

Consular cooperation

The Council approved guidelines designed to further strengthen the framework for consular cooperation among EU Member States by implementing a number of provisions under Decision 95/533/EC.

The aim of these guidelines is more especially to provide the necessary help for EU citizens in need in third countries, as swiftly as possible, in a pragmatic and flexible way.

They have been drawn up as part of a further implementation of the provisions under Article 20 of the TEC, and build on two Decisions adopted in 1995 with a view to strengthening European solidarity.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Cooperation in the area of countering radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism – *Council conclusions*

The conclusions will be found in 10928/08.

Cooperation with Western Balkan countries on the fight against organised crime – *Council conclusions*

The conclusions will be found in 10931/08.

Europol – Cooperation Agreements with Serbia and Montenegro

The Council authorised the Director of Europol to conclude the Cooperation Agreements between Europol and Serbia and between Europol and Montenegro.

The aim of the two Agreements is to enhance cooperation between the EU Member States, acting through Europol, and the above two countries respectively in preventing, detecting, suppressing and investigating serious forms of international crime, in particular through the exchange of strategic and technical information.

COMMERCIAL POLICY

Anti-dumping: ammonium nitrate from Russia and Ukraine; powdered activated carbon from China

The Council adopted Regulations:

- amending Regulation No 442/2007 imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of ammonium nitrate originating in Ukraine following an expiry review pursuant to Regulation No 384/96 ([10852/08](#));
- imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of ammonium nitrate originating in Russia following an expiry review and a partial interim review pursuant to Regulation No 384/96 ([10622/08](#));
- imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of powdered activated carbon originating in the People's Republic of China ([10625/08](#)).

The Council also approved a corrigendum to the Regulation of 28 April 2008 imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of coumarin originating in the People's Republic of China following an expiry review pursuant to Article 11(2) of Regulation No 384/96 extended to India, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia (9746/08).

Procedure for the preliminary examination of major investment projects – *Council conclusions*

The conclusions will be found in [9846/08](#).

ENLARGEMENT

EU/Croatia – Stabilisation and Association Agreement – enlargement

The Council adopted a Decision on the signing and provisional application of a Protocol to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Croatia to take account of the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU in January 2007 ([15834/07](#) + [15834/07 COR 8](#) + [15834/07 COR 9](#)).

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Croatia was signed in Luxembourg in October 2001 and entered into force in February 2005.

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

Financial contributions to economic and social cohesion

The Council adopted a Decision authorising the Commission to open negotiations concerning the future financial contributions of the States of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which are members of the European Economic Area (EEA), to economic and social cohesion in the EEA.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Financial contributions to the European Development Fund

The Council adopted a Decision fixing the second instalment of the financial contributions to be paid in 2008 to the European Development Fund ([11132/08](#)).

FISHERIES

Canary Islands - Imports of fishery products

The Council adopted a Regulation temporarily suspending, for specified tariff quotas, customs duties on imports of certain fishery products into the Canary Islands ([9761/08](#)).

The purpose of this measure is to offset the natural handicap resulting from the exceptional geographical situation of the Canary Islands and concerns only the supply of fishery products intended exclusively for the islands' domestic market.

The Regulation is applicable retroactively from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013.

ENVIRONMENT

Hazardous chemicals and pesticides - International trade

The Council adopted a Decision in favour of adding chrysotile asbestos, endosulfan and tributyltin compounds to the list of hazardous substances in the Rotterdam Convention ([10102/08](#)).

This Decision authorises the Commission, at the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, to support the addition of these three products to the list.

These three products are already subject to restrictions under Community legislation.

APPOINTMENTS

Economic and Social Committee

The Council appointed Mr Florival ROSA LANÇA to the Economic and Social Committee until 20 September 2010.

Committee of the Regions

The Council appointed to the Committee of the Regions, for the remainder of its term of office, which runs until 25 January 2010:

- as members: Ms Indra RASSA, Chairwoman of Saldus District Municipality and Chairwoman of Nīgrandes Local Municipality, Mr Carlos Alberto PINTO, Presidente da Câmara municipal da Covilhã, Mr Jacek CZERNIAK, Przewodniczący Sejmiku województwa lubelskiego (Chairman of the Sejmik of the Lubelskie voivodship) and Mr Bogusław ŚMIGIELSKI, Marszałek województwa śląskiego (Marshall of the Śląskie voivodship), Mr Pierre HUGON, Vice-président du Conseil général de la Loire (change of mandate), Mr Pierre MAILLE, Président du Conseil général du Finistère, Mr René SOUCHON, Président du Conseil régional d'Auvergne and Mr Christophe ROUILLON, Maire de Coulaines (change of mandate), and
- as alternate members: Mr Janis RAŠČEVSKIS, Chairman of Jēkabpils District Municipality and Chairman of Saukus Local Municipality, Mr Dariusz WRÓBEL, burmistrz Opola Lubelskiego (Mayor of Opole Lubelskie), Mr Jean-Michel DACLIN, Adjoint au Maire de Lyon, Ms Rose-Marie FALCQUE, Maire d'Azerailles, Ms Rachel PAILLARD, Maire de Bouzy and Mr Jean-Louis TOURENNE, Président du Conseil général d'Ille et Vilaine.