



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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PRESS RELEASE

3170th Council meeting

Foreign Affairs

TRADE

Brussels, 31 May 2012

President

Ms Pia Olsen Dyhr
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P R E S S

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Main results of the Council

*The Council approved the signing and provisional application of a free trade agreement with **Colombia and Peru**.*

*It also approved the launch of free trade negotiations with **Vietnam**.*

*The Council was informed of the successful conclusion of negotiations with the European Parliament on draft regulations on **bilateral investment treaties** and on reform of the EU's **generalised system of preferences**. The agreements pave the way for final adoption of the regulations.*

*The Council discussed the contribution of trade to the **growth** agenda, ahead of the June meeting of the European Council. It took stock of the results of a "scoping exercise" for a possible free trade agreement with **Japan**, and reviewed progress on an economic and trade agreement with **Canada**, as well as the work of an EU-**United States** high-level working group for growth and jobs. It also discussed trade liberalisation in the "**green**" sector.*

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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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Permanent Representative

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Deputy Minister for Industry and Trade

Denmark:

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Minister for Trade and Investments

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Mr Alexander STUBB

Minister for European Affairs and Foreign Trade

Sweden:

Ms Ewa BJÖRLING

Minister for Trade

United Kingdom:

Mr Norman LAMB

Minister for Employment Relations, Consumer and Postal
Affairs**Commission:**

Mr Karel DE GUCHT

Member

.....

The government of the acceding state was represented as follows:

Croatia:

Mr Denis ČAJO

Head of the State Office for Trade Policy

ITEMS DEBATED

TRADE AND GREEN GROWTH

The Council debated trade and "green" growth. It highlighted the importance of promoting the liberalisation of trade in environmental goods, with a focus on engaging with partners at the bilateral level, in particular through on-going free trade negotiations.

It also discussed how to gather support for a plurilateral agreement on the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade in environmental goods and services.

The incoming Cypriot presidency indicated its intention to pursue work on green growth.

EU-JAPAN TRADE RELATIONS

The Council was informed by the Commission of the results of an EU-Japan "scoping exercise", exploring the prospects for a possible free trade agreement.

It welcomed progress made in the scoping exercise, whilst noting several concerns expressed during its discussion.

The Commission indicated that the scoping exercise had been concluded, and that it would shortly present to the Council a draft mandate and negotiating directives with a view to authorising the Commission to open free trade negotiations with Japan.

The scoping exercise was launched following the EU-Japan summit in Brussels in May 2011, with the aim of defining the scope and level of ambition of future free trade negotiations. The scoping group has met on several occasions.

EU-US HIGH-LEVEL WORKING GROUP FOR GROWTH AND JOBS

The Council was briefed by the Commission on progress made by an EU-United States high-level working group assessing the options for further enhancing EU-US economic relations. It was informed by Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht about the latest developments in the discussions and on the prospects for concluding an interim report in June.

The Council expressed full support for the Commission's approach.

At the EU-US summit in Washington DC in November 2011, leaders called for the establishment of a high-level working group on jobs and growth to identify options for further enhancing EU-US economic relations. The group, co-chaired by Commissioner De Gucht and US Trade Representative Ron Kirk, is due to report its findings and recommendations by the end of 2012, with an interim report due in June.

Karel De Gucht is due to travel to Washington DC in early June for talks with Ron Kirk and Deputy Assistant to the President Michael Froman in order to conclude the interim report.

EU-CANADA TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

The Council discussed negotiations with Canada on a comprehensive economic and trade agreement. It addressed key outstanding issues, notably on rules of origin and intellectual property rights, with particular reference to pharmaceutical products.

The Council was briefed by the Commission on progress achieved, especially in the areas of market access for goods, public procurement, services, dispute settlement and, to a lesser extent, sanitary and phytosanitary issues and investment protection.

It took note of the Commission's assessment of the prospects for concluding the agreement in the near future, and called for full transparency in the final stages of the negotiations.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF TRADE TO THE GROWTH AGENDA

The Council discussed the contribution of trade to economic growth and employment, ahead of the European Council meeting on 28-29 June, which is expected to focus on ways to boost the European economy.

The Council highlighted the importance of international trade, investment and market integration as key drivers of strong sustainable and balanced growth, and called on the Commission to promote the opening of trade with strategic trading partners.

At its meeting in March, the European Council called for the removal of trade barriers and for improved market access and investment conditions. It undertook to review progress at its June meeting, and to discuss ways of strengthening trade and investment relationships with key international partners.

OTHER BUSINESS

Argentina: trade restrictive measures

At the request of the Spanish delegation, the Council was briefed by the Commission on steps taken or being considered to address restrictive measures taken by Argentina on trade and investment, including its recent decision to expropriate a majority stake held by Spanish company Repsol in Argentine energy company YPF.

Ongoing work on legislative proposals: BITs and GSP

The Council was informed by the presidency of the successful conclusion of negotiations with representatives of the European Parliament on draft regulations concerning:

- bilateral investment treaties (BITs); and
- reform of the EU's generalised system of tariff preferences (GSP).

The agreements pave the way for final adoption of the regulations.

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Over lunch, ministers reviewed progress on a free trade agreement with **India** and discussed trade relations with **China**.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**TRADE****EU-Vietnam free trade negotiations**

The Council adopted a decision authorising the Commission to start negotiations with Vietnam on a free trade agreement.

Vietnam will be the third ASEAN country to negotiate a free trade agreement with the EU; talks are expected to start shortly. Negotiations are already under way with Singapore and Malaysia.

In 2007, the Council agreed to launch negotiations on a region-to-region free trade agreement with the ASEAN countries, but these were put on hold in 2009. In December 2009, the Council decided to pursue free trade negotiations with the ASEAN countries in a bilateral format, whilst preserving the strategic objective of a region-to-region free trade agreement.

EU-Colombia/Peru free trade agreement

The Council adopted a decision approving the signing and provisional application of a multipartite free trade agreement with Colombia and Peru.

The agreement, initialled in March 2011, sets out to eliminate high tariffs, tackle technical barriers to trade, liberalise services markets, protect EU geographical indications and open up public procurement markets. It includes commitments on the enforcement of labour and environmental standards, as well as rapid and effective dispute settlement procedures. It will ensure a level playing field with competitors in the region such as the United States.

Political agreement on the signing and provisional application of the agreement was reached by the Council in March 2012. Based on the principle of regional integration, it remains open for signature by Bolivia and Ecuador, the other two members of the Andean Community.

Negotiations on a region-to-region association agreement with the Andean Community, including political dialogue, cooperation and trade, were suspended in 2008. In January 2009, the Council authorised the Commission to negotiate a multipartite trade agreement with individual members of the Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru).

Protection of geographical indications - Agreement between the EU and Moldova

The Council adopted a decision authorising the signing of an agreement with the Republic of Moldova on the protection of geographical indications of agricultural products and foodstuffs ([8737/12](#)).

With this agreement, the EU and Moldova are aiming at the mutual protection of geographical indications (GIs) in order to improve the conditions of bilateral trade as well as to promote quality in the food chain and stimulate value for sustainable rural development. Two objectives have been developed by the EU through this agreement: on one hand, an expansion of the protection and use of the geographical indications system, meaning that Moldova will protect the full list of EU GIs; on the other hand, intervention at the source of potential misuses of EU GIs. Reciprocally, Moldova has an interest in developing and protecting its current GIs in EU territory and strengthening its relations with the EU.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Visa dialogue with Georgia

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council welcomes the intention of the Commission to launch a visa dialogue with Georgia and to fully associate the Council and the EU member states with each step of the dialogue."

Restrictive measures

The Council decided to appeal the judgement of the General Court in joined cases T-439/10 (*Fulmen v. Council*) and T-440/10 (*Fereydoun Mahmoudian v. Council*), concerning restrictive measures against Iran and the general principles on which EU restrictive measures are based.

Relations with Croatia

The Council approved the position to be adopted by the EU at the eighth meeting of the EU-Croatia Stabilisation and Association Council, to be held in Brussels on 6 June.

ENVIRONMENT

CITES Convention

The Council adopted a decision requesting an amendment to appendix III to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (9494/12) in order to include porbeagle (*Lamna nasus*), a species that is vulnerable to fishing due to its low productivity.

The request will be jointly submitted to the CITES Secretariat by the member states, acting in the interest of the EU.
