



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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PRESS RELEASE

2611th Council Meeting

Agriculture and Fisheries

Luxembourg, 18 October 2004

President

Mr Cees VEERMAN

Minister for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the
Netherlands

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13129/04 (Presse 286)

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Main Results of the Council

*In agriculture, the Council had a comprehensive policy debate on the orientations to be given to the **fruits and vegetables** sector.*

*Commissioner FISCHLER, attending for the last time, comprehensively summarised the state of play regarding the latest **international trade negotiations**.*

*As regards fisheries, the Council held a public debate on the future **Community Fisheries Control Agency**.*

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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.
- The documents whose references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site <http://ue.eu.int>.
- 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 abovementioned Council 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:

Ms Sabine LARUELLE

Minister for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses, the Liberal Professions and the Self-Employed and Agriculture

Mr Yves LETERME

Minister-President of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister for Institutional Reform, Agriculture, Sea Fisheries and Rural Policy

Czech Republic:

Mr Jaroslav PALAS

Minister for Agriculture

Denmark:

Mr Hans Christian SCHMIDT

Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries

Germany:

Ms Renate KÜNAST

Federal Minister for Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture

Estonia:

Ms Ester TUIKSOO

Minister for Agriculture

Greece:

Mr Evangelos BASIAKOS

Minister for Rural Development and Food

Spain:

Ms Elena ESPINOSA MANGANA

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

France:

Mr Hervé GAYMARD

Minister for Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and Rural Affairs

Ireland:

Ms Mary COUGHLAN

Minister for Agriculture and Food

Mr Pat the COPE GALLAGHER

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

Italy:

Mr Giovanni ALEMANNI

Minister for Agricultural and Forestry Policy

Cyprus:

Mr Efthymios EFTHYMIU

Minister for Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment

Latvia:

Mr Mārtiņš ROZE

Minister for Agriculture

Lithuania:

Ms Dalia MINIATAITĖ

Deputy Minister for Agriculture

Luxembourg:

Mr Fernand BODEN

Minister for Agriculture, Viticulture and Rural Development, Minister for Small and Medium-sized Businesses, the Liberal Professions and the Self-Employed, Tourism and Housing

Hungary:

Mr Imre NÉMETH

Minister for Agriculture and Regional Development

Malta:

Mr Francis AGIUS

Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture and Fisheries, Ministry of Rural Affairs and the Environment

Netherlands:

Mr Cornelis Pieter VEERMAN

Minister for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality

Austria:

Mr Josef PRÖLL

Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, the
Environment and Water Management**Poland:**

Mr Józef Jerzy PILARCZYK

State Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural
Development**Portugal:**

Mr Carlos COSTA NEVES

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Slovenia:

Ms Marija MARKEŠ

State Secretary for Agriculture

Slovakia:

Mr Zsolt SIMON

Minister for Agriculture

Finland:

Mr Juha KORKEAOJA

Minister for Agriculture and Forestry

Sweden:

Ms Ann-Christin NYKVIST

Minister for Agriculture

United Kingdom:

Ms Margaret BECKETT

Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs

Mr Ben BRADSHAW

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

.....

Commission:

Mr Franz FISCHLER

Member

Mr David BYRNE

Member

ITEMS DEBATED

AGRICULTURE

– *Fruit and vegetables*

The Council has had a political exchange of views, based on a Presidency questionnaire (13265/04), on the report from the Commission on the simplification of the Common Market Organisation in fruit and vegetables.

The Council has invited the Special Committee on Agriculture to prepare the Conclusions to be adopted at the November meeting of the Agriculture/Fisheries Council.

As regards the first question, a large majority of delegations supported the existing principles and objectives of the 1996 reform of the CMO for both fresh and processed products. Some delegations supported a more market oriented approach for the CMO and the implementation of a decoupled payment in line with the principles laid down by the 2003 CAP reform.

Concerning the functioning of Producer Organisations (POs), several delegations suggested that improvements could be made by introducing greater flexibility and subsidiarity to Member States. However, some delegations underlined the risk of trade distortion in making such flexibility possible.

Some delegations suggested introducing a harvest insurance mechanism and buying-in operation as additional management tools to address market crises. A few delegations opposed the existing withdrawal mechanism in case of surpluses, while others considered it necessary to maintain it.

Finally, all delegations acknowledged the positive health aspects of fruits and vegetables and encouraged the increase of their consumption at EU level. Some delegations suggested the introduction of additional instruments in the CMO. Other delegations indicated that the promotion of fruits and vegetables already existed outside Regulation (EC) 2200/96 through horizontal promotional programming and that such promotion should be done within existing financial resources.

Commissioner FISCHLER provided a positive assessment of the CMO for fresh fruits and vegetables since its reform in 1996 but stressed the need to focus on the quality of the products and the grouping of supply through the strengthening of Producer Organisations. As regards processed fruits and vegetables, he indicated that a discussion should be held prior to the presentation of legislative proposals. Concerning crisis management he suggested including fruits and vegetables into a wider and broader project covering various sectors. Finally, he favoured the use of horizontal instruments within rural development (second pillar) to promote the consumption of fruits and vegetables.

The Commission report (*11889/04+ADD 1*) was submitted to the Council on 10 August 2004 with a view in particular to providing input in the discussion in the Council, the European Parliament and the sector concerned by raising strategic questions on possible improvements to the basic Regulation (EC) 2200/96.

– ***European action plan for organic food and farming (EAPOFF) - Council conclusions*** *

The Council adopted the following Conclusions on the EAPOFF (13411/04):

"The Council of the European Union:

1. Welcomes the Commission Communication of June 2004 on the European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming as an important step towards the realisation of an overall policy concept for the whole chain of organic production, processing, distribution and trade.
2. Fully shares the analysis given by the Commission on the current state of development of the organic sector in the European Union.
3. Generally supports the proposed comprehensive set of 21 actions. Their rapid and consistent implementation can make an important contribution to the removal of existing impediments to growth and thus to the strengthening and expansion of the organic sector. These actions are concentrated on the following main axes:
 - the organic food market;
 - public policy and organic farming;
 - standards and inspection.
4. Attaches particular importance to the following lines of action, which should be appropriately reflected in the timing of their implementation:
 - increase public information and consumer awareness by way of information and promotion campaigns including the EU logo;
 - improve the collection and analysis of relevant statistical data on the whole chain of organic production, processing, distribution and trade, and of other information relevant to the competitiveness of the sector;
 - optimise integration of organic farming into the rural development programmes;

- strengthen research on organic production, processing methods and marketing of organic products, making full use of the possibilities granted within the framework of EU research programmes;
- define the basic principles of organic production, both in the context of Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 and in international fora such as FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius and IFOAM;
- complete and further harmonise the standards for organic production, considering also the need for extending their scope to areas which are not covered for the present;
- clarify GMO-related issues;
- adapt inspection rules and improve cooperation among inspection bodies, following a risk based approach for compliance inspections, in order to streamline bureaucratic procedures and ensure product traceability;
- implement measures to facilitate trade in particular the market access for developing countries, including the improvement of equivalency-based opportunities for trade of organic products with third countries.

5. Regarding implementation of these priority actions, the Council calls upon the Commission and the Member States, each within their respective competencies, to:

- reinforce close coordination between EU-wide campaigns initiated by the Commission and campaigns or other relevant activities at the national or regional level in order to adapt to specific requirements at these levels, making full use of possible cooperation with relevant operators;
- increase the recognition of the EU logo without excluding the use of other logos;
- reinforce the means for the collection and analysis of data, while avoiding unjustified costs and administrative burdens for economic operators and public authorities;
- ensure that organic production is an integral part of the common agricultural policy, the rural development policy and of its instruments;
- give due regard to voluntary initiatives to establish rural areas for the advancement of value-added production, such as that of organic, typical and traditional products;

- improve coordination and cooperation in research and dissemination of the results;
 - review Community legislation relevant for organic production in the light of a definition of the basic principles therewith encouraging harmonisation of standards, and where possible reduce the level of detail;
 - develop a legislative framework which ensures the proper functioning of the free circulation of organic products, in particular in relation to private and national standards and inspection systems;
 - amend Annex III of Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 by 1 July 2005, using a risk-based approach, in order to adapt it to the new inspection provisions laid down in Regulation (EC) No. 392/2004 and develop cross-control procedures within the inspection system;
 - ensure that the new system replacing the current national derogation for imports is known to the involved sectors well in advance of the derogation expiry.
6. The Council invites the Commission to advance implementation of the Action Plan on the basis of concrete measures with the view to assure simplification and overall coherence and to bring forward proposals in this regard as soon as possible in the course of 2005.

Member States will be kept informed about the progress within the framework of the Standing Committee on Organic Farming."

– *International trade negotiations*

The Council has heard an update from the Commission Representative on developments concerning WTO, Mercosur, international negotiations on rice and bananas, as well as the planned Wine Agreement with the USA. The Council shall return to some of these subjects again, either for information, or when the Commission presents proposals on any of them.

FISHERIES

– *Community Fisheries Control Agency*

The Council has held a policy debate (public debate) on the Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing a Community Fisheries Control Agency.

The Council considers the Commission Proposal a good basis for work and invites Coreper to continue discussions on this Proposal.

On 21 June 2004 (9999/04), the Council had a first preliminary exchange of views on the proposal establishing a Community Fisheries Control Agency presented by the Commission on 29 April 2004. In December 2003, the European Council agreed on the urgency of establishing this Agency and decided that the Agency will have its seat in Vigo, Spain. Under the proposal, the Commission will adopt coherent plans for Monitoring, Control and Surveillance ("MCS"), Member States will pool their national means of control and inspection for joint deployment and the Agency will organise the joint deployment of national means under an appropriate Community plan.

The Agency will also perform a number of other tasks. These include the provision of assistance to Member States on control and enforcement, the supply of contractual services to them, and the training of inspectors.

The tasks of the Agency will focus on operational coordination of control and enforcement. It will have a budget of around €5m (mainly from the Community budget) and 50 staff.

Since May, the Council working group has begun to examine this proposal initially on a chapter-by-chapter basis, prior to a closer examination article by article. The most discussed issues at this stage concern the respective competences of the Member States and the Agency.

A feasibility study has now been made available. It determines the optimum organisation for the operational functions and structure of the Agency.

Given that the legal basis for this proposal is Article 37, the Opinion of the European Parliament is required and is not expected before 22 February 2005. The EP rapporteur appointed for this proposal is Ms Elspeth ATTWOOLL (UK, ALDE/ADLE).

– *Bilateral agreement EU-Norway*

Council has had a first exchange of views on the EC/Norway bilateral agreement, especially on how to pay for "cohesion cod". The Commission now has a first impression of the views of Member States for the second round of negotiations with Norway from 15-19 November.

It is understood that the views expressed today cannot prejudge the final position of the Council on the implementation of this Agreement.

However, the issues raised are not yet ripe for decision and further work is required. The Council invites Coreper to continue discussions on these matters.

Fishing possibilities of cod in Norwegian waters are granted for several Member States under the European Economic Agreement as "cohesion cod". Norway, as an "exchange currency" is entitled in 2004 to fish capelin and Greenland halibut in the Greenland waters, under the Fisheries Agreement with Greenland. As the biological state of the stocks of capelin in Greenland waters and Greenland halibut in Community waters might imply a reduction of these stocks in 2005, different options have been proposed by the Commission to tackle this issue.

– *Recovery plans: Norway lobster, southern hake and sole*

The Council held a policy debate on the basis of a questionnaire drawn up by the Presidency on two proposals establishing measures for the recovery of southern hake and Norway lobster stocks in the Cantabrian Sea and Western Iberian peninsula and for the recovery of sole stocks in the Western Channel and Bay of Biscay. The Council instructed Coreper to continue its work on this matter.

OTHER BUSINESS

– Bioterrorism act

The Italian delegation drew the attention of the Council and the Commission to the effects on EU exports of agricultural products to the USA of the US legislation that recently came into force (12941/04). The Italian delegation indicated that the law entered partly into force on 12 December 2003 but that the requirements imposed on the exporting companies, including registration with the Food and Drug Administration, the presence of a correspondent in the USA, were constraining and may deter exporting businesses in particular small and medium-sized companies. Furthermore, no derogation or trade facilitation for products whose quality is recognised at EU level appeared to have been made possible. The Italian delegation requested that an impact study be undertaken in order to evaluate the impact of these new rules on EU exports to the USA.

Commissioner BYRNE while acknowledging the legitimate needs of the USA against bioterrorism, underlined the importance of the proportionality principle and noted that the US had agreed on a flexible approach with the implementation of a transitional period which will come to an end in November 2004.

Commissioner FISCHLER, mentioning that no impact study could be made as the transitional period had not yet expired, urged the Member States to increase their communication with private businesses in order for the Commission to know what kind of problems these companies were currently facing and should unjustified trade barriers be found, to tackle this issue.

– School milk

The Danish delegation, supported by the delegations of United Kingdom, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, Latvia, Germany, presented its request for a revision of the EU School Milk Scheme. The Danish delegation holds the view that the list of dairy products eligible for subsidies should be revised in order to better reflect the nutritional recommendations for children, in particular by encouraging the consumption of products with the lowest fat content.

Commissioner FISCHLER recalled the delegations that this issue had already been widely discussed during the negotiations of Agenda 2000 and supported the view of the German delegation that the question of fat content had to be examined in a wider perspective including sugar products with regard to the increasing concerns on obesity among the young population. He noted that skimmed milk and yoghurts had already been inserted among the list of eligible products and that protein content had been increasingly taken into account. He indicated that Member States already enjoyed the possibility to grant support for skimmed milk products. However he indicated that support should be based on objective criteria at EU level.

– *Implementation of the CAP reform*

The Danish delegation informed the Council of the difficulties arising from the implementation of the hybrid model as stated in Article 59 of Regulation (EC) No 1782/2003 and asked for this issue to be dealt with by the Commission, in particular as regards the definition of active farmers in the Regulation and the conditions of eligibility for payments (13487/04). The Danish delegation stated that regional decoupled payments based on a reference period (2000-2002) provided for in the Regulation does not currently prevent cattle-raising farmers who have sold their cattle or their land during this period, from buying or renting land in 2005 and applying for payments of up to EUR 5 000 per hectare and receiving decoupled payments, even though they are retired farmers.

Commissioner FISCHLER contested the interpretation of Regulation (EC) No 1782/2003 by the Danish delegation, and pointed out four possibilities for addressing such cases in order to deter such practices, including the existing ceiling of EUR 5 000 per hectare, the implementation of the "Windfall profit" clause where a Member State can reduce by up to 90% the forthcoming aids granted to a farmer who sold a holding which has been transferred before 1 May 2004, the 50% taxation of aids during the first three years after the transfer of land and finally the legal complaints to be undertaken by a Member States, as laid down in Article 29 of Regulation (EC) No 1782/2003, when a farmer has artificially created the conditions for receiving payments.

– *Cereal surpluses*

The Hungarian and Czech delegations, supported by the Austrian, French, Polish and Slovak delegations, informed the Council of the considerable surpluses stemming from this year's cereals harvest in Central Europe and requested Community assistance for exports, as well as measures to ensure the continuous export of cereals from intervention stocks on account of their poor storage capacities (13486/04). Regarding export possibilities, increased transport costs are due to the fact that EU exports are mainly via seaports. Export prices offered to producers from Hungary and Czech Republic, landlocked countries, are far below the intervention price, thus making exports unattractive.

Commissioner FISCHLER, while acknowledging the exceptional cereal harvest of this marketing year, indicated that the Commission had already launched tenders for oats and barley, granted 3.4 million tonnes of export licences and that freight costs of Hungarian wheat to Romanian seaports had already been dealt with in order to ensure a balance of cereal exports for Hungary. He finally underlined the need to preserve the internal market principle and to avoid any breach of competition among the Member States.

– *Cereal surpluses II*

The Greek delegation also drew the attention of the Council and the Commission to the cereal surpluses and to the fruit and vegetable surpluses in Greece following exceptional weather conditions, and stressed the negative impact it had on prices and farmers' incomes. The Greek delegation requested an intervention of the Commission on the basis of Article 7 of Regulation No 1784/2003¹ which states that "Where the market situation so dictates, special intervention measures may be taken. Such intervention measures may in particular be taken if, in one or more regions of the Community, market prices fall, or threaten to fall, in relation to the intervention price."

Commissioner FISCHLER having noted the request, indicated his Institution would fully use all the available market tools. However he insisted on the existence of intervention as a safety net, and on the need to evaluate the evolution of farmers' incomes over several years and not only over one year, following the implementation of the CAP reform in 2003.

– *Damage caused by unfavourable weather conditions*

The Lithuanian delegation, supported by the Latvian delegation, informed the Council of a State aid measure of an expected €0.6 million under Article 87 of the Treaty, to compensate damages caused by natural disasters and extreme events in the agricultural sector of Lithuania in spring 2004, and asked the Commission to analyse the notification recently submitted by the Lithuanian government as soon as possible (13432/04). These damages to apples, blackcurrants and strawberries were caused by unexpected frost in May 2004. The losses are estimated to be €5.59 million.

Commissioner FISCHLER assured the Lithuanian delegation that he would examine the notified request for State aid as soon as possible and made clear that with regards to the exceptional damages caused, public aid might be allowed. He noted that the existing criteria for authorising this aid were to have -30% less production than during normal years and -20% less in less-favoured areas, and that losses should not be overcompensated.

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 1784/2003 of 29 September 2003 on the common organisation of the market in cereals.

– ***GM co-existence***

The Danish delegation, with the support of many delegations, requested for common rules on co-existence and the setting up of a Commission Task Force, which would co-ordinate collection and dissemination of relevant information at EU level. The Danish delegation notified its recent legislation on co-existence to the Commission.

In addition, the Danish delegation and other delegations asked the Commission to confirm whether the limit value for labelling GMOs in seed is 0% until another figure is fixed.

The Commission representative welcomed the Danish initiative and undertook to examine that legislation within the best delays.

The Commission representative also pointed out that setting up such Task Force should not slow down considerable amount of work still to be done at national level. He favoured the role of an enhanced EU-wide network, in particular on data collection and on agricultural best practices and experiences.

He also explained that, as no thresholds for the adventitious presence of GMOs in conventional seed lots have been established, any seed lot containing GM seeds authorised for the cultivation in the EU has to be labelled as containing GMOs. Seed lots containing GM seeds not authorised for cultivation cannot be marketed in the EU.

Commissioner BYRNE expressed his long time views on supporting GM technology, in particular as regards scientific uses.

The President voiced some doubts on the need to set up a Task Force, as the Commission has already the necessary tools to achieve the established goals on co-existence.

– ***BSE***

The Council took note of the latest state of play on BSE on the basis of written information provided by Commissioner BYRNE (13412/04).

– ***Rabies***

The French delegation, supported by the Finnish delegation, informed the Council and the Commission of the latest developments concerning cases of rabies in France in animals illegally imported from the Maghreb. Taking into account the serious situation facing the health authorities as a result of these entries into France of animals without any sanitary check, the French delegation called for several measures which could improve risk management with regard to rabies, in particular : developing information and awareness campaigns for travellers and transporters, reinforcing sanitary checks at Community frontiers as well as promoting cooperation and technical support programs with Maghreb countries.

Commissioner BYRNE indicated that the latest figures of the World Health Organisation (WHO) showed that rabies affected 10 million people each year, with 50 000 dying from it, and that rabies outbreaks remained a major problem in Africa and Asia. He reminded the delegations that the campaign at EU level had led to the eradication of rabies in EU 15 and that similar actions were being conducted in the 10 new Member States. He also stressed that as the new EC Regulation No 998/2003 concerning the transport of pets in the EU entered into force on 1 October 2004, controls were no more stringent. He finally noted that it was up to the Member States to check that owners of animals complied with the legislation in force and that, with regard to the EU policy towards neighbouring third countries, the EU Reference Laboratory (AFSSA Nancy) had already established contacts with Morocco in order to tackle the problem.

– ***International treaty on plant genetic resources***

The Spanish delegation announced Spain's intention to host the meeting of the Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, scheduled for late 2005 (13130/04). The Spanish delegation sought the Member States' and Commission's backing ahead of the final FAO decision and in staging the meeting itself, and called on them to help put the International Treaty into effect.

– ***Blue tongue***

The Spanish delegation informed the Council and the Commission on the recent outbreak of blue tongue disease (virus transmitted to ruminants by insects, a disease not transmissible to man) in southern Spain. The Spanish delegation underlined that the outbreak had been dealt with via a national plan and that neighbour countries (Portugal) had been kept aware of the outbreak as it developed. The Spanish delegation indicated that area protection had been established in order to isolate the infected cattle and to limit the outbreak, and there had been closer monitoring with third countries (Morocco). The Spanish delegation finally requested this issue to be dealt with in the Standing Committee on the Food Chain.

Commissioner BYRNE thanked the Spanish delegation for its quick reaction and noted that both Spain and the Commission had taken immediate measures to be reviewed this week at the Standing Committee on the food chain. He noted the positive use of the cofinanced Community programmes against outbreaks and recalled the delegations about the recent outbreaks of Blue tongue in Greece, Italy France (Corsica) and Spain.

– *Oil prices*

The French delegation, supported by the Greek, Portuguese, Spanish, Belgian and Italian delegations, drew the attention of the Council and the Commission to the recent significant increase in oil prices and the consequences for the economic situation of fishermen. The French delegation asked the Commission what measures it intended to put in place to address the concerns of the fishermen and the industry regarding the constant price increases and expressed the wish that the Council would examine the issue of oil prices in the agricultural and fisheries sectors.

The French delegation has already taken four provisional measures and made emergency provisions for companies, in particular for the most difficult cases, and indicated that a notification of these supports would be sent to the Commission for prior approval. These were an advance payment of EUR 15 million to fishermen through the use of options on the equities and derivatives market, to be reimbursed later, more flexible taxation regime for fishermen outside territorial waters and finally a EUR 4 cents reduction on the Domestic Tax on Oil Products (TIPP²).

The United Kingdom delegation, while recognising the difficulties faced by the fishermen, insisted on the need to respect Community rules on State aid and the importance of avoiding any breach of competition in the sector.

Commissioner FISCHLER drew a distinction between the agricultural sector, where a tax reduction on oil was possible, and the fisheries sector, where such a reduction could not be made as fishermen already benefit from zero taxation on mineral oil products. He also noted that the costs of rising prices could be directly borne by consumers. Finally, he warned that from the legal viewpoint no State aid could be authorised as the only authorised State aid was either for compensating damages caused by natural disasters or for supporting training or aid for restructuring, including a reduction in capacity. Furthermore, such aid could create a breach of competition among fishermen.

– *EC-Angola fisheries agreement*

The Spanish delegation drew the attention of the Council and the Commission to the state of play in the negotiations between the EU and Angola, and expressed its concerns as regards the possible social and economic consequences for the Spanish fleet of the last offer proposed by Angola. The Spanish delegation asked for a re opening of the negotiations and for consideration to be given to adopting measures similar to those taken to promote the conversion of vessels of fishermen dependent on the fishing agreement with Morocco.

² Taxe Interieure sur les produits petroliers.

The fisheries protocol with Angola expired on 3 August 2004. As a result, many Spanish vessels are prevented from fishing. The first round of negotiations to renew the protocol in June was suspended by the two parties.

Commissioner FISCHLER explained that no second round of negotiations had been successful until now because the Angolan authorities needed to await the entry into force of a new legal framework for the fisheries sector, but insisted that the Angolan authorities were willing and optimistic about the outcome of the negotiations. He noted four issues to be resolved within the negotiations following the adoption of the new legal framework :

- the setting of an accurate transitional period;
- the guarantees to be given by the Angolan authorities as regards European vessels;
- the possibility given to Community companies to own more than 50% of the capital in a joint venture with their Angolan counterpart;
- non discrimination vis-à-vis these joint ventures on the part of the Angolan authorities.

– *Organisation of future work*

The Council convened to hold its next session on 22-23 November 2004.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**EXTERNAL RELATIONS****Association agreement with Bulgaria - Public aid in the steel sector**

The Council adopted a Decision aimed at extending the grace period for public aid in the steel sector provided for by the EU- Bulgaria Association Agreement for an additional period of eight years starting on 1 January 1998 or until the date of Bulgaria's accession to the European Union, whichever comes first (12374/04).

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY**Crisis management operations - Agreements with Iceland, Norway and Romania ***

The Council adopted a Decision approving the conclusion of Agreements with Iceland, Norway and Romania establishing a framework for the participation of these countries in EU military and civilian crisis management operations (12435/04 and 13534/04 ADD 1).

EU Rule of Law mission in Georgia - Agreement on status

The Council approved a draft Status of Mission Agreement with Georgia on the EU Rule of Law Mission EUJUST THEMIS, outlining the rules and regulations to be followed by the parties.

The EU Rule of Law Mission EUJUST THEMIS was decided by the Council on 28 June 2004 (Joint Action 2004/523/CFSP) and the duration of the Mission is anticipated to be 12 months.