

EIGHTH MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION COUNCIL BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND POLAND (BRUSSELS, 20 NOVEMBER 2001) JOINT PRESS RELEASE

1. The EU-Poland Association Council held its eighth meeting on Tuesday 20 November 2001. The meeting was chaired by Mr Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland. Ms Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Belgium and President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, headed the EU delegation. Mr Ramón de Miguel Egea, State Secretary for European Affairs of Spain and Mr Eneko Landáburu Illarramendi, Director General responsible for Enlargement of the European Commission, were also part of the European Union delegation (Troika format).

The Association Council welcomed the conclusions of the Göteborg European Council, which confirmed that the enlargement process is irreversible. It noted the statement of the European Council that, provided that progress towards meeting the accession criteria continues at an unabated pace, the road map should make it possible to complete accession negotiations by the end of 2002 for those candidate countries that are ready, the objective being that they should participate in the European Parliament elections of 2004 as members. The European Council also recalled that candidate countries will continue to be judged solely on their own merits.

Against this background, the Association Council provided a valuable opportunity to review Poland's progress in the framework of the pre-accession strategy and to consider priorities for further work within the framework of the Europe Agreement.

2. The Association Council reviewed the state of Poland's preparation for accession in the light of the Regular Report issued by the European Commission in November 2001, the revised Accession Partnership which was adopted in December 1999 and is currently in the process of being revised again, and the Polish revised National Programme of Preparation for Membership in the EU, which was adopted in June 2001.

The Association Council noted that Poland continues to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria. It noted the progress made by Poland in the reform of the judiciary and underlined the importance of continuing the work already undertaken in this field. It encouraged Poland to intensify efforts as regards the fight against corruption and to pursue the implementation of the Civil Service Law, in order to ensure the further development of an independent and professional civil service.

With regard to the Copenhagen economic criteria, the Association Council noted that Poland is a functioning market economy. The Association Council, while welcoming positive developments in Poland, such as the continuation of the privatisation process and of the restructuring of sensitive industrial sectors, as well as the strengthening of the legal framework for business, noted the recent decline in economic growth and increase in unemployment. In this context, it welcomed the decision taken by the Polish government to place a realistic limit on the size of the budget deficit for 2002 and underlined the need for Poland to take appropriate measures so as to ensure financial stability.

The Association Council welcomed the ambitious legislative programme adopted by the Polish government and substantial progress made in adopting the necessary legislation in

a number of fields. It encouraged Poland to build upon these achievements in the transposition of the acquis and to focus on the strengthening of the administrative capacity in order to be able to fully implement it.

3. The Association Council noted that the Europe Agreement is being implemented in a spirit of co-operation between the two parties and encouraged them to intensify their dialogue in order to find appropriate solutions to outstanding issues, in particular as regards barriers to bilateral trade. The Association Council took note of the latest information concerning the previously proposed surcharge on imports.

The Association Council noted the agreement between the EU and Poland on reciprocal trade concessions in the field of agricultural products, which has been applied by autonomous measures as from 1 January 2001, and looked forward to the launch of a new round of negotiations for further liberalisation of agricultural trade. It also noted that the negotiations of a trade agreement on fish and fisheries products have been completed and that the procedures for its conclusion are underway.

The Association Council welcomed the revision of the Polish steel restructuring plan and the adoption of the Law on steel restructuring, and looked forward to the finalisation of the plan, with a view to ensure an economically viable steel industry in Poland, in the framework of the conditions set out in Protocol 2 of the Europe Agreement.

The Association Council highlighted the importance of the decision it had recently taken on the creation of a joint consultative committee between the Committee of Regions and the relevant Polish local authorities.

The Association Council welcomed Poland's participation, according to the provisions of the relevant Association Council decisions, in the following Community programmes: Leonardo da Vinci II, Socrates II, Youth and Culture 2000, as well as the Fifth Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration.

The Association Council noted the substantial increase of pre-accession aid to Poland and other applicant countries from 2000, welcomed the indicative allocations made for Poland under the new programmes providing aid for structural policies (ISPA) and agricultural and rural development (SAPARD) and looked forward to effective implementation. Under the SAPARD programme, an indicative annual allocation of 168.7 million is available to Poland and for ISPA an indicative annual allocation of between 300 and 370 million. The 2001 PHARE programme for Poland amounts to 411 million, plus 56 million which have been allocated for a cross-border co-operation programme with Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and for co-operation within the Baltic Sea region. In addition, the Association Council underlined the valuable contribution of the European Investment Bank to the development of various sectors of the Polish economy.

4. The Association Council exchanged views on international issues of common interest. It emphasised the importance of regional stability and good neighbourly relations and noted with satisfaction the continued orientation of Poland's foreign and security policy towards the EU. The Association Council welcomed Poland's contributions to international operations and its continuing substantial contribution to regional stability, including participation in the Stability Pact and other international fora, such as the Visegrad Group, the Council of Baltic Sea States and the Central European Initiative,. The Association Council acknowledged the solidarity shown by Poland in the fight against terrorism and its

association to the conclusions of the extraordinary European Council of 21 September 2001. It especially welcomed the conference among Central European countries on terrorism, organised by Poland on 6 November.

5. In conclusion, the Association Council expressed confidence in the development of relations within the Europe Agreement and emphasised the crucial role it is further called on to play until Poland's accession to the European Union.

[Quelle: http://www.msz.gov.pl/english/statement/2001_11_20_brussels.html]