

P R E S S   R E L E A S E

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2173rd Council meeting  
- GENERAL AFFAIRS -

Luxembourg, 26 April 1999

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**EU-ASEAN - extension of the Cooperation Agreement to Vietnam**

The Council adopted a Decision to conclude the Protocol on the extension of the Cooperation Agreement between the European Community and Brunei-Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, to Vietnam.

As the ASEAN countries have all already notified the Secretariat of the Council that they have accomplished the procedures necessary for the entry into force of this Protocol, signed on 14 February 1997, it will come into force on 1st May 1999 (first day of the month following conclusion by all parties of their internal procedures).

**Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - implementation of the Association Agreements**

The Council approved on behalf of the EU the Decisions of the EU/Estonia, EU/Latvia and EU/Lithuania Association Councils adopting the necessary rules for the implementation of the Europe Agreements' provisions on competition.

**JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS****Joint Action on reception and the voluntary repatriation of refugees**

The Council approved a Joint Action establishing measures to provide practical support in relation to the reception and the voluntary repatriation of refugees, displaced persons and asylum applicants, including emergency assistance to persons who have fled as a result of recent events in Kosovo. The financial assistance provided for the implementation of measures and projects under this Joint Action amounts to 15 million euro.

The general objectives of the measures or projects to benefit from this financial assistance are twofold, on the one hand the improvement of the conditions in which asylum applicants, displaced persons and refugees are received in the Member States, and supporting asylum procedures which are fair, efficient and accessible to persons in need of international protection, and on the other hand assisting the voluntary repatriation of these people to their countries of origin, and their reintegration there.

The measures may also include emergency assistance for Member States who receive persons displaced following the recent events in Kosovo, in particular if following an initiative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in the form of a contribution for their accommodation needs, means of subsistence such as food and clothing, medical, psychological or other personal assistance, and the costs of personnel administering and implementing this assistance, for a duration of 6 months. These measures may be integrated with actions to facilitate the voluntary return of displaced persons to Kosovo when conditions permit.

The financial assistance from the Community budget for these measures or projects shall not exceed 80% of the total cost and will be financed subject to a selection procedure which will take into account various criteria. The general management and budgetary control will be the responsibility of the Commission including the type of measure eligible for assistance, though in relation to displaced persons from Kosovo any expenditure incurred after the adoption of this Joint Action will be taken into consideration. The Commission will be assisted in the implementation of this Joint Action by a Committee, chaired by the Commission and consisting of one representative from each Member State, which will apply different Committee rules of procedure depending on the amount involved, the thresholds being 50,000, 200,000 and 1 million euro.

### **Schengen - negotiating directives for the Agreement with Iceland and Norway**

The Council approved, by unanimity of the 15 Member States, a negotiating mandate for the Presidency and the Commission, with a view to concluding the Agreement with Iceland and Norway as envisaged in Article 6(2) of the Schengen Protocol annexed to the Amsterdam Treaty.

According to Article 6(2) of the Protocol, this Agreement with Norway and Iceland must establish rights and obligations between Ireland and the United Kingdom, on the one hand, and Iceland and Norway, on the other hand. Those rights and obligations will only concern the areas covered by closer cooperation in the Schengen acquis and development in which Ireland or the United Kingdom or both of them take part, in accordance with procedures laid down in the Schengen Protocol.

It is recalled that the other Agreement with Norway and Iceland, concerning their association with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen acquis, based on Article 6(1) of the Schengen Protocol, which has already been negotiated, is to be approved shortly by the Council by unanimity of the 13 Member States participating in Schengen (see page 17).

## **ENVIRONMENT**

### **Sulphur content of liquid fuels**

The Council adopted a Directive relating to a reduction of the sulphur content of certain liquid fuels (amending Directive 93/12/EEC). The text is part of a wider Community strategy to combat acidification and concerns heavy fuel oil and gas oil. The adoption follows the Council common position of 6 October 1998 (see also Press Release no 9402/98 Presse 205 of the Environment Council meeting of 16/17 June 1998) and its approval by the European Parliament on 9 February 1999.