



EU-ROMANIA
- The Association Council -



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**Eleventh meeting of the Association Council
between the European Union and Romania**

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JOINT PRESS RELEASE

1. The EU-Romania Association Council held its eleventh meeting on Tuesday 14 June 2005. The meeting was chaired by Mr Jean ASSELBORN, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Luxemburg and President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, heading the European Union delegation (Troika format). Mr Olli REHN, Commissioner responsible for Enlargement, represented the European Commission. Mr Mihai-Răzvan UNGUREANU, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania, headed the Romanian delegation.

P R E S S

2. The Association Council welcomed the steady progress made by Romania in negotiations and in preparing for membership of the European Union, which allowed for the historical step of signing the Accession Treaty on 25 April 2005 with a view to welcoming Romania as a Member State in January 2007, depending on further progress in complying with the membership criteria. In this context, the need for Romania to step up its preparations in order to be fully ready in time for membership was stressed. In this light, the Association Council noted the Union's positive expectations that the 2007 target date would be maintained and its determination to fully support Romania in its efforts.

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

3. The Association Council reviewed the state of Romania's preparation for accession in the light of the latest Regular Report issued by the European Commission in November 2004, and the Accession Partnership.

The Association Council noted that Romania continues to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria. It acknowledged the progress achieved in reforming public administration and the judiciary, in the fight against corruption as well as in the process of formulating policy and drafting legislation.

At the same time, the Association Council called upon Romania to continue and intensify effective implementation of the reforms. It furthermore underlined the significance of continuing to strengthen the legislation with regard to political and civil rights and its implementation.

The Association Council acknowledged in particular the advances in the reform of the judiciary, while calling upon Romania to continue the reforms, both through the adoption of legislation and its full and effective implementation. The Association Council welcomed the Romanian Government's determination to tackle corruption on all levels, noting the legislation passed in adoption in March 2005 of the Strategy and Action Plan in the process of being adopted. The need was stressed for Romania to step up its preparations and priority should be given to ensure proper implementation of the legislation in this field. The Association Council welcomed the progress made on the development of legislation on children's rights while encouraging Romania to continue to develop administrative structures and capacity to implement this legislation in full.

With regard to the Copenhagen economic criteria, the Association Council commended Romania for the positive results achieved and noted with satisfaction that Romania now is considered as a functioning market economy which enjoys sustained economic growth. It also encouraged Romania to ensure that the current account deficit remains manageable and to complete the restructuring process.

The Association Council acknowledged the steady progress made by Romania in aligning its legislation to the *acquis communautaire*, which allowed for the closure of the accession negotiations in December 2004. As regards the specific area of public procurement, it acknowledged recent amendments to the Romanian legislation while stressing the need for Romania to ensure correct implementation of the rules. The Association Council also encouraged Romania to strengthen its state aid enforcement-record in the field of competition, to complete the harmonisation process in the environment sector and to fully implement the commitments undertaken in the field of Justice and Home affairs. Romania was also encouraged to step up its efforts on food safety and in its preparations in the agricultural sector. The Association Council acknowledged advances made with regard to the administrative reform while noting that the issue should remain a high priority, in order to further strengthen the capacity of the Romanian authorities. In this context, the Association Council invited Romania to continue increasing administrative capacity in the field of management of Community programmes and pre-accession funds.

4. The Association Council noted with satisfaction the continued smooth implementation of the Europe Agreement. It acknowledged the contribution made in this respect by the various bodies of the Association, notably the Association Committee, the Joint Parliamentary Committee and the Joint Consultative Committee between the Economic and Social Committee and the relevant Romanian economic and social partners. In this context, the Association Council noted that the procedures for establishment of a Joint Consultative Committee between the Committee of the Regions and the relevant Romanian regional and local authorities, requested by Romania, were well under way.

The Association Council noted with satisfaction positive trade relations between the Union and Romania. In this context, it welcomed the signature of the Protocol adapting the Europe Agreement following the latest EU enlargement, which provides for further liberalisation of the agricultural trade. It also noted the conclusion of the negotiations on processed agricultural products and wine and spirits, as well as the ongoing negotiations on a Protocol on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products.

The Association Council noted the allocation to Romania in 2004 of a total of € 405.3 million under the PHARE National Programme, as well as an additional € 28 million for cross-border co-operation, € 158.7 million for rural development under the SAPARD programme and € 316 million under the ISPA programme. The Association Council acknowledged the efforts made by Romania to strengthen its administrative capacities to manage PHARE funds while noting that the performance in programming and contracting needs to be enhanced. The Association Council also recalled the important contributions of the European Investment Bank which has, since 1991, granted over 3 billions of euros in loans to Romania.

5. The Association Council exchanged views on some international issues of common interest. It welcomed Romania's active participation in the multilateral dialogue within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and its continuing contribution to regional stability. In this context, the Association Council particularly commended Romania for its recently concluded Chairmanship-in-Office of the South Eastern Europe Co-operation Process (SEECF). It also commended Romania for its current, active presence in the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member.
6. In conclusion, the Association Council recalled the work done so far in the framework of the Europe Agreement. It expressed its commitment to continue its work, together with the other Association bodies, in order to assist Romania to be ready for accession in January 2007.