

Til

Udvalgets medlemmer og stedfortrædere

**Pressemeddelelse vedr. rådsmøde Økofin den 15. juni 2001 på engelsk**

Dette rådsmøde 2358 (9759/01 presse 237) blev behandlet af Europaudvalget på mødet den 14. juni 2001.

Bearbejdet dansk pressemeddelelse for dette rådsmøde vil blive hjemsendt som omtryk til dette bilag så snart det ligger klar fra Rådets oversættelsestjeneste.

Bruxelles, den 18. juni 2001

Med venlig hilsen

Morten Knudsen

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9759/01 (Presse 237)

**PRESS RELEASE**

Subject :

2358th Council meeting

**- ECOFIN -**

Göteborg, 15 June 2001

President : **Mr Bosse RINGHOLM**, Minister of Finance of Sweden.

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### **PARTICIPANTS**

The Governments of the Member States and the European Commission were represented as follows:

#### **Belgium :**

Mr Didier REYNDEERS Minister for Finance

#### **Denmark :**

Ms Marianne JELVED Minister for Economic Affairs  
Mr Michael DITHMER State Secretary for Economic Affairs

#### **Germany :**

Mr Caio KOCH-WESER State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Finance

#### **Greece :**

Mr Yannis PAPANTONIOU Minister for the National Economy and Finance

#### **Spain :**

Mr Rodrigo de RATO y FIGAREDO Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Economic Affairs

#### **France :**

Mr JOUYET Director for the Treasury

#### **Ireland :**

Mr Charlie McCREEVY Minister for Finance

#### **Italy :**

Mr Giulio TREMONTI Minister for the Economy and Finance

#### **Luxembourg :**

Mr Luc FRIEDEN Minister for the Treasury and the Budget

#### **Netherlands :**

Mr Gerrit ZALM Minister for Finance

#### **Austria :**

Mr Alfred FINZ State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Finance

#### **Portugal :**

Mr Manuel BAGANHA State Secretary for the Treasury and Finance

#### **Finland :**

Mr Sauli NIINISTÖ

Minister for Finance

**Sweden :**

Mr Bosse RINGHOLM

Minister for Finance

Mr Sven HEGELUND

State Secretary to the Minister for Finance

**United-Kingdom :**

Mr SHEINWALD

Permanent Representative

**Commission :**

Mr Pedro SOLBES MIRA

Member

**Other participants :**

Mr Mario DRAGHI

Chairman of the Economic and Financial  
Committee

Mr Jean-Philippe COTIS

Chairman of the Economic Policy Committee

**FORMAL ADOPTION OF THE BROAD ECONOMIC POLICIES GUIDELINES**

Following the endorsement by the European Council this same day, the Council formally adopted the Recommendation on the Broad Guidelines of the economic policies of the Member States and the Community.

The full text of the BEPG's can be found on the Council website : <http://ue.eu.int>.

**ITEMS APPROVED WITHOUT DEBATE**

(Decisions for which statements for the Council minutes have been made available to the public are indicated by asterisks; the statements in question may be obtained from the Press Office.)

**ECOFIN**

**Protection of Communities' financial interests and fight against Fraud - Conclusions**

Following agreement in principle reached on 5 June, the Council formally adopted the following conclusions :

1. " The Council takes note of the annual report 2000 from the Commission on the protection of the Communities' financial interests and the fight against fraud, and of the Action Plan for 2001-2003 on the overall strategic approach to the subject ( 1), and stresses the importance which it continues to attach to effective measures and action being taken to implement Article 280 of the EC Treaty. It regrets that the report was late in being forwarded to the Council. It notes that the Advisory Committee for the Coordination of Fraud Prevention (Cocolaf) has been consulted, and asks that in future Cocolaf should be consulted on the entire report.

2. The Council notes that a major effort has been made both at Community level and in the Member States to adopt legislative measures providing for a more effective fight against fraud, and invites all those concerned to continue these efforts. It regards it as essential that Cocolaf should be consulted in advance on any legislative initiative in the European Union framework concerning the protection of the Communities' financial interests and the fight against fraud. It underlines the importance which it attaches to the involvement of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) in the incorporation in legislative proposals of effective measures to prevent fraud.

3. The Council notes the increase in the number of cases of fraud and other actual or suspected irregularities notified by the Member States in 2000, in comparison with previous years, and the increase in their budgetary impact in some sectors. It believes, as does the Commission, that this increase is mainly the result of the increased effectiveness of controls and of the effect of certain individual cases in which particularly large amounts were involved.

4. However, the Council regrets that OLAF is not at present able to act on the wish expressed by the Council in its conclusions of 17 July 2000 that suspected cases of fraud, irregularities and administrative negligence should be more clearly distinguished and invites the Commission, with Cocolaf's assistance, to draw up measures relating to notification systems so that this distinction can be made from 2002; it considers that in any case, appropriate information should be provided on cases which are suspected of being fraudulent, as well as on those suspected of being irregular.

5. The Council approves of the efforts made by OLAF to grant higher priority to controls concerning the expenditure managed directly by the Commission. It invites the Commission to devote a separate chapter to this in the annual report. It points out that Regulation (EC) No 1073/1999 and Regulation (Euratom) No 1074/1999 explicitly state that OLAF's investigative powers apply to Community institutions and to bodies, offices and agencies created by the Community.

6. The Council notes with interest the various measures envisaged in the White Paper on reforming the Commission, concerning the strengthening of preventive measures and sanctions in the fight against fraud and the protection of the Communities' financial interests, and the improvement of financial management and control. In this context, it particularly stresses the importance which it attaches to a speedy overhaul of the Financial Regulation.

7. The Council notes the progress of cooperation between the Commission and the Member States. It welcomes the strengthening of the links between OLAF and the competent departments in the Member States, particularly in the area of controls. It considers that such cooperation is essential for the protection of the Communities' financial interests and should be reinforced. Progress should also be made in recovering amounts unduly paid out.

8. The Council underlines that it attaches great importance to the participation of third countries, and especially the candidate countries, in action to fight fraud, and to their cooperation with OLAF.

9. The Council reiterates its appeal to those Member States which have not yet done so to ratify without further delay the Convention of 26 July 1995 on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests and the Additional Protocols to it, so as to make progress in the protection by criminal sanctions of the Communities' financial interests and in the fight against fraud.

10. More particularly concerning the Action Plan for 2001-2003:

- The Council welcomes the fact that the Commission has acted on its request, made in the ECOFIN Council conclusions of 17 July 2000, that it should present a more precise timetable for the implementation of the overall strategy to protect the Communities' financial interests, and takes note of the specific measures planned for the years covered, particularly as regards prevention, cooperation with national authorities and proper coordination of activities undertaken to protect the Communities' financial interests. It points out that the Treaty of Nice does not provide for the creation of a European Public Prosecutor.

- The Action Plan should be supplemented by a financial evaluation of the projected reduction in the volume of fraud, so as to assess the cost-effectiveness ratio ex ante and ex post. The Council calls on the Commission to include in its annual reports from 2001 onwards a balance sheet of the results and costs involved in the framework of the Action Plan.

### **Mutual assistance for the recovery of claims (\*)**

The Council adopted a Directive amending Directive 76/308 76/308/EEC on mutual assistance for the recovery of claims resulting from operations forming part of the system of financing the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, and of agricultural levies and customs duties and in respect of value added tax and certain excise duties

The Directive provides that, in order to safeguard better the financial interests of the Member States and the neutrality of the internal market, claims relating to certain taxes on income and capital and taxes on insurance premiums are added to the scope of the mutual assistance provided for by Directive 76/308/EEC.

Furthermore, in order to permit more efficient and effective recovery of claims in respect of which a request for recovery has been made, the instrument permitting enforcement of the claim is treated in principle as an instrument of the Member State in which the requested authority is situated.

The use of mutual assistance for recovery cannot, save in exceptional circumstances, be based on financial benefits or an interest in the results obtained, but Member States should be able to agree the reimbursement arrangements when recovery poses a specific problem.

The measures necessary for the implementation of this Directive are to be adopted in accordance with Council Decision 1999/468/EC of 28 June 1999 laying down the procedures for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission. (Comitology).

## **BUDGET**

### **Draft supplementary and amending budget No. 3 and 4 2001**

The Council adopted :

The draft supplementary and amending budget No. 3 for the financial year 2001 - as amended by its Budget Committee - concerning :

- Section III - K : Research and Development, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF),
- Section VI - : Economic and Social Committee, and
- Section VII - : Committee of the Regions.

The draft supplementary and amending budget No. 4 to the budget for 2001 - concerning :

- Section III : Commission - General Statement of Revenue.

Footnotes:

( 1) 10020/00 FIN 259