

Ninth meeting of the European Union - Mercosur Bi-regional Negotiations Committee. Final Conclusions.-

From 17 to 21 March 2003, negotiators from the European Union and Mercosur met in Brussels for the ninth round of negotiations on the Interregional Association Agreement.

Mr Rigoberto Gauto, Vice Minister of Economical Relations and Integration of Paraguay, on behalf of the pro tempore Presidency of Mercosur, and Mr Karl Falkenberg, Director for Free Trade Agreements of the Directorate-General for Trade of the European Commission, on behalf of the European Union, jointly opened the meeting. They underlined their commitment to a rapid progress in these negotiations and in particular welcomed the recent exchange of substantive tariff offers.

They recalled the conclusions of the Negotiators' Meeting at Ministerial level, held at Rio de Janeiro last July. On that occasion, Mercosur Ministers and EU Commissioners discussed the state of the negotiations. They also agreed to a schedule of meetings for 2002 and 2003, giving a new impetus to the trade negotiations of the Interregional Association Agreement.

Following the opening, the Parties met at the level of Technical Groups to work intensively on the agenda set out in the Rio work-programme. This agenda included the following subjects:

- Goods: tariffs, rules of origin, trade defence, wine and spirits and sanitary and phytosanitary measures;
- Government procurement;
- Investment;
- Services;
- E-commerce and
- Dispute Settlement.

Both sides clarified questions related to their tariff offers. Substantive progress on methods and modalities for negotiations on investment and government procurement has been achieved. In the other areas, substantive discussions resulted in further harmonisation of negotiating texts.

The Action Plan on Business Facilitation (which includes dialogue on sanitary and phytosanitary measures, standards, technical regulations, conformity assessment procedures, e-commerce and customs) was also thoroughly discussed. In addition both sides also discussed co-operation for development, sustainable development and EU enlargement

Both sides concluded that this round was a significant step in the implementation of the Rio work-programme, paving the way for the next ones: the exchange of requests for improvement of tariff offers between 15 April and 15 May and the exchange of offers for services, investment and government procurement by 30 April.

The next round of negotiations on the Interregional Association Agreement will take place in Asuncion on 23-27 June 2003.