

## Joint press release at the first meeting of the EU–Latvia Association Council (Brussels, 23 February 1998)

**Caption:** On 23 February 1998, a press release outlines the main decisions adopted at the first meeting of the EU–Latvia Association Council, held in Brussels.

**Source:** Joint Press Release of the First Meeting of the Association Council between the EU and Latvia, Brussels, 23 February 1998 . [ON-LINE]. [Riga]: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, [23.05.2005]. Available on <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/press-releases/1998/feb/1971/?print=on>.

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## Joint Press Release of the First Meeting of the Association Council between the EU and Latvia, Brussels, 23 February 1998

1. The EU-Latvia Association Council held its first meeting on Monday 23 February 1998, only a few weeks after the entry into force of the Europe Agreement on 1 February 1998. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Robin COOK, Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom and President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union. The Delegation of Latvia was headed by Mr Valdis BIRKAVS, Minister for Foreign Affairs. The European Commission was represented by Commissioner Hans van den BROEK.

The parties welcomed this inaugural meeting of the Association Council which marks an important step in the relations between the European Union and Latvia. The Europe Agreement, which takes up the existing Free Trade Agreement of 1995, covers overall economic and political relations as well as cultural and financial cooperation. It will significantly broaden co-operation between the Union and Latvia and it provides a vital institutional framework which will assist Latvia's integration into the European Union.

2. The Association Council's first task was to adopt its rules of procedure. This Decision will be published in the respective Official Journals of the Parties.

An agreement was also reached on a Decision to amend the Protocol of the Europe Agreement regarding rules of origin in accordance with Decision no 1/97 of the Joint Committee under the Free Trade Agreement. This Decision, which will ensure legal continuity in this important area, will be formally adopted by written procedure as soon as possible.

3. The meeting took place at a unique time, not long after the Luxembourg European Council of last December.

The European Union side presented the conclusions of the Luxembourg European Council which took the historic decision to launch the overall enlargement process. After the European Conference in London on 12 March, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the 15 Member States of the European Union, the 10 Central and Eastern European applicant States and Cyprus will meet in Brussels on 30 March for the formal launch of the accession process. This will form part of the implementation of Article O of the Treaty on European Union. The nature of this process is comprehensive, inclusive and ongoing, and will take place in stages; each of the applicant States will proceed at its own rate, depending on its degree of preparedness. The EU emphasized that the main task in the years ahead will be to prepare the applicants for accession and to see that the Union is properly prepared for enlargement. It underlined that negotiations are only one aspect of the accession process. Accession can only take place when an applicant country is completely ready to assume the rights as well as the obligations of membership. The Luxembourg European Council also decided that the preparation of negotiations with Latvia should be speeded up, in particular through an analytical examination of the Union acquis. It will be up to Latvia, as part of this inclusive and dynamic process, to take full advantage of the pre-accession period. The progress of Latvia in adopting and implementing the Union acquis will be examined in the Association Council and its bodies.