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Resolution of the European Council on the Stability and Growth Pact Amsterdam, 17 June 1997

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I. Meeting in Madrid in December 1995, the European Council confirmed the crucial importance of securing budgetary discipline in stage three of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). In Florence, six months later, the European Council reiterated this view and in Dublin, in December 1996, it reached an agreement on the main elements of the Stability and Growth Pact. In stage three of EMU, Member States shall avoid excessive general government deficits: this is a clear Treaty obligation (1). The European Council underlines the importance of safeguarding sound government finances as a means to strengthening the conditions for price stability and for strong sustainable growth conducive to employment creation. It is also necessary to ensure that national budgetary policies support stability oriented monetary policies. Adherence to the objective of sound budgetary positions close to balance or in surplus will allow all Member States to deal with normal cyclical fluctuations while keeping the government deficit within the reference value of 3 % of GDP.

II. Meeting in Dublin in December 1996, the European Council requested the preparation of a Stability and Growth Pact to be achieved in accordance with the principles and procedures of the Treaty. This Stability and Growth Pact in no way changes the requirements for participation in stage three of EMU, either in the first group or at a later date. Member States remain responsible for their national budgetary policies, subject to the provisions of the Treaty; they will take the necessary measures in order to meet their responsibilities in accordance with those provisions.

III. The Stability and Growth Pact, which provides both for prevention and deterrence, consists of this Resolution and two Council Regulations, one on the strengthening of the surveillance of budgetary positions and the surveillance and coordination of economic policies and another on speeding up and clarifying the implementation of the excessive deficit procedure.

IV. The European Council solemnly invites all parties, namely the Member States, the Council of the European Union and the Commission of the European Communities, to implement the Treaty and the Stability and Growth Pact in a strict and timely manner. This Resolution provides firm political guidance to the parties who will implement the Stability and Growth Pact. To this end, the European Council has agreed upon the following guidelines:

THE MEMBER STATES

1. commit themselves to respect the medium-term budgetary objective of positions close to balance or in surplus set out in their stability or convergence programmes and to take the corrective budgetary action they deem necessary to meet the objectives of their stability or convergence programmes, whenever they have information indicating actual or expected significant divergence from those objectives;
2. are invited to make public, on their own initiative, the Council recommendations made to them in accordance with Article 103 (4);
3. commit themselves to take the corrective budgetary action they deem necessary to meet the objectives of their stability or convergence programmes once they receive an early warning in the form of a Council recommendation issued under Article 103 (4);
4. will launch the corrective budgetary adjustments they deem necessary without delay on receiving information indicating the risk of an excessive deficit;
5. will correct excessive deficits as quickly as possible after their emergence; this correction

should be completed no later than the year following the identification of the excessive deficit, unless there are special circumstances;

6. are invited to make public, on their own initiative, recommendations made in accordance with Article 104c (7);

7. commit themselves not to invoke the benefit of Article 2 (3) of the Council Regulation on speeding up and clarifying the excessive deficit procedure unless they are in severe recession; in evaluating whether the economic downturn is severe, the Member States will, as a rule, take as a reference point an annual fall in real GDP of at least 0,75 %.

THE COMMISSION

1. will exercise its right of initiative under the Treaty in a manner that facilitates the strict, timely and effective functioning of the Stability and Growth Pact;

2. will present, without delay, the necessary reports, opinions and recommendations to enable the Council to adopt decisions under Article 103 and Article 104c; this will facilitate the effective functioning of the early warning system and the rapid launch and strict application of the excessive deficit procedure;

3. commits itself to prepare a report under Article 104c (3) whenever there is the risk of an excessive deficit or whenever the planned or actual government deficit exceeds the reference value of 3 % of GDP, thereby triggering the procedure under Article 104c (3);

4. commits itself, in the event that the Commission considers that a deficit exceeding 3 % of GDP is not excessive and this opinion differs from that of the Economic and Financial Committee, to present in writing to the Council the reasons for its position;

5. commits itself, following a request from the Council under Article 109d, to make, as a rule, a recommendation for a Council decision on whether an excessive deficit exists under Article 104c (6).

THE COUNCIL

1. is committed to a rigorous and timely implementation of all elements of the Stability and Growth Pact in its competence; it will take the necessary decisions under Article 103 and Article 104c as is practicable;

2. is urged to regard the deadlines for the application of the excessive deficit procedure as upper limits; in particular, the Council, acting under Article 104c (7), shall recommend that excessive deficits be corrected as quickly as possible after their emergence, no later than the year following their identification, unless there are special circumstances;

3. is invited always to impose sanctions if a participating Member State fails to take the necessary steps to bring the excessive deficit situation to an end as recommended by the Council;

4. is urged always to require a non-interest bearing deposit, whenever the Council decides to impose sanctions on a participating Member State in accordance with Article 104c (11);

5. is urged always to convert a deposit into a fine after two years of the decision to impose sanctions in accordance with Article 104c (11), unless the excessive deficit has in the view of the Council been corrected;

6. is invited always to state in writing the reasons which justify a decision not to act if at any stage of the excessive deficit or surveillance of budgetary positions procedures the Council did not act on a Commission recommendation and, in such a case, to make public the votes cast by each Member State.

(1) Under Article 5 of Protocol 11, this obligation does not apply to the United Kingdom unless it moves to the third stage; the obligation under Article 109e (4) of the Treaty establishing the European Community to endeavour to avoid excessive deficits shall continue to apply to the United Kingdom.