EC/Pacific States Interim Partnership Agreement

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PURPOSE: to conclude the **Interim Partnership Agreement** between the European Community, of the one part, and the Pacific States, of the other part.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

BACKGROUND: the Interim Partnership Agreement has been negotiated to avoid disrupting trade with the Community on the expiry of the trade regime set out in Annex V of the Cotonou Agreement on 31 December 2007 and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) waiver covering that trade regime.

These negotiations were concluded by the Interim Partnership Agreement on 23 November 2007 with the Republic of Fiji Islands and Papua New Guinea.

As a result the signatory Pacific States (Fiji and Papua New Guinea) were included in the list of countries in Annex 1 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1528/2007 adopted by Council on 20 December 2007 that have benefited from the Community market access offer made in the context of EPAs from 1 January 2008. Their inclusion on this list will become permanent following ratification of the Interim Partnership Agreement by all parties. This will ensure a single harmonised trade regime with the EU providing improved market access for signatory Pacific States.

CONTENT: the Interim Partnership Agreement is a **framework for an EPA** and includes all the measures necessary to establish a **Free Trade Area** compatible with the provisions of Article XXIV of the GATT 1994, including provisions on:

- customs and trade facilitation,
- technical barriers to trade,
- sanitary and phytosanitary measures,
- dispute settlement.

Both development cooperation provisions and institutional provisions are very limited, the major focus of the Interim Partnership Agreement is purely trade in goods. The Interim Partnership Agreement contains a rendezvous-clause for continuation negotiations of the comprehensive EPA, which will cover other areas, such as:

- development cooperation,
- services,
- fisheries,
- agriculture,
- trade related rules.

The negotiation of a comprehensive EPA continues consistently with the directives for EPAs with ACP States adopted by Council on 12 June 2002.

Provisional application: pending the entry into force of the Interim Partnership Agreement, the provisional application of the Agreement is foreseen (see COM(2008)0858).

It should be noted that the European Parliament will be called upon to give its assent to the conclusion of the Interim Partnership Agreement, which establishes a framework for an EPA.