



Brussels, 19 March 2010

BACKGROUND¹
GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL
Monday 22 March in Brussels

*Starting at 15.00, the Council will prepare the spring **European Council**, which will focus on preparation of a new European strategy for **growth and jobs**, the EU 2020 strategy, and follow-up to the Copenhagen conference on **climate change**. The Council will also assess the state of play on preparatory work for the setting-up of the **European External Action Service**. This item will be taken together with the president and members of the Foreign Affairs Council.*

*A presidency **press conference** is scheduled for 18.30.*

Ministers will hold a working dinner with the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy.

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On the sidelines of the Council

Tuesday, 23 March:

8.30 EU-Croatia Stabilization and Association Council, *with press conference at 11.00.*

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¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office

Preparation of the spring European Council

The Council will examine draft conclusions for the spring meeting of the European Council, drawn up by the President of the European Council in close cooperation with the Spanish Prime Minister (for the Spanish presidency) and the President of the Commission.

The European Council, meeting in Brussels on 25 and 26 March, is due to focus on:

- Jobs and growth: preparation of a new European strategy, the EU 2020 strategy;
- Climate change: follow-up to the UN conference in Copenhagen in December.

It is also expected to discuss issues relating to the G-20 and competitiveness within the European Union.

As regards jobs and growth, the European Council is due to agree on the general framework of the new strategy, in the light of a communication from the Commission (*doc. [7110/10](#)*), and drawing on preparatory work by several Council configurations (*doc. [7596/10](#)*). It is expected to adopt the strategy at its subsequent meeting, in June.

The EU's existing strategy, launched by the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000 and renewed in 2005 was instrumental in putting forward the agenda for structural reforms in Europe but was lacking on delivery. In view of the economic crisis and the challenges posed by ageing populations, increased inequalities and climate change, a new approach has become necessary for the successor strategy.

The new strategy will be aimed in particular at:

- ensuring sustainable public finances whilst preserving investment and social welfare;
- establishing inclusive and efficient labour markets;
- promoting a sustainable economy;
- further strengthening the EU's internal market;
- fully exploiting the reciprocal benefits of foreign trade and openness.

At its December meeting, the European Council called for reflection on the methodology to be used for the new strategy, and for a more efficient and transparent governance structure, geared towards reaching tangible results. It called for reflection on an improved coordination of EU policies and on the best way of using country-specific recommendations for strengthening the link between EU and national measures.

This work was taken forward at an informal meeting of heads of state and government in Brussels on 11 February.

On climate change, the European Council will take stock of work on the follow-up to the Copenhagen conference, drawing on preparatory work by two Council configurations (Environment, Economic and Financial Affairs) and taking into account a communication from the Commission (*doc. [7438/10](#)*).

The political declaration issued in Copenhagen falls well short of the EU's objective of securing a legally binding agreement that ensures that the average global temperature increase remains no more than 2° C above pre-industrial levels. The EU however considers it a first step, and remains fully committed to continuing negotiations in order to conclude as soon as possible a more ambitious and legally binding agreement for the period after 2012.

Further negotiations are scheduled to take place in Bonn from 31 May to 11 June, with a view to a further UN conference which is due to be held in Cancún, Mexico, from 29 November to 10 December.

With this in view, the European Council will examine how best to adjust the EU's approach to the negotiations so as to reinvigorate global action on climate change.

European External Action Service: state of play

A joint session of the General Affairs Council and the Foreign Affairs Council will be held at 15.00. Ministers will have the opportunity to assess the state of play on preparatory work within the Council for the setting-up of the European External Action Service.

The debate will take place in view of the presentation by the High Representative of her proposal for a Council decision on the organisation and functioning of the service.

Creation of the EEAS is one of the most significant changes introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon. It should be a key instrument for enhancing the coherence of the EU's external action.

Preparatory work in the Council on the EEAS has been intense under the Spanish presidency, in the Permanent Representatives Committee and at ministerial level. The Spanish presidency is determined to make every effort to reach an early agreement on the decision and related legislative proposals.
