



Brussels, 28 January 2011

BACKGROUND¹
GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL
Brussels, 31 January 2011

*Starting at 10.00, the Council will prepare the February meeting of the **European Council**, which is due to focus on **energy** and **innovation**. The Council will examine draft conclusions calling for completion of the internal energy market, delivery of energy efficiency targets and increased coherence of the EU's external action in the field of energy. The draft conclusions will also stress the need for completion of the European Research Area and improvement of conditions for innovative companies.*

*The Council will also be briefed by the presidency on its programme for the duration of its term of office, and specifically on its plans for implementation of the **European Semester** and for a European strategy for the **Danube region**, as well as on preparation of a report on **Roma integration**.*

A presidency press conference will be held at the end of the Council.

Press conferences and public events can be followed by video streaming:
<http://video.consilium.europa.eu/>

Video coverage for preview and download in broadcast quality (MPEG4):
<http://tvnewsroom.consilium.europa.eu>

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

Presidency programme

The Hungarian presidency will present its programme for the duration of its term of office (January to June 2011) and the Council will hold an exchange of views.

The item will be taken as a public debate which can be followed on the internet:

<http://video.consilium.europa.eu/>

The Hungarian presidency intends to concentrate on the following priorities:

- Growth and employment,
- Food, energy and water resources;
- Issues of direct relevance to citizens;
- EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy.

Follow-up to the December European Council

The Council will take stock of the follow-up to be given to the European Council's meeting on 16 and 17 December.

Preparation of the February European Council

The Council will examine draft conclusions for the European Council meeting to be held in Brussels on 4 February, prepared by the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, in cooperation with the Hungarian presidency and the Commission. The European Council will focus on energy and innovation.

The draft European Council conclusions emphasize the need for further action at the EU level aimed at integrating the internal energy market, achieving energy efficiency targets and promoting investments in renewable energies, as well as improving the coherence of the EU's external action in the field of energy. The conclusions further call for the implementation of a strategic and integrated approach to boosting innovation and for the completion of the European Research Area by 2014 to create a genuine single market for knowledge, research and innovation.

European Semester

The Council will take stock of implementation of the so-called "European Semester", which involves simultaneous monitoring of the member states' budgetary policies and structural reforms, in accordance with common rules, during a six-month period every year.

The European Semester is implemented for the first time this year as part of a reform of EU economic governance.

- Annual growth survey

The Commission will present the main conclusions of its first annual growth survey (*doc. [18066/10](#)*).

The survey outlines priority actions to be taken by member states in order to ensure better-coordinated and more effective policies for putting Europe's economy on a path to sustainable growth.

It sets out priorities in three main areas:

- enhancing macroeconomic stability: implementing budgetary consolidation, correcting macroeconomic imbalances and ensuring the stability of the financial industry;
- structural reforms for boosting employment: making work more attractive, reforming pension systems, getting the unemployed back to work and balancing security and flexibility on labour markets;
- growth-enhancing measures under the "Europe 2000" strategy for jobs and growth: tapping the potential of the EU's single market, attracting private capital to enhance growth and creating cost-effective access to energy.

- Implementation

The presidency will present its plans for implementation of the European Semester. It will make proposals for the first phase of the European Semester, lasting from the publication this month of the annual growth survey until the March European Council, while the second phase will be elaborated in greater detail after the European Council, scheduled for 24 and 25 March.

Roma

The Council will be briefed by the Hungarian presidency on the preparation of a report on Roma integration. The report will be submitted to the General Affairs Council in May and forwarded to the European Council meeting on 24 June.

The Commission is expected to propose in April an EU framework on national Roma integration strategies. Subsequently, the presidency plans to hold debates on this text in four relevant Council configurations.

Strategy for the Danube region

The Council will take note of the Commission's presentation of a communication on the European Union strategy for the Danube region.

The Council is scheduled to adopt conclusions on this issue at its meeting on 18 April (General Affairs Council).

The strategy is aimed at developing the economic potential of the Danube region and improving environmental conditions. It contains a detailed action plan based around four pillars:

- Connecting the Danube region
- Protecting the environment in the Danube region
- Building prosperity in the Danube region
- Strengthening the Danube region (e.g. stepping up institutional capacity and cooperation to promote security and tackle organised crime)

While no new funds will be made available for the implementation of the strategy, about EUR 100 billion in funds available under the EU's current financial framework are to be used in a more coordinated and effective manner.
