



Brussels, 28 January 2011

DRAFT

BACKGROUND¹

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Monday, 31 January 2011, Brussels

*The Foreign Affairs Council will meet in the afternoon of Monday, 31 January. The main items on the agenda will be **Tunisia, Belarus, Lebanon, Cote d'Ivoire and freedom of religion or belief.***

*During the plenary session, which will start at 15.00, the Council will discuss **Tunisia** and adopt conclusions. It is expected to declare the EU's readiness to mobilise all its instruments in support of the process of democratisation and to look at reinforcing its partnership with Tunisia. It is expected to adopt restrictive measures against individuals responsible for diverting public funds.*

*The Council will also discuss **Belarus** following the presidential election in December and its violent aftermath. The ministers will discuss the current political crisis in **Lebanon** and are expected to adopt conclusions.*

*Other items for discussion include **Cote d'Ivoire** and "**intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion and belief**" and the Council is expected to adopt conclusions on these two subjects.*

*Over **dinner**, the High Representative will lead a discussion on **Russia**. She will also brief ministers on the E3+3 negotiations with Iran on 21 and 22 January in Istanbul and report on her recent visit to the **Middle East** ahead of the Quartet meeting on 5 February.*

*The Council is also expected to adopt conclusions on **Sudan, Sahel and Common Security and Defence Policy.***

The Council meeting will be followed by a press conference (+/- 18.30).

Press conferences and public events can be followed by video streaming:

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

Video coverage of the event will be available for preview and download in broadcast quality (MPEG4) on <http://tvnewsroom.consilium.europa.eu>

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

Tunisia

The Council will discuss the situation in Tunisia and EU relations with Tunisia following the ousting of President Ben Ali and the formation of a transitional government.

It is expected to adopt conclusions stating the EU's readiness to mobilise all its instruments in support of the democratic transition in Tunisia, including assistance for holding elections. It will also look at updating and reinforcing its strategy and assistance for Tunisia under the European Neighbourhood Policy in order to reflect the new situation and the aspirations of the Tunisian people. The Council is expected to adopt targeted restrictive measures, in consultation with the Tunisian authorities, against individuals responsible for diverting public funds.

Belarus

The Council will discuss **Belarus** following the violence and repression that marred the presidential election on 19 December 2010.

It will adopt conclusions in which it is expected to call again for the immediate release of those detained on political grounds and to state its continued commitment to strengthening its engagement with the Belarussian people and civil society. It is expected to impose travel restrictions and an assets freeze on persons responsible for the fraudulent elections in December and for the subsequent crackdown and to reinstate the previous travel restrictions that had been suspended since October 2008.

Lebanon

The Council will discuss the current political crisis in **Lebanon**.

Côte d'Ivoire

The Council is expected to have a short discussion on the situation in **Côte d'Ivoire** following the presidential election at the end of last year. Since December, the EU has imposed a visa ban and assets freeze targeting persons and entities who specifically oppose the legitimate president's authority, obstruct the handover of power and finance former president Gbagbo.

Intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion and belief

The Council will have a brief discussion on this subject and is expected to adopt conclusions expressing concern at the increasing number of acts of religious intolerance and discrimination, as epitomised by recent violence and acts of terrorism targeting places of worship and pilgrims, which it firmly condemns.

Iran

The High Representative will brief ministers over dinner on the talks with Iran that she conducted on behalf of the E3 +3 countries (France, Germany, UK, China, Russia and the US) in Istanbul on 21 and 22 January.

Middle East

During the working dinner, the High Representative will report on her recent trip to the Middle East, ahead of the Quartet meeting to be held on 5 February.

Strategic partners - Russia

During dinner, the High Representative will present a work plan on the EU's strategic partners and lead a discussion on Russia.

Other items

The Council is also expected to adopt conclusions on the **Sahel, Sudan** and **Common Security and Defence Policy**.
