



Brussels, 8 May 2014

BACKGROUND¹
FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL
Monday 12 May 2014 in Brussels

The Council will start at 9.30, under the presidency of Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Mr. Didier Burkhalter, will hold an exchange of views with ministers on the ongoing situation in Ukraine and the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission.

*The Council will then have an internal discussion on the crisis in **Ukraine**, taking stock of ongoing work, and is expected to adopt conclusions.*

*Ministers will then turn to the state of play in the **Middle East peace process** and could adopt conclusions on same.*

*Over lunch, ministers will exchange views on the **EU's neighbourhood policy** with countries in both eastern and southern Europe, inter alia on the basis of a recent joint communication by the High Representative and the Commission.*

*The **EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Council** will take place at 17.00. The EU delegation will be led, on behalf of the High Representative, by the Greek Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Evangelos Venizelos (TV/photo opportunity).*

*The **EU-Algeria Association Council** will be held on Tuesday 13 May at 9.00, co-chaired, on behalf of the High Representative, by the Greek Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Evangelos Venizelos (TV/photo opportunity).*

Press conferences:

- after the Foreign Affairs Council (+/- 16.00)
- following the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Council (+/- 19.15)
- on the EU-Algeria Association Council (13 May, +/- 9.50)

* * *

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

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

Photographic library on www.consilium.europa.eu/photo for photos in high resolution.

* * *

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

P R E S S

Ukraine

The discussion on Ukraine will be divided in two parts. The first part will see an exchange of views with the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Mr Didier Burkhalter, covering recent events in Ukraine and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission.

The second part will be an EU-only session where the Council will assess developments in the Ukrainian crisis and adopt conclusions. Ministers are expected to take stock of the situation on the ground and discuss diplomatic efforts to promote de-escalation of the situation, the EU's non-recognition policy regarding the illegal annexation of Crimea and EU restrictive measures.

The Council is also set to decide on EU assistance to Ukraine in the field of civilian security sector reform. European security sector experts have been deployed to the EU delegation in Kiev and a Political Framework for Crisis Approach has been prepared, outlining options that will allow ministers to decide how best to support Ukraine in this field.

In response to developments on the ground, the Council could in addition broaden the EU's targeted restrictive measures for actions undermining the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine (the so-called "stage two" sanctions).

On 29 April, the EU High Representative expressed her alarm at the worsening security situation in Eastern Ukraine and demanded that all persons illegally detained by armed groups be immediately released. She welcomed the actions taken by the Ukrainian government to implement the joint Geneva statement of 17 April and called on Russia to take concrete action in support of that accord (see [Geneva statement](#)). See [statement](#) by the High Representative.

The European Council of 20/21 March strongly condemned the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation and refused to recognise it. At the same time, the European Council reiterated that further steps by Russia to destabilise the situation in Ukraine would lead to additional and far reaching consequences for relations between the EU (and its member states) and the Russian Federation in a broad range of economic areas. Preparations on these economic measures continue in the Commission.

In response to Russian actions so far, the European Council cancelled the next EU-Russia summit; member states' regular bilateral summits with Russia were also annulled. Instead of the G8 summit in Sochi, the G7 will meet in Brussels on 4/5 June. In addition, negotiations on visa matters and a new agreement with Russia have been suspended. The EU has also targeted 48 persons responsible for actions that threaten or undermine the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine with an asset freeze and a ban from entering the EU.

The EU continues to roll out the support to Ukraine as set out in the Commission's package on 5 March: On 29 April, the Commission announced the details of a €365m state-building contract so as to help the country's transition and boost the role of civil society, promoting democratic reforms and inclusive socio-economic development. Macro-financial assistance to the tune of €1.6 billion can be made available to contribute to covering Ukraine's urgent balance-of-payments needs. The disbursement will be conditional on specific economic policy conditions outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding and on the successful implementation of an IMF stand-by arrangement. In addition, trilateral talks between the Commission, the Russian Federation and Ukraine on gas supplies, transit and prices were held on 2 May.

The political chapters of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement were signed on 21 March. At the same time, EU remains committed to signing the full agreement including the deep and comprehensive free trade area. Ahead of the signature of the provisions on free trade, temporary EU trade preferences for Ukraine apply since 23 April.

For more details, see [European Council conclusions](#) and [factsheet](#) on EU-Ukraine relations.

Middle East peace process

The Council will discuss the state of play in the Middle East peace process; conclusions could be adopted.

On 27 April, the EU High Representative expressed her extreme concern at recent developments related to the peace process that were putting into question the continued negotiations between the parties. She said: *"Negotiations are the best way forward. The extensive efforts deployed in recent months must not go to waste."* The EU supports intra-Palestinian reconciliation, while it expects any new government to uphold the principle of non-violence and the objective of a negotiated peaceful settlement of the conflict as well as to accept Israel's legitimate right to exist. For more details, see [statement](#).

The EU fully supports the efforts of the parties and of the US. In December 2013, the Council reiterated the EU's readiness to contribute substantially to post-conflict arrangements for ensuring the sustainability of a peace agreement. *"The EU will provide an unprecedented package of European political, economic and security support to both parties in the context of a final status agreement,"* the Council said. See [Council conclusions of 16 December 2013](#).

European neighbourhood policy

During lunch, ministers will discuss the future of the European neighbourhood policy, inter alia based on a joint communication assessing progress in the EU's relations with its neighbours in 2013 (see [communication](#)).

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is one of the key policy areas of the EU's foreign policy. It is a policy of continuous engagement based on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms that aims at developing a special relationship between the European Union and its eastern and southern neighbours, contributing to an area of security, shared prosperity and good neighbourliness. It is an inclusive policy though tailored to the needs and specificities of each country, which is both in the interest of partner countries and of the EU. In the framework of the ENP, the EU also supports multilateral cooperation both in the East (Eastern Partnership) and in the South (Union for the Mediterranean).

2013 was a year of crises, with political instability, continuing difficult socio-economic conditions in a number of partner countries and increasing security challenges. In those countries in particular support to political and economic transitions requires a wider and more coherent scope of EU action in partner countries. The EU is committed to helping its neighbours prevent, and if necessary to cope with, political and economic crises and emerging needs. One of the key objectives of the ENP is therefore to assist the partner countries in setting up, and in stabilising, functioning state structures. Civil society engagement, including independent media, is important for the success of required reforms and will continue to be supported by the EU. Recognising these challenges, the joint communication stresses the need for the EU to be better equipped to react to crises, to emerging needs, or rapidly evolving situations – faster, more flexible where needed.

The ENP reflects the long-term commitment of the EU to supporting its partners' reform efforts, and providing the framework for close political and economic relations. Its long term objective is compelling: sustain good neighbourliness ties and support security, prosperity and stability. That is the added value of the EU in eastern European and southern Mediterranean countries.

The total amount of funding granted to partners between 2007 and 2013 was higher than initially planned. In 2013 alone, assistance from the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument reached € 2.033 billion. In the 2014-2020 EU financial framework, the budget for the ENP amounts to € 15.4 billion.

Other items

The Council is set to adopt several other items without discussion, including:

- EU human rights guidelines on freedom of expression online and offline

The Council is set to approve the first EU human rights guidelines on freedom of expression online and offline. This document provides guidance for the EU and its member states in working for the freedoms of opinion and expression in their external human rights policy.

The EU is committed to respecting and promoting the freedom of opinion and expression both within its border and in its external human rights policy. They are fundamental rights of every human being; democracy cannot exist without them. Technological innovations have created new opportunities and challenges, but it is the EU's conviction that all human rights that exist offline must also be protected online, including the right to freedom of expression, the right to privacy and the protection of personal data.

- Human rights dialogue with Myanmar/Burma

The Council is due to adopt conclusions endorsing the establishment of a human rights dialogue with Myanmar/Burma and approve the modalities agreed with Myanmar/Burma. Meetings to discuss bilateral cooperation and issues related to human rights will be held on an annual basis. The first such dialogue is scheduled to take place on 20 May.

- EU Comprehensive Approach

The Council is to adopt conclusions endorsing the key recommendations from the joint communication by the High Representative and the Commission on the matter from December 2013. The focus is on how to apply more efficiently the available tools and resources, in order to respond to security and development challenges on ground. It is a step towards making the EU more efficient and more responsive international actor.

- EU policy towards the Arctic region

The Council is set to adopt conclusions on developing an EU policy towards the Arctic region. Given that the Arctic is a region of growing strategic importance, the Council will ask for an enhanced EU contribution to Arctic cooperation. EU action should be strengthened in four areas: research, responsibly contributing to economic development, constructive engagement with Arctic states as well as the protection of the Arctic environment. The Council is due to request more detailed proposals for the further development of an integrated and coherent Arctic policy by December 2015.

- Georgia - participation in EU programmes

The Council is due to adopt a decision concluding a protocol to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Georgia on the general principles for the participation of Georgia in EU programmes. If Georgia fulfils the necessary procedures during the month of May, it could take part in EU programmes as of 1 June.
