



Brussels, 11 November 2011

BACKGROUND¹
GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL
Tuesday 15 November in Brussels

*Starting at 11.00, the Council will debate certain aspects of the proposed **multiannual financial framework** for the 2014-2020 period.*

*It will discuss a draft annotated agenda for the December meeting of the **European Council**, which is due to focus on economic policy and energy.*

*The EU's strategy for the **Baltic Sea region** is also on the agenda.*

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

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In the margins of the Council:
14.30 EEA Council

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

Multiannual financial framework

The Council will hold a public debate on certain parts of the Commission proposal for the EU's multiannual financial framework (MFF) for the 2014-2020 period².

More specifically, ministers will have the opportunity to express their views on economic, social and territorial cohesion, the "Connecting Europe" facility³, the Common Agriculture Policy and Common Fisheries Policy.

The discussion will be framed by the following questions from the presidency ([16102/11](#)):

On economic, social and territorial cohesion:

- *Do delegations agree that the proposed conditionality (ex ante, performance and macro-fiscal) is an adequate tool to further enhance the effectiveness of cohesion policy expenditure?*
- *Do delegations agree with the Commission's proposal on macro-fiscal conditionality?*
- *Do delegations agree with the Commission's geographic approach and the amounts proposed?*
- *Do delegations agree on the proposed elements to address the issue of absorption of funding?*

On the "Connecting Europe" facility:

- *Do delegations support the creation of the "Connecting Europe" facility and the proposed amounts?*
- *Do delegations agree with the proposed interlink between the "Connecting Europe" facility and the funds in the field of economic, social and territorial cohesion, in particular with the ring fencing of EUR 10 billion in 2011 prices for transport in the cohesion fund?*
- *Do delegations agree on the proposed use of innovative financial instruments to implement part of interventions within the "Connecting Europe" facility?*

On the Common Agriculture Policy:

- *Do delegations agree on the adequacy of the new elements (convergence and "greening" of direct payments, and their capping) and the amounts as proposed by the Commission?*
- *Do delegations share the Commission's approach to rural development, including the total amount and the way of establishing the annual breakdown of the amounts?*

² The Commission's proposal and accompanying communication can be found in [12474/11](#) + [12475/11](#).

³ The "Connecting Europe" facility is a new instrument proposed by the Commission aimed at accelerating infrastructure development in transport, energy and information and communication technologies across the EU.

On the Common Fisheries Policy:

- *While the sectoral proposals are not yet approved by the Commission, do delegations believe that the outline, including the amount, of the European maritime and fisheries fund rightly responds to the challenges in this sector?*

The Polish presidency intends to include the main outcome of the debate, together with the results of work conducted since July, in a report to be presented to the General Affairs Council on 5 December. In the meantime, it has submitted to the Council an interim report ([16105/11](#)).

The negotiation phase is due to start in January with the beginning of the Danish presidency.

European Council

- Preparation of the December meeting

The Council will examine a draft annotated agenda, drawn up by the President of the European Council in cooperation with the presidency and the Commission, for the European Council meeting to be held on 9 December ([15950/11](#)).

The European Council is due to focus on:

- Economic policy:
 - a review of the economic situation in Europe, including the themes developed at its June and October meetings;
 - the member states participating in the Euro Plus Pact will track progress on their commitments;
 - discussion on reflections by the euro area member states on the strengthening of economic governance in the euro area.
- Energy, in particular energy efficiency, the internal energy market, energy infrastructure development, external energy policy and nuclear stress tests.
- Other issues, in particular EU enlargement.

Draft conclusions will be prepared in the run-up to the European Council.

Signature of a treaty on the accession of Croatia to the EU is scheduled in the margins of the meeting.

- Follow-up to the October meeting

The Council will take stock of the follow-up to the European Council meeting on 23 October, on the basis of a note from the presidency following on from its February, March, June and October meetings ([16468/11](#)).

Strategy for the Baltic Sea region

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions reviewing implementation of the EU's strategy for the Baltic Sea region ([15848/11](#)).

The strategy, launched by the European Council in October 2009, addresses common challenges faced by the countries of the macro-region, as well as unexploited potential, by providing a common framework for strengthened cooperation.

It involves a detailed action plan focused on:

- environmental sustainability (in particular the marine environment);
- prosperity in the region (including by removing barriers to trade and fostering innovation);
- accessibility and attractiveness of the region (in particular transport and energy);
- safety and security (including by tackling marine pollution and cross-border crime).

Whilst no new funds are available for its implementation, the strategy does encourage better coordination and more effective use of existing financial support, in particular under the EU's structural funds, as well as the involvement of international and regional financial institutions.

The first EU initiative of its kind, the Baltic Sea strategy has been used as a pilot case for other macro-regional strategies, such as the strategy for the Danube region, launched in April this year.

The draft conclusions set out recommendations on enhancing political support for the strategy, strengthening coordination between policies with a territorial impact, facilitating the alignment of funding in the 2014-20 programming period, strengthening the roles of key stakeholders, strengthening monitoring by introducing targets and indicators, improving communication systems, promotion and visibility, integrating multilateral structures and strengthening cooperation with third countries.
