



Brussels, 12 October 2007

BACKGROUND¹

GENERAL AFFAIRS and EXTERNAL RELATIONS COUNCIL

Monday 15 October 2007 in Luxembourg

*Prior to the Council, at 9.30, ministers will meet within the **intergovernmental conference** to discuss the **draft reform treaty** to amend the EU treaties, with a view to enabling heads of state and government to reach an agreement on the text at an informal meeting in Lisbon on 18 and 19 October.*

The text of the draft treaty is available on the Council web site's IGC homepage.

*Starting at around 10.15, the Council will discuss EU disaster response arrangements. A session on external relations will follow, featuring preparation of the **EU-Russia** summit, the future EU operation in **Chad** and the **Central African Republic**, developments in the Democratic Republic of the **Congo** and the situation in **Burma**, as well as **Iraq**, **Libya** and **Uzbekistan**.*

*Lunch discussion items will include **Iran**, **Zimbabwe** and the **Western Balkans**.*

Press conference: *at the end of the Council.*

Press conferences and public events can be followed by video streaming:
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In the margins of the Council:

Friday 12 October (in Brussels):

11.00 Accession conference with Croatia, to be followed by a press conference as from 12.00;

Tuesday 16 October:

9.35 EU-Armenia cooperation council;

10.40 EU-Azerbaijan cooperation council;

11.45 EU-Georgia cooperation council.

To be followed by a joint press conference at around 12.50.

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

SESSION ON GENERAL AFFAIRS

EU disaster response

The Council will hear a presentation by the Greek delegation on the means of reinforcing the EU's disaster response following this summer's forest fires in Greece.

The presentation is expected to address shortcomings in existing disaster response structures when crises of exceptional severity break out, and to suggest enhanced common action at EU level, contributing to:

- more timely coordination between national civil protection structures and improved interoperability within the European civil protection system;
- increased effectiveness, resulting from the availability and/or acquisition of common means, the use of European know-how and technologies (eg. satellite surveillance), as well as from the sharing of experiences and of national best practices;
- increased cost-effectiveness, since the cost of prevention and preparedness is substantially smaller than that of reconstruction ex-post facto (EU solidarity fund).

SESSION ON EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Relations with Russia

The Council will discuss preparations for the EU-Russia summit that will take place in Mafra, Portugal on 26 October, the 20th to be held under the EU-Russia partnership and cooperation agreement.

The agenda is likely to feature the following issues:

- the situation in the EU and in Russia;
- progress on the four EU-Russia "common spaces"² and future perspectives for EU-Russia relations;
- international and regional issues, including Kosovo, the Middle East peace process, Iran, Afghanistan and Moldova.

Discussions are also expected to encourage continued efforts to help find a solution to Russia's bans on Polish imports so as to allow negotiations to start on a new framework agreement for EU-Russia relations.

Chad, the Central African Republic and Sudan

The Council is expected to confirm that the EU will conduct a bridging military operation in Eastern Chad and North Eastern Central African Republic - codenamed EUFOR TCHAD/RCA - in the framework of the European security and defence policy.

On 24 September, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1778 (2007), which approves the deployment in Chad and the Central African Republic of a multidimensional presence and authorises the EU to provide the military element thereof.

² Common economic space, common space of freedom, security and justice, common space of external security, common space of research and education, including cultural aspects.

By addressing the regional dimension of the Darfur crisis, the deployment of EUFOR TCHAD/RCA and a UN police mission, in parallel to UNAMID in Sudan, aims to facilitate a long lasting solution to the conflict in Darfur.

The Council is also expected to welcome the designation of EUFOR TCHAD/RCA's Operation Commander and Force Commander. It should underline that the establishment of EUFOR TCHAD/RCA, which will be deployed for a period of one year, forms part of a comprehensive EU effort to reinforce support for refugees and displaced people in Chad and the CAR, including through continuing humanitarian assistance to both countries and the financing of substantial rehabilitation and reconstruction work in the zones of return for displaced persons.

The Council is expected to adopt a Joint Action on EUFOR TCHAD/RCA, setting out inter alia the decision to conduct the operation, as well as the chain of command, budgetary and other arrangements for the operation.

On the situation in Darfur itself, the Council will recall that sustainable peace is only possible once a widely acceptable political settlement for Sudan has been successfully put in place. It is expected to express its concern at the increasing levels of violence in Darfur, and in particular the attack on African Union peacekeepers in Haskanita, an incident which also stresses the need for the urgent deployment of the UN support package to AMIS and UNAMID.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Council will discuss developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the light of the deteriorating situation in the east of the country.

Burma/Myanmar

The Council will discuss the situation in Burma/Myanmar after the brutal crack-down on demonstrators.

It is expected to reiterate the EU's demands that the authorities immediately cease all violent repression and intimidation and that they release all those arrested since mid-August, as well as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners.

The Council should also express its strong support for active UN engagement, in particular the good offices mission of UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari, and welcome the resolution on Burma/Myanmar adopted at the special session of the UN Human Rights Council.

In line with the Presidency statement of 25 September, in view of the seriousness of the current situation and in solidarity with the people of Burma/Myanmar, the Council is expected to decide to adopt a package of additional restrictive measures targeting those responsible for the violent crack-down and the overall political stalemate in the country.

It is also expected to express the EU's readiness to continue and increase its substantial humanitarian aid programmes aimed at the most vulnerable populations of Burma/Myanmar and Burmese refugees in neighbouring countries.

It should encourage all of Burma's neighbours to maintain pressure for a credible and fully participatory reform process.

Iran

Over lunch, ministers will discuss developments regarding the Iranian nuclear issue, notably after recent diplomatic activity in the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York.

The Council is expected to welcome the statement made at the meeting in New York on 28 September, by the foreign ministers of China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK and the United States, with the support of EU High Representative Javier Solana, where they reaffirmed their commitment to their dual track approach and reiterated their readiness to engage with Iran in negotiations on a comprehensive long-term agreement to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions.

Zimbabwe

Over lunch, ministers are expected to discuss the situation in Zimbabwe, notably on the basis of a presentation by Minister Amado following his recent visit to Southern Africa.

Western Balkans

Over lunch, ministers will discuss the situation Kosovo. The Council is due to adopt conclusions on the following issues:

- **Montenegro:** the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the Interim Agreement with Montenegro are ready to be signed, following the successful completion of the negotiations. The actual signing could already take place in the margins of the Council meeting. This is an important step on the country's path towards the EU and will encourage Montenegro to push ahead with its reform agenda.

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** expressing full support to HR/EUSR Miroslav Lajcak and his efforts to advance reforms which are essential for Bosnia to move forward, in particular police reform, agreement on which is one of the necessary conditions for further progress towards a Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the EU.

- **Kosovo:** expressing full support for the Troika process and for the EU's Representative therein, Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, and welcoming the intense pace of activity and the constructive atmosphere of the first rounds of talks.

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Ministers will also meet with the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Carla del Ponte, on cooperation with the ICTY.

Iraq

The Council will discuss recent developments regarding Iraq, which remains a central challenge for the international community. In its conclusions, it should reaffirm the EU's commitment to play a major role in supporting the Iraqi government in its work to bring stability, security and prosperity to all of its citizens, including through practical assistance.

The discussion will also take place against the background of preparations for the ministerial conference of Iraq's neighbouring countries to be held in Istanbul in early November.

The Council should welcome the adoption on 10 August 2007 of UN Security Council resolution 1770, renewing and extending the mandate of UNAMI, as well as the support by the participants at the High Level Meeting on Iraq in New York on 22 September for a broader UN role and for the International Compact with Iraq.

Libya

The Council is due to discuss relations with Libya following the conclusion of the case of the Bulgarian medical personnel in connection with the HIV-AIDS infection in Benghazi.

Acknowledging the potential of EU-Libya co-operation in many areas of common interest, the Council will consider a reinforcement of the policy of engagement with Libya which it decided in 2004 with a view to enhancing EU-Libya relations. The objective of this policy will be to set EU-Libya relations into an appropriate, coherent long-term framework. To that end the Council should invite the Commission to prepare a draft mandate for discussions on an EU-Libya framework agreement.

Middle East

The Council is due to adopt conclusions on the Middle East peace process and on Lebanon.

Ministers are due to discuss the issues further over dinner on 18 October at an informal meeting of heads of state and government in Lisbon.

In its conclusions, the Council should welcome the present opportunities for progress on Israeli-Palestinian peace, following recent meetings between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, as well as recent discussions in the Quartet in the perspective of the upcoming international meeting.

Regarding Lebanon, the Council is expected to focus on the electoral process, which it is following closely, and in particular to condemn the car bomb attack perpetrated on 19 September in Beirut, which claimed the life of six people including Member of Parliament Antoine Ghanem.

Uzbekistan

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the human rights situation in Uzbekistan, assessing recent developments and reviewing the restrictive measures in force.

Other business

- *Trade relations with ACP countries*

The Council, under "other business", will be briefed by the Commission on the state of negotiations on economic partnership agreements (EPAs) with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries and regions.

The EPAs are intended to replace trade preference agreements that involve lower customs tariffs granted by the EU to the ACPs. The trade preferences are contrary to the rules of the WTO but are tolerated under a derogation that expires at the end of 2007. Negotiations on the EPAs, which started in 2002, must therefore be concluded by the end of the year.
