



Brussels, 24 February 2012

BACKGROUND¹
GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL
Tuesday 28 February in Brussels

*Starting at 10.00, the Council will discuss whether to grant **Serbia** the status of EU candidate country in the light of progress made on the criteria identified in December.*

*It will also prepare the **European Council** meeting on 1 and 2 March on the basis of draft conclusions.*

President Herman Van Rompuy will join ministers to discuss preparations for the European Council over lunch.

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

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

EU enlargement - Serbia

The Council will consider whether to grant Serbia the status of candidate country in the light of its application for EU membership.

The European Council in December noted progress made by Serbia in fulfilling the political criteria for candidate countries and under the stabilisation and association process for the Western Balkans, as well as a satisfactory level of cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. It welcomed Serbia's reengagement in the dialogue with Kosovo and progress on the implementation of agreements, including on integrated border management (IBM).

With a view to granting Serbia the status of candidate country by March, the European Council asked the Council to confirm that Serbia continues to show credible commitment and achieves further progress in implementing agreements, including on IBM, has reached an agreement on inclusive regional cooperation and has actively cooperated in enabling the EULEX and KFOR missions to execute their mandates.

Preparation of the March European Council

Draft conclusions

The Council will examine draft conclusions for the European Council meeting to be held on 1 and 2 March, prepared by the President of the European Council in cooperation with the presidency and the Commission.

The European Council is due to focus on:

- Economic policy:
 - assessing progress made in implementing country-specific recommendations under the 2011 *European Semester* and commitments under the *Euro Plus Pact*²;
 - giving guidance to member states, on the basis of the Commission's annual growth survey, to be incorporated into their national reform programmes (structural reforms) and stability or convergence programmes (fiscal policies);
 - highlighting labour market reforms and employment and competitiveness issues; and
 - providing guidance to the Commission and the Council on the implementation of flagship initiatives.
- International summits: preparations for the G-8 summit on 19-20 May, the G-20 summit on 18-19 June and the UN "Rio+20" conference on sustainable development on 20-22 June;
- Foreign policy, including the southern neighbourhood (one year after the start of the Arab Spring) and Syria;
- Other issues, including EU enlargement (Serbia) and accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Schengen area.

² The *Euro Plus Pact*, agreed by 23 member states, is intended to strengthen economic policy coordination with the aim of improving competitiveness and enabling a greater degree of policy convergence.

The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union ("fiscal compact" treaty) will be signed in the margins of the meeting.

An annotated draft agenda was discussed by the Council on 27 January ([5354/12](#)).

European Semester

The Council will also take note of a report from the presidency on the EU's 2012 *European Semester*³ ([6662/12](#)).

The report summarises the results of discussions in the Council's different configurations on the basis of the Commission's 2012 annual growth survey, as well as on implementation at national level of reforms agreed under the 2011 *European Semester*.

³ The *European Semester* involves simultaneous monitoring of the member states' structural reforms and fiscal policies during a six-month period every year.