



Brussels, 12 June 2009

BACKGROUND¹

GENERAL AFFAIRS and EXTERNAL RELATIONS COUNCIL

Monday 15 June in Luxembourg

*The Council will start at 10.00 with a session on general affairs, focusing on preparations for the June **European Council**.*

*A session on external relations will follow, where the Council will discuss the situation in the **Middle East**, including the peace process, Lebanon and Syria, **Cuba**, the **Western Balkans**, in particular Bosnia and Herzegovina and visa liberalisation, and **Burma/Myanmar**.*

A presidency press conference will be held at the end of the meeting (+/- 17.00).

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In the margins of the Council:

Sunday, 14 June:

20.00: Dinner: EU Troika with the Arab League

Monday, 15 June:

18.00: EU-Israel Association Council, *to be followed by a press conference (at +/-19.00)*

Tuesday, 16 June:

9.45: EU-Algeria Association Council, *to be followed by a press conference (at +/-10.30)*

10.30: EU-Ukraine Cooperation Council, *to be followed by a press conference (at +/-12.00)*

11.30: EU Troika meeting with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), *to be followed by a press conference (at +/-13.00)*

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

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

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

SESSION ON GENERAL AFFAIRS

Preparation of the June European Council

The Council will examine draft conclusions prepared by the presidency for the European Council meeting to be held in Brussels on 18 and 19 June.

The issues to be addressed by the European Council are as follows:

- institutional issues;
- the economic, financial and social situation (including the financial markets and efforts to support employment);
- climate change and sustainable development;
- illegal immigration; and
- external relations, in particular Pakistan/Afghanistan.

An annotated draft agenda was discussed by the Council at its meeting on 18 and 19 May: Draft conclusions have since been examined by the Permanent Representatives Committee.

SESSION ON EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Middle East

At a moment when the international community is intensifying its efforts to re-launch the peace process, the Council will hold a comprehensive discussion on the Middle East, including Lebanon and Syria.

EU High Representative Javier Solana, who is travelling to Israel, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon and Egypt on 10-14 June, will brief the Council on his visit to the region.

Encouraged by the United States' commitment, the Council will confirm its readiness to work actively with the US and other Quartet members to pursue a two-state solution with a view to achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

It should call on the government of Israel to commit unequivocally to the two-state solution and to immediately end settlement activities. It should urge the Palestinian Authority to continue to make every effort to improve law and order in the Palestinian territories. The Council should call on both parties to take immediate steps to resume peace negotiations and to implement their obligations under the Roadmap.

The discussion will also focus on the Gaza crisis, inter-Palestinian reconciliation, Palestinian economic development and the regional approach.

The Council should also call for the settlement of the conflicts between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon.

As regards Lebanon, the Council is expected to congratulate its people, its institutions and political forces on the successful holding of parliamentary elections on 7 June. It will encourage all parties to further engage in dialogue in a spirit of consensus and reform, and express the hope that all parties cooperate with President Michel Sleimane with a view to the timely formation of a government.

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions along these lines.

Cuba

The Council will assess its relations with Cuba, in the context of the annual review of its 1996 common position on Cuba.

It is expected to conclude that the political dialogue resumed with Cuba should be pursued and deepened on a comprehensive, equal and results-oriented basis.

It should also reaffirm its determination to pursue a dialogue with representatives of civil society and the peaceful pro-democracy opposition.

The Council should also call upon the Cuban government to improve effectively the human rights situation by, inter alia, unconditionally releasing all political prisoners, including those that were detained and sentenced in 2003.

It should also encourage the Cuban government to take the necessary steps to improve living conditions of the Cuban people by undertaking social, economic and structural reforms. The EU will be ready to support Cuba in these efforts.

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions along these lines.

Western Balkans

- Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Council will discuss the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), in the light of the forthcoming Peace Implementation Council (PIC) steering board meeting on 29 and 30 June.

It should in particular exchange views on the current political situation and the transition from the Office of the High Representative (OHR) to a reinforced EU presence.

The Council should also reconfirm its support for the European perspective of BiH.

EU High Representative Javier Solana and US Vice-President Joe Biden recently delivered a common political message during their joint trip to BiH. They reiterated common objectives of the EU and US and support for the country's efforts in progressing on the path towards the EU and Euro-Atlantic institutions. They urged the leaders of BiH to transcend nationalist agendas and individual interests and to work responsibly together for the future of the country.

- **Visa liberalisation**

The Council will debate visa liberalisation with regard to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, in the light of progress made by these countries.

It should support reinforced regional co-operation among the countries in south-east Europe, and emphasise the importance of such co-operation for the European perspective of the Western Balkans.

- **Serbia**

Over lunch, ministers will have an exchange of views with the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Serge Brammertz, following his recent report to the UN Security Council on cooperation by Serbia and other countries with ICTY.

Burma/Myanmar

The Council will discuss its policy on Burma/Myanmar in the light of developments in the country, in particular as regards political prisoners and ethnic minorities, respect for human rights and progress towards the establishment of an inclusive democratisation process in the run-up to planned elections.

The debate will focus on the trial of Aung San Suu Kyi and options on possible next steps of the EU towards Burma/Myanmar.

At its meeting on 18 May, the Council asked its preparatory bodies to examine further steps, and agreed to step up dialogue with Asian countries with regard to Burma/Myanmar.

Other items

The Council will examine the situation in Sudan and the EU's presence at ASEAN's meetings.

Without discussion, the Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Iraq, Republic of Moldova, a presidency report on ESDP, and a Joint Statement of the EU and the US on the closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility and future counterterrorism cooperation.
