



Brussels, 11 September 2009

BACKGROUND¹

GENERAL AFFAIRS and EXTERNAL RELATIONS COUNCIL

Monday 14 and Tuesday 15 September in Brussels

*The Council will start on Monday at 17.00 with a session on general affairs, featuring preparation of the October **European Council**, with a specific focus on the security of the EU's **energy supplies**.*

*Ministers of Foreign Affairs will have a dinner at 19.30 to discuss the situation in **Iran**.*

*The Council will continue on Tuesday at 9.00 with a session on external relations. It will discuss the situation in **Afghanistan** and how to enhance relations with the countries of the **Southern Caucasus**. It may also adopt conclusions on **Honduras** and on **Sudan**.*

Trade ministers will meet on Sunday 13 September for an informal meeting and dinner to discuss the key challenges for trade policy.

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Presidency press conferences will be held at the end of both Council sessions:

- on Monday at +/- 19.00;
- on Tuesday at +/- 12.45.

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

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

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Meetings in the margins of the Council:

Monday at 11.00: EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council, *to be followed by a press conference, after lunch (+/- 14h00);*

Tuesday at 15.30: EU-Central Asia Ministerial Conference, *to be followed by a press conference (+/-19.30).*

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

SESSION ON GENERAL AFFAIRS

Preparation of the October meeting of the European Council

The Council will examine an annotated draft agenda prepared by the presidency for the European Council meeting to be held in Brussels on 29 and 30 October (*doc. 12942/09*).

Issues to be addressed by the European Council include:

- institutional issues;
- climate change;
- the economic situation;
- macro-regional strategies;
- illegal immigration.

The European Council is also likely to discuss external relations, in the light of developments.

Furthermore, in line with the conclusions to its June meeting, it will take stock of work on energy infrastructures and energy interconnections and on crisis mechanisms relating to the security of energy supplies.

In preparing for this stock-taking, the Council will be briefed by the presidency and the Commission, and the presidency has prepared a progress report.

SESSION ON EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Iran

Ministers, over dinner on Monday, will discuss Iran, including the political situation after the presidential election, human rights and the nuclear dossier following the recent handing over by Iran of proposals.

Afghanistan

As a follow-up to the debate on 5 September at the informal ministerial ("Gymnich") meeting in Stockholm, the Council will discuss the situation in Afghanistan. The debate will focus on the aftermath of the presidential elections held on 20 August.

The Council will also discuss the state of play of a new strategy to enhance the EU's engagement in Afghanistan.

It should be noted that at its June session, the Council invited the High Representative Javier Solana and the Commission to look at how to further enhance and improve the EU's engagement in Afghanistan, and to report to the Council by October proposing recommendations, policy priorities and a strategy for EU engagement. This work is intended to prepare the EU for co-operation with the incoming government.

Southern Caucasus

The Council will have an exchange of views on the strengthening of the EU's relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, within the framework of the EU's Eastern Partnership².

The discussion will focus on how to enhance bilateral relations with the three South Caucasian countries, including principles for enhancing those relations.

Existing relations between the EU and the three South Caucasian countries are currently based on partnership and cooperation agreements. These entered into force in 1999 for an initial period of ten years and will be from now on automatically extended on a yearly basis. With the creation of the Eastern Partnership, the EU has adopted a new vision for the development of its relations with these countries. The discussion in the Council will help to set out some basic principles to guide deliberations in order to enhance EU's relations with the three countries.

There will be meetings between the EU and the three countries in late September and Cooperation Council meetings in the margins of the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 26 and 27 October to further discuss this issue.

Other items

Under “other business”, the Council will be briefed on the state of play regarding **Canadian visa restrictions** on Czech nationals and on the absence of visa reciprocity with **Brazil**, and will hold a brief discussion on **religious freedoms in Pakistan**.

It is also expected to adopt, without discussion, conclusions on **Sudan** and **Honduras**.

² With Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.