



Brussels, 7 December 2007

BACKGROUND¹

GENERAL AFFAIRS and EXTERNAL RELATIONS COUNCIL

Monday 10 December in Brussels

*The Council will start at 10.00 on Monday with a session on general affairs, featuring preparations for the 14 December meeting of the **European Council** and a discussion on the **EU enlargement package**.*

*During its external relations session, the Council will address **Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs)** and will review the situation in **Burma/Myanmar**, in **Sudan** and **Chad** and regarding the **Middle East** peace process.*

*Lunch discussion items will include **Iran** and the **Western Balkans** (in particular **Kosovo**).*

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

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In the margins of the Council:

Monday 10 December

18.30 EU-Russia permanent partnership Council, with press briefing as from 19.45;

Tuesday, 11 December

09.00 EU-Jordan association council, with press briefing as from 11.30;

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

SESSION ON GENERAL AFFAIRS

Preparation of the December meeting of the European Council

The Council will pursue work on draft conclusions prepared for the European Council to be held in Brussels on 14 December.

Among the issues to be addressed by the European Council are the following:

- Justice and home affairs (enlargement of the Schengen area, migration policy, police and judicial cooperation, combating terrorism);
- Economic, social and environmental issues (Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs, climate change, energy, sustainable development, maritime policy, internal market, social policy);
- External relations (in the light of developments, but likely to include EU-Africa relations and Kosovo).

The European Council is expected to welcome the signature of the Lisbon treaty on 13 December, and the proclamation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights on 12 December.

It should also adopt a declaration on globalisation and decide to establish an independent reflection group to help the Union anticipate and meet challenges more effectively in the longer term (horizon 2020-2030).

EU enlargement

The Council will discuss the EU enlargement strategy on the basis of the Commission's communication on the enlargement strategy and main challenges 2007-2008 of 6 November. It should take note of the analysis and recommendations contained in the communication. The Council should notably reaffirm the renewed consensus on enlargement, which is based on consolidation of commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality and better communication, together with the capacity to integrate new members, as the basis of EU's enlargement strategy. In this context the Council is expected to assess the pace of reform in Turkey and in Croatia.

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions.

SESSION ON EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Note: the European Council on 14 December is likely to adopt conclusions on a number of international issues.

European Neighbourhood Policy

The Council will hear a briefing by the Commission on a communication on the European Neighbourhood Policy and on progress achieved in further developing this policy.

Economic partnership agreements

The Commission will brief the Council on developments in the negotiation of economic partnership agreements (EPAs) in the run-up to the 31 December 2007 deadline for completion of these agreements. It will also present a report and recommendations, as requested by the Council at its meeting on 19 and 20 November. This report intends to address the situation of ACP non-LDC (least developed countries) which have not initialled an agreement in the due time delay and face the possibility of having their trade relations with the EU based on GSP rules.

The Council will also be called on to adopt a regulation on market access for the ACPs, stemming from the EPA provisions, so as to enable its entry into force on 1 January 2008.

EPAs are being negotiated with the Caribbean, the Pacific and four African regions in their regional configuration but also with sub-regional groups (that in some cases integrate a small number of countries, e.g. Ghana and Ivory Coast; Gabon and Cameroon). The Commission is negotiating under a mandate granted by the Council in 2002 and reviewed in November 2007.

The EPAs will provide for trade and development measures aimed at helping ACP states boost investment, output, trade and employment.

They are intended to replace arrangements by which the EU has, for more than 30 years, granted unilateral trade preferences to ACP developing countries, but which conflict with the rules of the WTO because they are unilateral and not reciprocal in nature. The WTO has allowed a waiver whereby action cannot be taken against the non-compliant trade preferences, and that waiver expires on 31 December 2007.

The draft regulation is based on article 133 of the treaty, which requires a qualified majority for a decision by the Council.

Sudan/Chad

The Council will discuss the situation in Sudan against the background of ongoing international efforts to solve the conflict in Darfur. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions.

It is expected in particular to welcome the start of the political talks in Sirte, Libya, on 27 October, as the beginning of a process to ensure lasting peace in Darfur, and to reiterate its support for the mediation under the auspices of the UN and the AU. It should reconfirm its readiness to provide all possible support to the talks.

The Council will also discuss the situation in Chad. It should express concern regarding the renewed military clashes between rebel groups and Chadian armed forces in Eastern Chad. It will underline its full commitment to contribute to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1778 which authorises the deployment in Chad and Central African Republic of a multidimensional presence including the EU providing the military element of it.

Following its decision in October 2007 to conduct a bridging military operation in Eastern Chad and North Eastern Central African Republic, the Council should take note of the state of preparations for launching the operation.

Burma/Myanmar

The Council will discuss the situation in Burma/Myanmar, notably in the context of ongoing UN work by special envoy Ibrahim Gambari and special rapporteur on human rights Sergio Pinheiro following the recent arrests, detentions and disappearances in the country. The appointment on 6 November of Piero Fassino as EU special envoy for Burma/Myanmar to support the UN's good offices mission highlights the importance the EU attaches to the improvement of the situation in the country. Mr Fassino has been actively engaged in contacts with key partners towards that objective.

Western Balkans

Over lunch, ministers will discuss the situation in the Western Balkans, with particular emphasis on negotiations facilitated by the contact group troika on the future status of Kosovo, which are due to be finalised with a report to the UN Secretary-General on 10 December. The European Council on 14 December is expected to adopt conclusions on Kosovo. The EU Representative in the Troika that facilitated negotiations between the parties, ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, will present the report that the Troika prepared and which will be submitted by the Contact Group to the UN Secretary-General by 10 December.

For its part, the Council on 10 December is expected to adopt conclusions in the context of the progress reports. The conclusions should address the following issues:

- **Albania** - noting progress in a number of areas, as well as remaining challenges in the field of good governance and rule of law.
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina** - noting the initialling of the SAA as an important step, and reaffirming its readiness, as soon as the four conditions are met, including full cooperation with ICTY, to sign the SAA.
- **The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** - noting progress achieved as well as delays in reform because of internal political tensions, which diverted the focus of the country's political institutions away from the priorities of European integration.
- **Montenegro** - noting progress made in a number of areas, including adopting a Constitution and establishing the necessary legal framework and institutions following independence and stressing the need for Montenegro to implement the new Constitution in line with European standards.
- **Serbia** - noting the initialling of the SAA as an important step and recalled that its signature remains conditional upon Serbia achieving full cooperation with the ICTY and expressing confidence that Serbia would be capable of implementing a future SAA and accelerating its preparations on the road towards the European Union.

- **Serbia/Kosovo** - noting progress made by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in addressing certain priorities, but stressing the need for major efforts to strengthen the rule of law, anti-corruption policy and the fight against organised crime; noting that resolving the status of Kosovo will facilitate progress in the reform agenda, and confirming that the EU will continue to assume its responsibilities in Kosovo.

Iran

At lunch, ministers will discuss developments regarding the Iranian nuclear issue. High representative Javier Solana is expected to brief on his latest contacts with the Iranian negotiator, Said Jalili.

The Council has repeatedly expressed its support for efforts to find a negotiated long-term solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. It also consistently reaffirmed its support for UN security council resolutions 1696, 1737 and 1747 requesting Iran to suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities. It also agreed in October that the EU would consider which additional measures it might take in order to support the UN process and the shared objectives of the international community.

The European Council on 14 December is expected to adopt conclusions on Iran.

Middle East

- *Middle East peace process*

The Council will discuss the Middle East peace process following the international meeting at Annapolis. Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad is expected to be present.

The Council is expected to welcome the holding of the Annapolis conference and the joint understanding reached between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to immediately launch good-faith bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty before the end of 2008.

It should express the EU's determination to accompany this new momentum by actively supporting the parties in their negotiations and through working closely with other Quartet members and partners in the region to keep the negotiations on track. In the EU action strategy: "State-building for peace in the Middle East" drawn up by HR Solana with the Commission, the EU has indicated its readiness to adapt and enhance its activities in support of a new, substantive and credible process. Further strengthening of security and law and order will be a priority and in this context the re-engagement and expansion of the EUPOL COPPS mission to support the Palestinian civil police will be an important element.

The EU will also further strengthen its programmes to foster institution building, good governance, civil society contributions and support for growth of the Palestinian economy working in close cooperation with Quartet Representative Tony Blair, who recently announced a number of quick impact projects.

The Council is also expected to underline the importance of the forthcoming Donors' conference in Paris, which will be an opportunity for the international community to back up its commitment to assist in the economic and financial development of a future viable Palestinian state and to provide the necessary support to the post-Annapolis process.

- ***Lebanon***

The Council will discuss the situation in Lebanon and, depending on unfolding events, might express its concern at the absence of a Head of State in Lebanon. It should reiterate the importance of reaching a solution through dialogue, in a spirit of consensus and in full respect for the Lebanese democratic institutions and constitutional norms.

The Council should adopt conclusions on both the Middle East and Lebanon.

OTHER ITEMS

Items to be adopted without discussion include:

- **Charter of Fundamental Rights** of the European Union - authorisation to proclaim the Charter on behalf of the Council in Strasbourg, 12 December 2007
 - **Mobility Partnerships and Circular Migration** in the Framework of the Global Approach to Migration - conclusions.
 - **Afghanistan** - conclusions.
 - **Somalia** - conclusions.
 - **International Arms Trade Treaty** - conclusions.
 - **Human rights and democratisation in third countries** - conclusions.
 - **EU guidelines for the promotion and protection of the Rights of the Child** - conclusions.
 - **European security and defence policy** - endorsement of Presidency report.
 - **Operation EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina** - conclusions.
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