Brussels, 20 May 2011

BACKGROUND¹

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL
- including defence, development -

Monday, 23 May and Tuesday, 24 May 2011, in Brussels

The Council will meet at 9.30 on Monday, 23 May. It will then meet in defence ministers format at 17.00 on Monday and in development ministers format at 15.00 on Tuesday.

**Foreign ministers**

The Council will discuss the Southern Neighbourhood Region and is expected to adopt conclusions on Syria, Libya, Bahrain and Yemen.

The Council will also discuss the Middle East Peace Process, as well as the South Caucasus, EU human rights strategy and Sudan. Belarus and Albania are likely to be raised under any other business.

The Council is expected to adopt decisions imposing additional restrictive measures on Belarus, Iran, Syria and Libya.

A press conference is scheduled for 15.00.

**Defence ministers**

The Council will discuss military Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations. It will also discuss initiatives in the CSDP area and capabilities and is expected to adopt conclusions on pooling and sharing.

**Development ministers**

The Council will discuss development aid for South Sudan. It will adopt a report on Official Development Aid (ODA) targets and it will exchange views on water issues.

**Meetings on the sidelines of the Council**

Monday, 23 May 2011

- An EU-EEA (European Economic Area) Council will be held at 14.30, preceded by a political dialogue lunch.
- The European Defence Agency (EDA) steering board will meet at 19.00.

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

Southern Neighbourhood Region

The Council will discuss the Southern Neighbourhood Region in the light of the latest developments in Syria, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, Egypt and Tunisia. It is expected to adopt conclusions on Syria, Libya, Bahrain and Yemen.

Syria

The Council is expected to condemn the ongoing repression and violence in Syria and to call for the release of all detainees. It is expected to call for a national dialogue and a timetable for political reforms.

It is likely to discuss the suspension of cooperation programmes with Syria and consider the suspension of further Community assistance to Syria in the light of developments. The Council is expected to recall that the EU will not be taking further steps with regard to the Association Agreement with Syria. It is also expected to further strengthen the restrictive measures imposed on Syria on 9 May.

Libya

The Council will repeat its call for UN Security Council Resolutions 1970 and 1973 to be implemented in full, for the violence to cease, for the protection of civilians to have top priority and for Colonel Gaddafi to relinquish power immediately. It will reiterate the EU's readiness to conduct a CSDP operation, EUFOR Libya, to support humanitarian assistance in the region, if requested by UN OCHA.

The Council is expected to welcome the first report to the UN Security Council by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on the Gaddafi regime's crimes against humanity and war crimes and to stress the significance of the Prosecutor's request for arrest warrants against the three individuals it considers most responsible or crimes against humanity. It is likely to underline the important role of the Transnational National Council (TNC) as a key political interlocutor.

The Council is expected to discuss additional efforts to prevent the Gaddafi regime from having access to resources and funding and to seek further ways of addressing the humanitarian needs of the Libyan people. It will also welcome the initiative by the High Representative to open a technical office in Benghazi. It is expected to extend the restrictive measures it has imposed on the regime.

Bahrain

The Council is expected to voice its concern about the imminent risk of execution of four Bahraini nationals recently sentenced to death and to call on Bahrain to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and accountability regarding allegations of human rights violations.

It is expected to welcome the decree issued by King Hamad of Bahrain, according to which the state of emergency will be lifted on 1 June, and again to urge all parties to engage rapidly in meaningful dialogue with a view to bringing about reforms which offer real prospects for successfully addressing the country’s challenges.
Yemen

The Council is likely to strongly condemn the violence and repression in response to recent demonstrations throughout the country and call for the violence to stop immediately. It will restate its full support for the efforts led by the Gulf Cooperation Council in seeking a political solution to the crisis and urge President Saleh and the Yemeni political parties to enter into the agreement immediately and to implement it in good faith, as the starting point of a process that should bring about political and social reform in Yemen.

The Council will state its support for the proposed visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to independently assess the reports of human rights violations during the demonstrations.

It will state the EU's continued readiness to accompany reform, including through support to the electoral process, and to review and adapt its policies towards Yemen in the light of developments.

Middle East Peace Process

The Council will exchange views on the Middle East Peace Process after President Obama's speech on 19 May and in the light of recent developments in the region. It is expected to adopt conclusions. The High Representative will report on her contacts with interlocutors, particularly during her recent visit to Washington.

South Caucasus

The Council will hold an exchange of views on the current situation in the South Caucasus and a possible EU role in the region, with a focus on regional stability and conflict resolution and making full use of the Eastern Partnership. The discussion will take place against the background of rising tensions in the region, in particular concerning Nagorno-Karabakh.

Human rights

The Council will begin discussions on the EU's priorities in connection with the review of the EU Human Rights Strategy that is currently under way. The discussion will be continued at the next Council meeting, in June.

Sudan

The High Representative will present the main lines of the EU's comprehensive strategic approach to Sudan ahead of South Sudan's declaration of independence, expected for 9 July 2011. The strategy is to be endorsed at the June Council.

European External Action Service (EEAS)

Over lunch, the High Representative will lead a discussion with ministers on cooperation between member state embassies and EU delegations in the field; on cooperation between the HR and ministers and on the preparation and conduct of FAC meetings.
Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Council will discuss the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The High Representative will in particular report on her visit to BiH on 13 May.

Any other business

Belarus as well as Albania (elections) may be raised under any other business.

Items without discussion

The Council is expected to adopt decisions concerning restrictive measures against Iran, Belarus, Syria and Libya.

DEFENCE MINISTERS

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

In their six-monthly session as part of the Foreign Affairs Council, defence ministers will review developments in CSDP and take stock of progress in following up the December 2010 and January 2011 Council conclusions on CSDP.

- Operations

The Council will discuss the state of play concerning the EU's military CSDP operations and will consider the way forward. These operations include Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EUNAVFOR Atalanta counter-piracy operation off the coasts of Somalia, and the EU Training Mission for Somali forces. The EU has also expressed its readiness to conduct a CSDP operation, EUFOR Libya, to support humanitarian assistance in the region.

- Capabilities

Ministers will discuss recent work e.g. the Weimar initiative for the reinforcement of EU capabilities proposed by France, Germany and Poland. On pooling and sharing of capabilities, the Council is expected to underline the need to turn the financial crisis and its impact on national defence budgets into an opportunity for greater cooperation in the area of capability development and to call for a structured, long-term approach to pooling and sharing, based on a high level of ambition. It is likely to welcome the initial indications from member states of areas in which more pooling and sharing initiatives could be taken and to encourage the European Defence Agency to continue to support participating Member States in identifying opportunities for this. It will welcome close contacts with NATO on pooling and sharing.
The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on pooling and sharing.

The Council is also expected to adopt a number of CSDP items, including:
- a decision on the signing and conclusion of an Agreement between the EU and Albania establishing a framework for participation in EU crisis management operations;
- a decision defining the statute, seat and operational rules of the European Defence Agency;
- a report by the Head of the European Defence Agency to the Council;
- a draft administrative arrangement between the European Defence Agency and the European Space Agency concerning the establishment of their cooperation

**DEVELOPMENT MINISTERS**

**Sudan**

Commissioner Piebalgs will report on his recent visit to Sudan. Following on from the foreign ministers' discussion, development ministers will focus on the joint programming of development aid and the development needs of South Sudan, and of the north, following South Sudan's declaration of independence, expected for 9 July 2011.

After independence, South Sudan will have to face numerous humanitarian and socio-economic challenges, making external aid all the more crucial.

The Council is expected to adopt (without discussion, during Monday's session in foreign ministers format) a decision allocating a further EUR 200 million for the purpose of supporting South Sudan's state and capacity-building and its development needs (9953/11). This amount comes from de-committed funds of previous European development funds. In July 2010, the Council had already allocated EUR 150 million of de-committed funds from previous European development funds to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations in Sudan. Of this sum, EUR 85 million were earmarked for South Sudan.

South Sudan is expected to request accession to the Cotonou Agreement so that in time it will be able to benefit from the European development fund.

**EU development aid targets**

The Council is expected to adopt a report to the European Council on EU development aid targets, following up the request of the European Council of June 2010.

The EU kept up progress in 2010 in delivering on its pledges for increased official development aid (ODA). In 2010, EU and member state ODA reached a historic high of EUR 53.8 billion, up by EUR 4.5 billion from 2009 levels. This represents 0.43% of EU gross national income (GNI), but still falls short of the EU target of 0.56% GNI it had set itself for 2010. In spite of the economic and financial crisis, the EU remains the biggest donor worldwide and provided 58% of global ODA in 2010 while accounting for around a quarter of global GDP.
Although the EU remains a leading force in pushing for better living standards in developing countries, the report recognises that a comprehensive approach is needed. Aid alone will never be enough to sustainably address the development needs of partner countries and the report examines the qualitative aspects of aid as well as the quantitative aspects, looking for example at effectiveness and innovative financing mechanisms.

The report is addressed to the European Council and will be considered at its next meeting on 23 and 24 June. It is based on a recent communication from the Commission (9334/1/11 REV1). The exchange of views will be based on an information note on the state of play in joint programming (10449/11).

**Water**

The Council will hold a political debate on the development-policy aspects of water, in response to the Hungarian Presidency's initiative on water. The exchange of views will be based on an issues paper (10448/11).

**Any other business**

Ivory Coast will be raised as an item under any other business, at the request of Commissioner Piebalgs, who will report on his recent visit to the country.