Brussels, 30 November 2011

BACKGROUND

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL
- including security and defence issues -

30 November and 1 December 2011, in Brussels

Defence ministers
A European Defence Agency steering board meeting, chaired by Catherine Ashton in her capacity as the head of the agency, will be held at 14.30 on Wednesday 30 November. The Council will meet from 16.00 onwards and discuss Common Security and Defence Policy issues, focussing on operations and partnerships. Over dinner (19.00), foreign ministers will join defence ministers to jointly debate CSDP issues.

Foreign ministers
On Thursday 1 December, the Council will start at 9.30 with a discussion of the latest developments in the Western Balkans (Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina). Ministers will then exchange views on the Southern Neighbourhood, in the light of the latest developments in the region and focussing on Egypt, Syria, Yemen and progress in the implementation of the EU's horizontal approach to the region. The Council will also discuss Iran, in the light of the latest report by the International Atomic Energy Agency on its nuclear programme. Ministers will also have a short exchange of views on the Middle East Peace Process.

During lunch, ministers will discuss the Arab Spring, the Middle East Peace Process and relations with the Arab League, in the presence of Dr. Nabil El Araby, Secretary General of the League of Arab States.

In the margins of the Council, the EU-Georgia Cooperation Council will meet on 1 December at 16.00.

Press conferences: Wednesday 30 November (+/- 17.00) on the EDA steering board Thursday 1 December after lunch (+/- 15.30)

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

European Defence Agency Steering Board

In the margins of the Council, defence ministers will meet in the composition of the European Defence Agency (EDA) steering board under the chairmanship of Catherine Ashton as the head of the EDA. They will concentrate of questions of pooling and sharing defence capabilities. On the basis of the preparatory work by the EDA, ministers are expected to confirm concrete commitments for pooling and sharing projects and programmes, also in areas where needs have been identified during the Libya crisis.

Common Security and Defence Policy

In their six-monthly session as part of the Foreign Affairs Council, defence ministers will review developments in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). For discussions on operations and partnerships, they will be joined by NATO Assistant Secretary General Amb Evans. Conclusions on CSDP could be formally adopted at the session on 1 December.

- Operations

Ministers will be invited to give orientations for the further work of the CSDP operations in the Horn of Africa and the Western Balkans, and take stock of the latest developments with regard to Libya. High Representative Ashton will invite ministers to address the outstanding issues, in particular the force generation challenge.

Background on the operations:

The European Naval Force Somalia - ATALANTA, launched in December 2008, aims to prevent acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast and in the Indian Ocean. Not only EU member states contribute in the operation: Norway, Croatia, Ukraine and Montenegro also participate – either at the sea or at the operations headquarters in Northwood (UK).

The funding of ATALANTA amounts to EUR 8.05 million in 2011 and covers the financing of common costs. The costs of supplying military assets and personnel are shared by the contributing states, with each state bearing the cost of the resources it deploys.

The total size of the force is variable, but it typically consists of 5 to 10 surface combat vessels, one to two auxiliary ships and two to four maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft. Including land-based personnel, EU NAVFOR consists of around 1400 military staff. Its mandate currently runs until December 2012. The Council will discuss the extension of the mission until 2014 in early 2012.

On the 7 April 2010, the EU launched a military training mission in Somalia (EUTM Somalia) in order to contribute to strengthening the Transitional Federal Government and the Somali institutions. Its mandate currently runs until the end of December 2012.

The main objective is to train Somali forces, which takes place in Uganda where Somali forces are already being trained. The mission headquarters is in Kampala (Uganda). The EUTM Somalia operates in close coordination with other international actors, in particular, the United Nations, AMISOM and the United States.
In November 2011, the third intake of around 700 Somali trainee soldiers have started their training period.

The budget of the mission, covering common costs, amounts to EUR 4.8 millions for the 15 months until the end of 2012. Each country bears the cost of the resources it provides. The mission comprises approximately 125 EU personnel, who come from the 14 contributing member states.

Operation EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has contributed to the maintenance of the safe and secure environment in BiH since December 2004. The launch of ALTHEA followed the decision by NATO to conclude its SFOR operation and UN Security Council resolution 1575 authorizing the deployment of an EU force in BiH.

The main objective of ALTHEA is to support BiH efforts to maintain the safe and secure environment and to provide capacity-building and training support to the BiH Ministry of Defence and armed forces. EUFOR also provided support to the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia in pursuit of persons indicted for war crimes.

The structure of the mission is currently being reconfigured, following Council conclusions adopted in October (15297/11). The new operations concept should be finalized in spring 2012.

The common costs of the operation are EUR 23 million. 21 EU member states contribute as well as Albania, Chile, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Switzerland and Turkey.

- Partnerships

HR Ashton will update ministers on her efforts to strengthen EU-NATO cooperation in crisis management in line with the mandate of the European Council of September 2010, on the EU-UN cooperation, and on her contacts with strategic partners with regard to CSDP. Ministers will exchange views on further substantial dialogue and cooperation with partner organizations and partner countries in CSDP.

Other items

The Council will also seek to agree on the budget of the European Defence Agency for 2012 and the review of the ATHENA financing mechanism for common costs of military operations.
SESSION ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Western Balkans

The Council will take stock of recent developments in the region and is expected to ensure continued support for the EU policy towards the Western Balkans. The exchange of views will feed into the upcoming debate on enlargement in the General Affairs Council on 5 December, which will adopt conclusions.

The High Representative is expected to inform ministers about the latest round of the EU facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, scheduled for 30 November. The seventh meeting of the dialogue was held with EU facilitation on 21/22 November in Brussels. The two parties agreed that the European University Association will be asked to certify diplomas issued by universities of each party for use by the other in connection with further education and/or public employment. The parties will return to the issue of effective and inclusive regional cooperation and discuss the implementation of previous agreements at the meeting on 30 November. For more information, see press release 17410/11.

The Council is also expected to debate the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The Commission's 2011 progress report concluded that BiH made only very limited progress. The report emphasised that a common understanding by BiH's political representatives on the overall direction and future of the country and its institutional setup remained necessary.

A single reinforced EU presence in BiH has been established: In July, Peter Sorensen was appointed EU Special Representative in BiH and head of the EU delegation to the country. Since 2004, the EU maintains a peacekeeping military operation in BiH, EUFOR Althea, and the Union also has a police mission (EUPM) deployed in BiH that aims to establish a sustainable, professional and multiethnic police service, through mentoring, monitoring and inspecting.

Iran

Ministers will exchange views following the publication of the new report by the International Atomic Energy Agency concerning Iran's nuclear programme.

The Council is expected to reiterate is serious and deepening concerns over the nature of Iran's nuclear programme and the findings of the report. In the light of these concerns, the Council is likely to strengthen EU restrictive measures on those associated with or providing support to Iran's proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions outlining its next steps on this issue. The conclusions are still under discussion.

The report covers developments since the last report on 2 September 2011 as well as issues of longer standing. It is thought to contain evidence of military aspects of the Iranian nuclear programme.

On 23 October, the European Council reiterated the EU's commitment to work for a diplomatic solution of the issue. It also urged Iran to enter into constructive and substantial talks with the E 3+3 so as to arrive at a comprehensive and negotiated long-term solution of the nuclear question. At the same time, it invited the Council to prepare new restrictive measures "to be decided upon and to be implemented at the appropriate moment in the case that Iran continues not to co-operate seriously nor to meet its obligations." (52/11, para 18)
In response to concerns about Iran's proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities, the EU already has a range of targeted restrictive measures in place: Trade with Iran in technology related to enrichment or nuclear weapon delivery, arms, equipment for internal repression and dual-use goods has been prohibited. Moreover, technology for the oil and gas industries may not be traded and investment in the Iranian oil and gas industries is banned for EU operators. Moreover, financial services, such as grants, loans and credit insurance to the Iranian government are not allowed while activities of EU financial institutions with banks domiciled in Iran are monitored. Finally, the assets of 290 entities are frozen while 76 persons are subject to a visa ban and an asset freeze. The measures target those associated with Iran's proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities as well as senior members of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and of Islamic Republic of Iran shipping lines, a company suspected of violating UN sanctions and shipping military-related cargo.

For more information, see consolidated versions of the two relevant legal acts: A Council decision and a Council regulation.

At the same time, the EU has expressed several times its profound concern at deteriorations in the human rights situation in Iran and imposed restrictive measures against persons responsible for those serious human rights violations. 61 individuals are subject to an assets freeze and a visa ban in this respect.

**Camp Ashraf**

The High Representative will update ministers about the situation regarding Camp Ashraf in Iraq.

The camp, where members of the People's Mojahedin organisation of Iran dwell, is due to be closed by the Iraqi authorities by 31 December 2011. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees is currently considering requests for determining refugee status of individual residents of the camp (see press release). In September, Ambassador Jean De Ruyt was appointed to advise the EU on how to solve the situation in Camp Ashraf in line with humanitarian and human rights principles (A 384/11).

**Southern Neighbourhood**

The Council will exchange views on the situation in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, in the light of the latest developments in the region.

_- Egypt_

The Council will discuss the situation in Egypt.

It is likely to express its concern and deplore the loss of life and the high number of injured people. It is expected to call on the interim authorities to seek a peaceful and constructive way forward based on a dialogue with all political forces and civil society that safeguards democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms. Finally, the Council will reiterate its continuing support for Egypt's transition process.

The Council is likely to adopt conclusions.

The parliamentary elections to the People’s Assembly started on 28 November and will be held in three rounds. A three-round Shura Council election will be held from 29 January to 11 March 2012.
The definite hand-over by the military to a civilian government is not expected not before May 2013. The EU assists Egypt's Higher Electoral Commission with EUR 1.2 million to support capacity building for electoral management.

In light of the new circumstances, the EU has reprogrammed its support for sustainable economic and social development in Egypt: For 2011, programmes amounting to €132 million have been approved for signature (trade, support for the agriculture, energy and water sectors) and for 2012 initiatives amounting to €95 million are already in the pipeline (waste and water management, vocational training and energy sector support).

- Syria

The Council will discuss the situation in Syria.

The Council is likely to welcome the efforts of the League of Arab States to end the violence and prevent further bloodshed. It will also state the EU's intention to keep pressing for strong UN action to increase international pressure and urge the members of the UN Security Council to uphold their responsibilities to end the violence.

Both the Council and the European Council have strongly condemned the continuing brutal campaign by the Syrian regime against its own population and called for President Assad to step aside to allow a political transition that addresses the legitimate demands of the Syrian people.

In response to the continuing human rights violations, the Council is expected to reinforce the EU's restrictive measures against the Syrian regime, targeting the regime's ability to conduct the repression.

The Council is likely to adopt conclusions.

The Council has gradually reinforced the EU's restrictive measures in response to the continuing human rights violations in Syria. It has not only imposed an arms embargo, but also banned the import of Syrian crude oil and new investment into the Syrian petrol sector. The delivery of Syrian-denominated banknotes from the EU to the Syrian central bank is also prohibited. In addition, it has frozen the assets of 74 individuals responsible for the violent repression against the civilian population and prohibited their entry into the EU. The funds of 19 further entities benefitting from or supporting the regime are also frozen, including the Commercial Bank of Syria. On 14 November, the Council suspended further disbursements of project loans to the Syrian government from the European Investment Bank as well as the bank's technical assistance contracts for sovereign projects in Syria.

- Yemen

The Council will discuss the situation in Yemen.

The Council is expected to welcome the signature of the agreement for political transition in Yemen and to called on all parties to deliver in good faith on their commitments to a peaceful and orderly transition. It will also express its hope that the transition process which has just begun will become a solid platform for national reconciliation in Yemen that meets the legitimate demands and aspirations of all Yemenis. The EU will continue to monitor the situation and do all it can to assist the Yemeni people.
So far, the EU and its member states have contributed EUR 60 million in humanitarian assistance to Yemen in 2011.

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions.

**- Developments in the EU's Southern neighbourhood**

The Council is expected to take stock of the EU's efforts in support of the transitions in its Southern neighbourhood.

The Council is expected to reaffirm the EU's commitment to a new partnership with the EU's Southern neighbours, based on mutual accountability and adherence to universal values.

The EU has adopted the “more for more” approach in supporting the partners in the Southern Mediterranean. Those that deliver on reforms building “deep democracy” and ensure inclusive economic development can count on our support through three channels: money for assistance, easier mobility and better market access. EUR 350 million have been allocated to support for democratic transformation, institution building and economic growth in the wake of the Arab Spring in the years 2011 and 2012 ("EU SPRING package").

Dialogues on migration, mobility and security have been initiated with Tunisia and Morocco. The Commission has proposed negotiations mandates for deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. In addition, the EU supports civil society to promote reform and increase public accountability in these countries with an initial budget of 22 EUR million ("Neighbourhood civil society facility"). The Erasmus Mundus initiative for exchanges in higher education has been extended to both the Southern and the Eastern neighbourhood with an overall budget of €66 million.

The Council is likely to adopt conclusions.