BACKGROUND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL
- including a session on development cooperation -
Monday, 15 October 2012, in Luxembourg

Foreign ministers

The Council, chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton, will meet from 9.30am in the Kirchberg Conference Centre in Luxembourg (see practical details).

Ministers will discuss the latest developments in the EU’s southern neighbourhood, including Syria and Egypt. A debate on the situation in Mali will follow. The Council will also take stock of the Middle East Peace Process and of talks with Iran concerning its nuclear programme. It will finally ensure the follow-up to the EU-China summit of 20 September.

During lunch, ministers will exchange views on recent elections in the EU’s eastern neighbourhood, that is in Belarus and in Georgia. The Council will also adopt conclusions on these countries.

Development ministers

From 17.00 onwards, development ministers will have an orientation debate preparing the post MDGs/2015 framework and follow-up to the Rio+20 summit. They will also exchange views the EU support for sustainable change in transition societies. A debate on the EU approach to resilience will follow.

Ministers are expected to adopt without discussions four sets of conclusions, notably one on Europe’s engagement with civil society in external relations and another on social protection in European Union development cooperation.

A press conference will be held after lunch (+/- 16.00).

Events in the margin

On Sunday 14 October at 19.30, EU foreign ministers will hold an informal dinner with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov.

The EU-OSCE ministerial meeting will take place on Tuesday 16 October at 9.00 in Luxembourg (roundtable at 9.00). It will be followed by the EU-Jordan Association Council (roundtable at 13.30, press conference at 14.45). A protocol for the participation of Jordan in EU programmes will be signed at 14.30 in the press room.

This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office
The political dialogue with Cape Verde will take place on Wednesday 17 October at 9.00 in Brussels (roundtable at 9.00). The EU-Lebanon Association Council will follow (roundtable at 15.15).

All events in the margin will be chaired by the Foreign Minister of Cyprus, Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis.

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Press conferences and public events can be followed by video streaming: http://video.consilium.europa.eu/
Video coverage of the event will be available for preview and download in broadcast quality (MPEG4) on www.eucouncil.tv.
Photos of the event can be found in our photographic library on www.consilium.europa.eu/photo where they can be downloaded in high resolution.
Southern neighbourhood

- Syria

The Council will discuss the latest developments in Syria. Ministers will exchange views on a range of related issues, including assistance to refugees and internally replaced persons, regional implications of the conflict, contacts with the Syrian opposition and the EU's support for the diplomatic efforts of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi to bring an end to the violence.

The Council is expected to reiterate its deep concern about the increasingly deteriorating situation in Syria and the spill-over effects of the Syrian crisis in neighbouring countries. It will adopt conclusions and is expected to reinforce EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), more than 320,000 Syrian refugees have arrived in the neighbouring countries while 1.2 million people are displaced internally within Syria. So far, the EU and its member states have given more than EUR 121 million in humanitarian aid for medical assistance and aid to refugees.

The Council has gradually reinforced the EU's restrictive measures against the Syrian regime in response to the continuing human rights violations. For more details, see: factsheet European Union and Syria

- Egypt

The Council will take stock of the preparations for the "task force" meeting with Egypt, scheduled for 13 November in Cairo.

Under the EU neighbourhood policy instrument, the EU has allocated a budget of € 160 million of support for Egypt in 2012 alone, in the areas of energy and water sector reform, education and training as well as employment. In addition, the Neighbourhood Investment Facility contributes to several projects, including the third line of the Cairo metro (together with the European Investment Bank).

The EU is Egypt's main commercial partner and accounted for 32% of Egypt's trade in 2010. Negotiating directives for a free trade agreement with Egypt were adopted by the Council in December 2011, but talks about such a treaty have not yet begun.

Egypt is also a very active participant in programmes such as Tempus and Erasmus Mundus. An average of 90 Egyptian students and 9 Egyptian academics participate every year in mobility schemes with European universities.

Mali

The Council will discuss the situation in Mali.

The Council will reflect on what form EU support to Mali's security sector could take and adopt conclusions.

At the last Foreign Affairs Council, the Council showed readiness to "provide support for the possible deployment of a well-prepared ECOWAS stabilisation force in Mali, under the mandate of the UN Security Council and in concertation with a government of national unity and the African
Union”. It was also willing to consider "contributing, with the agreement of the government of national unity and in coordination with it and with other partners, in particular the UN, the AU and ECOWAS, to the restructuring of Mali’s security and defence forces, under civilian control in line with the Sahel Strategy.” See Council conclusions of 23 July.

Since January 2011, Mali has been faced with a Touareg-led rebellion, followed by a military coup d'Etat on 24 March, which the EU was quick to condemn. In the wake of the coup, the EU's supported ECOWAS mediation efforts to help re-establish a democratic government with authority over the entire Malian territory. Since the coup, the EU has put on hold development aid to Mali (including budget support) except actions providing direct support to the population, to the democratic transition and humanitarian aid. EU development cooperation will resume in line with progress along a transition roadmap, once agreed.

Since the beginning of 2012, an estimated 450,000 people have been displaced, including 175,000 internally displaced persons and 275,000 refugees in neighbouring countries. The Commission has allocated a total of € 172 million of humanitarian aid to respond to the crisis in the Sahel region in 2012.

In addition, the EU has launched a Common Security and Defence Policy mission to support capacity building in the fight against organised crime and terrorism in the Sahel region: EUCAP SAHEL Niger. Activities will initially focus on Niger, but could be extended to Mali and Mauritania at a later stage.

The EU strategy for security and development in the Sahel region is focused on four core Sahelian states: Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Algeria (the latter only for the political and diplomatic action). It outlines four strands of action: development, good governance and internal conflict resolution; political and diplomatic action; security and rule of law; and countering violent extremism. In the framework of its Sahel strategy, the EU has further mobilised additional financial resources for development and security related projects worth € 167 million along the four lines of action of the strategy.

For more information, see factsheet European Union and the Sahel.

Middle East Peace Process

The Council will take stock of the Middle East Peace Process, as a follow-up to the events at the UN General Assembly in September.

In line with the Middle East Quartet statement of 23 September 2011, the EU, including within the Quartet, continues to engage with the parties aiming at the resumption of meaningful negotiations.

In May, the Council reaffirmed the EU's commitment to a two state solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict (9909/12). Reiterating its fundamental commitment to the security of Israel, the Council expressed deep concern about developments on the ground which threaten to make a two-state solution impossible, including the marked acceleration of settlement construction following the end of the 2010 moratorium.

The EU and its member states, the biggest donor to the Palestinian authority, encourage all relevant stakeholders to help preserving the financial viability of the Palestinian authority.
Iran

The Council will discuss the talks with Iran concerning its nuclear programme, on the basis of a debriefing from the High Representative on her most recent contacts with the Iranian side and with her partners in the E3+3 format.

The objective of the EU remains to achieve a comprehensive, negotiated, long-term settlement which restores international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme, while respecting Iran's legitimate right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy under the Non Proliferation Treaty.

EU sanctions are meant to persuade Iran to comply with its international obligations and to constrain its development of sensitive technologies in support of its nuclear and missile programmes. Given the lack of progress in the negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme, the Council is expected to strengthen EU restrictive measures. The sanctions are aimed at affecting supplies and sources of finance for the nuclear programme, not the Iranian people.

The EU fully implements all UN sanctions and has also adopted a number of complementary measures. More details on restrictive measures: factsheet European Union and Iran.

Follow-up to the EU-China summit

The Council will have an exchange on the outcome of the EU-China summit of 20 September, in view of the European Council of 18 and 19 October.

The summit reviewed bilateral relations at the end of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's term. Leaders discussed the economic situation in the EU and China, with Prime Minister Wen reiterating his support for EU measures to consolidate the eurozone. They also exchanged views on major international issues and recognized the growing interaction and interdependence between China and the EU (see summit communiqué).

Several agreements were signed in the margins of the summit: a declaration establishing an innovation cooperation dialogue; a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the area of anti-monopoly law enforcement; an agreement on an EU-China low carbon, urbanisation and environmental sustainability programme and a joint statement on a EU-China/European Space Agency dialogue on space technology cooperation.

Eastern neighbourhood

The ministerial lunch will be devoted to a debate about the EU's eastern neighbourhood.

- Belarus

Ministers will take stock of the situation in Belarus after the parliamentary elections of 23 September. The Council will also adopt conclusions on Belarus.

EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Stefan Füle noted that the elections represented "yet another missed opportunity to conduct elections in line with international standards in Belarus" and that they "regretably took place against the background of an overall climate of repression and intimidation" (see joint statement).
Given that not all political prisoners have been released, no released prisoner been rehabilitated and the respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles has not improved, the Council will prolong the existing restrictive measures until 31 October 2013. The restrictive measures will be kept under constant review. 243 Belarusian officials, including President Lukashenka, are currently subjected to travel bans and the same 243 persons plus 32 business entities are targeted by an asset freeze within the EU. More information: factsheet European Union and Belarus.

The EU continues to demand that political prisoners be released and rehabilitated. The EU's policy towards Belarus is not, however, limited to sanctions, it also supports civil society and the independent media. Moreover, critical engagement continues through dialogue and the Eastern Partnership.

- Georgia

Ministers will debate the situation in Georgia following the parliamentary elections of 1 October. In addition, the Council is set to adopt conclusions on Georgia.

EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Neighbourhood Commissioner Stefan Füle have congratulated the Georgian Dream coalition on its election victory. "The generally positive conduct of parliamentary elections on 1 October, and the high level of voter participation, underscore Georgia’s commitment to its democratic path", they said in a joint statement.

Negotiations for an Association Agreement, which is to include a comprehensive free-trade area, were launched with Georgia in July 2010. An agreement on visa facilitation and readmission entered into force on 1 March 2011. A visa dialogue with Georgia was launched in June 2012 and is to be followed by a two-phased visa liberalisation action plan, which is currently being prepared.

The bilateral relations between EU and Georgia are based on a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which entered into force in 1999 and is supplemented by the neighbourhood policy action plan. Since September 2008, the EU monitoring mission in Georgia (EUMM) has contributed to stability throughout Georgia and the surrounding region by inter alia monitoring and analysing the situation pertaining to the stabilisation process. Its mandate currently runs until September 2013.

The EU started funding Georgia's transition efforts in 1992 and until 2007 the Union had already provided assistance of over € 530 million. The Commission pledged another € 500 million to mitigate the effects of the 2008 war with Russia. Subsequently, the EU allocated funding of € 180 million for the 2011-2013 period for projects ranging from strengthening the rule of law to poverty reduction.

Other items

The Council is expected to take a number of decisions without discussion ("A-items"), including Council conclusions on EUFOR Althea, the EU's military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its objective is to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts to maintain a safe and secure environment.
SESSION ON DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Preparing the post Millennium Development Goals/2015 framework - Rio +20 follow-up

The Council will discuss the coherence and coordination between the follow up to Rio+20 and the post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)\(^2\) development agenda.

Ministers will notably discuss which principles should underpin for a comprehensive EU approach to the post-2015 development agenda and the Rio+20 follow-up. They will be address several issues, including how to develop sustainable development goals that are relevant to the post-2015 development agenda; how to mainstream the inclusive green economy in line with the agenda for change (\[15560/11\]) and how the EU can promote an integrated approach to financing and other means of implementation for both agendas.

The Environment Council of 26 October will also discuss the post MDGs/2015 framework and the Rio +20 follow-up.

The Rio+20 conference on sustainable development was held on 20-22 June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). It gathered heads of state and government, civil society and private sector participants who addressed the global social, economic and environmental challenges of sustainable development. The outcome document adopted in Rio notably lays the principles for establishing a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs). Work in that regard is ongoing at UN level, with the creation of a high level working group on SDGs.

In parallel, initial discussions on a post-2015 development agenda are also taking place in the United Nations framework. A high-level panel of eminent persons was appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in July, and has been tasked to produce a report as basis of the intergovernmental negotiations on a post-2015 framework. For more information see: http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/beyond2015

EU support for sustainable change in transition societies

Development ministers will discuss how best to provide support for sustainable change to countries undergoing major political, social and economic reforms - so-called transition countries, on the basis of the Commission communication (\[14662/12\]).

The EU has an important role to play in supporting transition countries. It can draw on the rich transition experience EU Member States have themselves, as well as on the success of EU enlargement, neighbourhood and development cooperation policies, to help transition countries put in place accountable government, political freedom, economic inclusiveness, decent jobs, social justice and equity.

Ministers will discuss ways to better mobilise the full range of available EU tools to support transition countries in their reforms, based on their needs and a reform agenda defined by them, country ownership being an underlying principle of EU response. Another key element is the important role of civil society in reform processes and political dialogue.

\(^2\) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) range from having extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDs and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015.
The debate among ministers will feed into the preparation of Council conclusions that establish the EU approach to support for sustainable change in transition countries at a later Council meeting.

The EU approach to resilience

The Council will discuss ways of addressing chronic vulnerability and building resilience to crises on the basis of the Joint communication "The EU approach to resilience: learning from food security crises" (14616/12).

Recent and recurrent food crises in the Sahel region and in the Horn of Africa have underscored the need to work on a long-term and systematic approach to building the resilience of vulnerable countries and populations by reducing the risks of a crisis and at the same time improving coping and adaptation mechanisms. Additionally, in a context of increasing budget pressure in both partner and donors countries, investing in resilience is not only better for the people concerned but also cost effective: addressing the root causes of recurrent crises rather than responding to their consequences will contribute to maximising the impact of the funds made available.

Ministers will discuss how to improve the effectiveness of EU support to reducing vulnerability in food insecure and disaster prone countries. They will exchange views on how to include resilience as a central aim of EU external aid, at the interface of humanitarian and development assistance.

The debate will inform the preparation of Council conclusions that will set out the EU approach to resilience.

Europe's engagement with civil society in external relations

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions without discussion on "The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with civil society in external relations", in response to Commission communication (13788/12).

The Council is expected to recognise the crucial role of an empowered civil society as an asset for any democracy and as a key element to contribute to more effective policies, equitable development and inclusive growth. The Council is expected to set a renewed EU policy in support of civil society, with a focus on long-term partnerships with civil society organisations from partner countries.

Social protection in the European Union development cooperation

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions without discussion on social protection in European Union development cooperation, in response to Commission communication (13220/12).

The Council is due to recognise the transformative role of social protection policies by fostering equity, promoting social inclusion and dialogue with social partners. The Council is expected to set guiding principles for future EU development cooperation in the field of social protection, on the basis of a differential approach, taking into account partner countries' needs, priorities and capacities, and with the objective to support the development of inclusive and nationally-owned social protection policies and programmes.