Brussels, 19 July 2013

BACKGROUND¹

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Monday, 22 July 2013, in Brussels

The Council meeting will start at 9.30 on 22 July and be chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton.

The meeting will begin with brief deliberations on recent developments in Myanmar/Burma and on the increasing importance of water security.

Ministers will also discuss events in Egypt and Syria as well as the implementation of the EU strategy for human rights and democracy.

The Council will in addition take stock of developments in Africa, in the Great Lakes region, Somalia and Mali.

Besides, ministers will discuss questions related to the Middle East peace process and Lebanon.

An EU-Eastern Partnership ministerial meeting will be held from 17.00, followed by a dinner in the premises of the European External Action Service. The discussion is to focus on expectations for the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in November.

Press conference: after the Foreign Affairs Council (+/- 16.00).

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Press conferences and public events by video streaming: http://video.consilium.europa.eu/

Video coverage in broadcast quality (MPEG4): www.eucouncil.tv


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

The Council will adopt conclusions establishing a comprehensive framework for the EU's policy and support to Myanmar/Burma in the run-up to the general elections in 2015. The EU's goals are to support political, social and economic development, foster respect for human rights and assist the government in rebuilding its place in the international community. For more information about EU relations with Myanmar/Burma, see factsheet.

Water diplomacy

The Council will approve conclusions on EU water diplomacy. Given that conflicts over access to water are likely to become more frequent, water security is of increasing concern for foreign policy. The Council will recall the EU's commitment to address the root causes and express concern about the water security situation in many parts of the world.

Southern neighbourhood - Egypt

The Council will discuss the latest events in Egypt and the EU's reaction to it. It is expected to adopt conclusions. The High Representative will debrief ministers about her recent trip to Cairo.

On 14 July, the High Representative declared on behalf of the EU: "It is of utmost importance that Egypt returns rapidly to a legitimate government and democratic structures responding to the democratic and socio-economic aspirations of the Egyptian people." She also stressed "the importance of holding democratic elections in the shortest possible time" and called for a "broad-based and substantial dialogue, inclusive of all those political forces committed to democratic principles." (see declaration on behalf of the EU)

- Syria

The Council will debate the situation in Syria, in particular the efforts for a political solution to the conflict and the EU's contribution to them. The High Representative is due to report to member states on the way the EU contributes to international diplomatic efforts, on the developments related to the US-Russia initiative for a peace conference and on the engagement of the Syrian parties.

From the outset, the EU has condemned in the strongest terms the human rights violations in Syria and called for an immediate end to all violence. On 27 May, the Council reiterated the urgent need for a political solution of the conflict and welcomed the joint US-Russian call for a peace conference on Syria to promote a political process based on the principles included in the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (see Council conclusions).
More than 1.75 million Syrian refugees have arrived in the neighbouring countries Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey as well as in Egypt and North Africa. At the same time, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates the number of internally displaced persons in Syria at 4.25 million. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights sees the number of deaths at more than 93,000.

The EU is the largest humanitarian donor for the Syrian crisis. The total response from EU and member states to the crisis exceeds EUR 1 billion. The funds mostly go to food assistance, shelters and emergency healthcare.

On 1 June, the Council adopted economic sanctions against the Syrian regime, including an oil embargo and restrictions on financial activities. Possible exports of arms and equipment that may be used for internal repression are subject to specific member state commitments as set out in the Council declaration of 27 May.

For more details on EU positions and restrictive measures, see factsheet European Union and Syria

Human rights

The Council will take stock of the implementation of the EU strategic framework and action plan on human rights and democracy that the Council adopted in June 2012. It is also expected to approve conclusions, reaffirming the EU's determination to promote and protect human rights and democracy through the world.

The strategic framework sets out principles, objectives and priorities to improve the effectiveness and consistency of EU human rights policy: The promotion of human rights ought to be integrated into all EU external policies, including trade, investment, development cooperation, counter-terrorism and the Common Security and Defence Policy. Among the priorities are the promotion of freedom of expression and assembly, freedom of religion or belief, the fight against discrimination in all its forms as well as the EU's long-standing campaign for the abolition of the death penalty worldwide.

In July 2012, the Council appointed Stavros Lambrinidis as EU Special Representative for Human Rights (see press release). He is tasked with enhancing the effectiveness and visibility of EU human rights policy.

Africa

The Council will take stock of developments in Africa, focussing on:

- Great Lakes region

The Council will adopt conclusions on the Great Lakes region, setting out a coordinated response by the EU and its member states to the political, security and development issues in the region.
Conflict in the Great Lakes region has persisted over the past 20 years. The signing of a framework agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the region in February and the appointment of Mary Robinson as Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the Great Lakes provide an opportunity for defining a new approach that could address the root causes of the conflicts, especially those in the Kivus where massive displacements of populations have led to a desperate humanitarian situation.

The EU and its member states intend to focus their action to support the implementation of the framework agreement on the promotion of peace among the countries of the region; encouraging the government of the DRC to ensure security in the eastern DRC; supporting democracy and good governance, including the promotion of human rights; assisting in rebuilding the regional economy as well as promoting greater engagement by the international community.

- Mali

The Council is due to approve conclusions on Mali, welcoming the commitment of the Malian authorities to make every effort towards credible and transparent presidential elections on 28 July. The Council is set to remind the importance of implementing the preliminary peace agreement of 18 June so that peaceful elections can also be held in the Kidal region. It is also expected to commend the work of the EU training mission in Mali and welcome on-going work on options for possible additional EU support to the Malian internal security forces and the justice sector.

Following an invitation by the Malian government, the EU has deployed an election observation mission to monitor the presidential elections, led by Chief Observer MEP Louis Michel (see press release).

- Somalia

Ministers will take stock of the situation in Somalia, ahead of the "New Deal for Somalia" conference. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Somalia, welcoming the progress made in Somalia in establishing the foundations for rebuilding the Somali state.

The conference will take place on 16 September in Brussels. It is expected to endorse a "new deal compact" that will commit the Somali people and their international partners to a set of key priorities and new support for the reconstruction of Somalia over the next three years (see press release). It is intended to implement Somalia's political, security and socio-economic priorities, both of the federal government and of other regions. Through this, the conference will offer a platform for Somali reconciliation, with a view to providing impetus to the political process.

In Somalia, the EU brings to bear all elements of its comprehensive approach. EU Special Representative Alexander Rondos is tasked with contributing to efforts for lasting peace, security and development in the Horn of Africa. In addition, the EU is the biggest donor of development aid to Somalia and has allocated €243 million in humanitarian aid to the country between 2008 and 2012. Besides, the EU assists the development of Somali security capacities with a view to enabling the federal government to provide security to its population. It is a key supporter of the AMISOM peacekeeping mission in Somalia, with more than €325 million disbursed over the period 2007-2012. The EU training mission in Somalia has provided military training to around 3,000 recruits in the Somali National Armed Force and continues to advise the Somali Ministry of Defence and general staff. The EU is also engaged in the fight against piracy off the Somali coast. For more information, see factsheet.
**Eastern Partnership**

Ahead of the Eastern Partnership ministerial meeting, the Council will discuss recent developments in the partner countries. The Council will deliberate on the way ahead on Eastern Partnership in the run-up to the Eastern Partnership summit in November and the phase after that.

The EU’s Eastern Partnership was launched at the Prague summit in May 2009. It concerns six Eastern partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Its objectives include accelerating political association and deepening economic integration with the Eastern European partner countries. The EU supports reforms in the partner countries aimed at consolidating democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and an open market economy. At the same time, it offers gradual integration into the European economy, greater mobility for citizens and closer political ties. Between 2010 and 2013, EUR 1.9 billion is allocated to support its implementation.

The Eastern Partnership provides for Association Agreements, which are to replace the existing Partnership and Cooperation Agreements. The new accords are to include deep and comprehensive free trade agreements. Negotiations with Ukraine have been completed and the Association Agreement/DCFTA could be signed at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November. Talks have also been concluded with the Republic of Moldova and the texts are being prepared for initialling while negotiations with Georgia are close to substantial completion.

**Middle East peace process**

Ministers will discuss developments in the Middle East peace process. The Council could also adopt conclusions. The EU has supported the diplomatic efforts currently deployed by the United States to facilitate the peace process.

In May 2012, the Council reaffirmed the EU’s commitment to a two-state solution (9909/12) and in December 2012 underlined the urgency of renewed, structured and substantial peace efforts in 2013 (17516/12).

The EU continues to reaffirm its commitment to a two-state solution and its conviction that the ongoing changes across the Arab world make the need for progress on the Middle East peace process all the more urgent. Heeding the aspirations of the people in the region, including those of Palestinians for statehood and those of Israelis for security is a crucial element for lasting peace, stability and prosperity in the region.
Lebanon

The ministerial lunch will also feature a debate relating to Lebanon.

Other items

The Council will adopt a number of decisions and Council conclusions without discussion, including:

- Sudan and South Sudan
Two years on after the independence of South Sudan, the Council will adopt conclusions on Sudan and South Sudan. The Council is set to reiterate that Sudan and South Sudan must coexist peacefully as two viable states. The Addis Agreements must be implemented without further delay or preconditions.

- Bosnia and Herzegovina
The Council is due to adopt conclusions on Bosnia and Herzegovina, expressing its concern about Bosnia and Herzegovina's continued lack of progress on the path towards the European Union. In particular, the Council is set to regret that the European Court of Human Rights ruling in the Sejdic/Finci case has not been implemented yet.

- EU Special Representative in Afghanistan
The Council is expected to appoint Mr Franz-Michael Mellbin as new EU Special Representative in Afghanistan, taking effect on 1 September 2013. His mandate is to promote the EU’s views on the political process and developments in Afghanistan, maintaining close contact with relevant Afghan institutions and relevant international stakeholders. Besides, Mr Mellbin has been appointed Head of the EU Delegation in Kabul.

In addition, the Council will adopt a number of legislative A-items in public deliberation.