Brussels, 21 August 2013

BACKGROUND¹

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Wednesday, 21 August 2013, in Brussels

In light of recent developments in Egypt, an extraordinary meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council has been convened. The meeting will be chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton.

Ministers will start their discussions over lunch at 13.00 and they are expected to adopt conclusions at the end of their meeting.

On the basis of input from the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission, including factual and up to date information on the current state of play in the EU - Egypt relations, the Council is expected to decide on possible response. The Council is also expected to reiterate its calls for an end to violence, its full support for dialogue and an inclusive political process, as well as the democratic future of Egypt, leading to the holding of free and fair elections and the establishment of a civilian government.

A press conference will be held at the end of the meeting (+/- 16.00).

* * *

Since the 25 January 2011 uprising, the EU has consistently supported the Egyptian population's legitimate request for their civil, political and socio-economic rights, calling for a peaceful and inclusive transition.

In the conclusions of 22 July 2013 the Foreign Affairs Council reiterated its deep concern about the situation in Egypt and stressed that the struggle for democracy should remain central. It called on all political forces to engage in a process of reconciliation and trust building for the good of the country and its democratic future.

In recent weeks, the EU has further stepped-up its efforts to promote dialogue and a peaceful solution to the Egyptian crisis through its constant engagement with all parties, including during the last visits by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, on 17 and 29-30 July. The EU Special Representative, Bernardino Leon, has also been in constant contact with all parties and partners on the ground.

The President of the European Council, Van Rompuy, and President of the European Commission, Barroso, reiterated in a statement on 18 August that "the EU will remain firmly engaged in efforts to promote an end to violence, resumption of political dialogue and return to a democratic process".

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office
Egypt is a neighbour and a major partner in a region of strategic importance for the EU. The relations are assured by an Associations Agreement which came into force in 2004. The agenda of the EU-Egypt relation is outlined in a jointly agreed action plan under the European Neighbourhood Policy. The cooperation focuses on democratic reform, economic modernisation, social reform and migration issues. Trade is another important subject of relations.

The entry into force of the Association Agreement in 2004 improved conditions for trade between the EU and Egypt. Since 2004, EU-Egypt bilateral trade has more than doubled and reached its highest level ever in 2012 (from 11.5 billion euro in 2004 to 23.8 billion euro in 2012). The EU is traditionally Egypt's main trading partner, covering 23% of Egypt's trade volume in 2012 and ranking first both as Egypt's import and export partner.

In the 2007-2013 financial period, the EU has made available more than €1 billion to Egypt under the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI), which is the main financial instrument for providing assistance programmes to the region. Currently, the programmes being implemented amount to about €892 million. Disbursement levels of on-going programmes have decreased: e.g. in 2013, only €16 million have been paid so far, due to the on-going instability in the country and the non-compliance with agreed conditions.

At an EU-Egypt Task Force meeting in November 2012 an additional 5 billion euro were identified by the EU and associated financial institutions (EIB and EBRD) as an overall package of long-term assistance to support Egypt in different frameworks. This financial assistance to Egypt is subject to political and economic conditionality and the Egyptian authorities are currently not able to fulfil many of those conditions, including the absence of an agreement between the IMF and Egypt.

* * *

**Useful links:**

19 August statement by EUSR Leon after a meeting of the EU Political and Security Committee
18 August statement by Presidents Van Rompuy and Barroso
16 August statement by HR Ashton on the situation in Egypt
14 August statement by HR Ashton on the latest developments in Egypt
14 August statement by HR Ashton on the situation in Egypt
7 August joint statement by HR Ashton and US Secretary of State Kerry on Egypt
30 July remarks during her visit in Egypt
22 July Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions
14 July - declaration by HR Ashton on behalf of the European Union, on the situation in Egypt

* * *


*Video coverage in broadcast quality (MPEG4): [http://www.eucouncil.tv](http://www.eucouncil.tv)*