



Brussels, 25 January 2008

BACKGROUND¹
GENERAL AFFAIRS and EXTERNAL RELATIONS COUNCIL
Monday 28 January 2008 in Brussels

*Starting at 10.00, the Council will focus on external relations, discussing **Pakistan**, the **Middle East**, **Lebanon**, **Kenya** and **Sudan**, **Chad** and the **Central African Republic** as well as the **Western Balkans**.*

*Lunch discussion items will include **Serbia** and **Iran**.*

Press conference: *after lunch (as from 15.00).*

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In the margins of the Council:

- 18.30: Troika meeting with Serbia *(to be followed by press conference at 19.30)*

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

SESSION ON EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Pakistan

The Council will have an exchange of views with regard to the latest developments in Pakistan and following the visit to Brussels of President Pervez Musharraf on 21 January.

In a declaration on 7 January, the EU took note of the decision of the election commission of Pakistan to postpone general elections until 18 February. It strongly reiterated the importance of holding free and fair elections by this new date, which should allow for a democratic and transparent electoral process under proper security conditions. The EU also noted that at this stage, overall stability in the country and further progress on the path towards democracy are among the most important challenges for Pakistan, and that the EU would continue to support the Pakistani people in addressing these challenges. Elements looking to destabilise Pakistan should not be allowed to succeed.

After meetings with President Musharraf in Brussels on 21 January, both the President of the Council, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, and High Representative Javier Solana reiterated that the EU wanted the elections to bring progress in reform, especially in ensuring the rule of law.

Middle East

- *Middle East peace process*

The Council will review developments in the Middle East, in particular the alarming situation in Gaza, the settlements issue and the follow-up to the Middle East meeting held in Annapolis (United States) on 27 November and to the international donors' conference for the Palestinian state in Paris on 17 December.

It is expected to welcome the start of negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian officials on all outstanding issues, including all final status issues, with a view to concluding a peace agreement before the end of 2008, as agreed in Annapolis. The goal remains the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza that will unite all Palestinians, living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

The Council is also likely to express deep concern at recent settlement activity in East Jerusalem and the West Bank and at recent violence affecting Gaza and communities in southern Israel. It should reiterate its grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and call for the continuous provision of essential goods and services, including fuel and power supplies.

The Council will welcome the USD 7.4 billion pledged at the Paris conference, and call on all donors to deliver on their pledges in support of efforts to build the future Palestinian state in accordance with the reform and development plan presented by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. It will welcome the Commission's work on a new funding mechanism -PEGASE- that will constitute a key channel for EU and other international assistance.

It is due to adopt conclusions along these lines.

- *Lebanon*

The Council will review the situation in Lebanon, and is expected to express concern that it has not yet been possible to elect a new president, and that the parliamentary session has been further postponed until 11 February.

It should welcome a plan for the immediate election of a president, the formation of a national unity government and the adoption of a new electoral law, as endorsed by Arab League foreign ministers in Cairo on 6 January, as well as mediation efforts by the Arab League secretary-general. It should reiterate its support to the legitimate and democratic government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and the Lebanese armed forces in their contribution to the stability of the country.

The Council will also condemn the recent terrorist attack on the UN force in Lebanon and the bombing of a US diplomatic vehicle in Beirut, as well as the rocket attacks launched against Israel on 8 January.

It is due to adopt conclusions along these lines.

Africa

- *Sudan/Chad/Central African Republic*

The Council will discuss the situation in Sudan, including peace efforts, in the presence of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Darfur crisis, Jan Eliasson.

It is expected to adopt conclusions, notably welcoming the fact that the parties to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) have resumed their cooperation in the Government of National Unity and agreed on the full and timely implementation of all the provisions of the CPA. It should also welcome the transfer of authority from AMIS to UNAMID for the operation in Darfur and underline the need to address the considerable challenges facing the deployment of UNAMID.

The Council is due to adopt a decision to launch the **military bridging operation EUFOR Tchad/RCA**. It should authorise the EU operation commander to release the activation order in order to execute the deployment of the forces and start the execution of the mission.

The decision will contribute to the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1778 (2007), which authorises the deployment in Chad and Central African Republic of a multidimensional presence, including the EU providing the military element of it. In accordance with this resolution, the EU will conduct this military bridging operation for a period of 12 months from the declaration of initial operational capability.

EUFOR Tchad/RCA will actively work for the improvement of the security situation in Chad and Central African Republic. It will contribute to protecting civilians in danger, particularly displaced persons and refugees, to facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of humanitarian personnel and to protecting UN personnel, facilities, installations and equipment. It is part of the EU's multi-faceted support to the area, which includes European Community support to the UN police mission in Chad.

Operation EUFOR Tchad/RCA will be conducted in a neutral, impartial and independent manner. Throughout the mission, it will coordinate closely with the UN and cooperate with the governments of Chad and the CAR.

The operation will be commanded from the EU Operations Headquarters (OHQ) in Mont Valérien (Paris) by Lieutenant General Patrick Nash (Ireland); the Force in theatre will be commanded from Abeche (Chad) by Brigadier General Jean-Philippe Ganascia (France). The operation will cooperate closely with the UN mission MINURCAT and with the humanitarian and development organisations present in Chad and CAR.

The Council will underline that in conducting this operation the EU is stepping up its longstanding action in support of efforts to tackle the crisis in Darfur and to address its regional ramifications, notably in Eastern Chad and North-eastern Central African Republic.

- ***Kenya***

The Council will review the situation in Kenya. It is expected to express concern at the crisis that has arisen following presidential elections and to express full support for the efforts of the Panel of Eminent African Personalities led by Kofi Annan.

It should condemn the acts of violence and call on all political leaders in Kenya, as well as police and army officials, to exercise maximum restraint, and to engage in dialogue in order to secure a political solution based on democratic principles. It should call on the Kenyan authorities to restore media freedoms and the right of assembly and to avoid excessive force against those demonstrating peacefully.

Initial findings of the EU election observer mission and reports from other independent observers cast serious doubt on the official results of the presidential elections. The Council is expected to call for all allegations of election irregularities to be investigated urgently and thoroughly. It will decide on its next course of action towards the situation in Kenya, and Kenya's political leaders, on the basis of their level of engagement in efforts towards finding a lasting political solution. And it will reiterate its commitment to the humanitarian needs of Kenyans and to stand ready to provide further assistance as required.

The Council is due to adopt conclusions along these lines.

Iran

At lunch, ministers will review the situation regarding the Iranian nuclear issue.

Meeting in Berlin on 22 January, the foreign ministers of China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK and the United States as well as the EU High Representative agreed on the contents of a new UN Security Council Resolution on Iran's nuclear program. Germany, France and the UK will now submit a draft resolution to the UN Security Council.

On 23 January, HR Solana discussed the nuclear issue with Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Saeedd Jalili over dinner in Brussels, without going into details, in a meeting aimed at maintaining communication channels open.

At its meeting on 14 December, the European Council reiterated full support for work undertaken in the UN Security Council to adopt further measures under Article 41, Chapter VII, of the UN Charter, as well as its full and unequivocal support for efforts to find a negotiated long-term solution to the Iranian nuclear issue.

Western Balkans

Ministers, over lunch, will review the situation in Western Balkans, and specifically in Serbia, following the first round of presidential elections, with a second round scheduled for 3 February. They will discuss EU-Serbia relations and prospects for signing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Serbia, initialled on 7 November 2007.

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions focusing on:

- Serbia. On 14 December, the European Council encouraged Serbia to meet the necessary conditions to allow its SAA rapidly to be signed and, in the light of Serbia's considerable institutional capacity, and recalling its conclusions of December 2006, it reiterated its confidence that progress on the road towards the EU, including candidate status, can be accelerated.
- Visa facilitation and readmission. The Council should welcome the entry into force of visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Albania on 1 May 2006 and with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 1 January 2008. The agreements will foster people-to-people contacts and increase economic ties with the region. The Council should also welcome the intention of the European Commission to launch soon a visa dialogue with all countries in the region.
