



Brussels, 15 February 2008

**BACKGROUND<sup>1</sup>**  
**GENERAL AFFAIRS and EXTERNAL RELATIONS COUNCIL**  
**Monday 18 February 2008 in Brussels**

*Beginning at 10.00, the Council will start with a session on general affairs, including preparations for the Spring meeting of the **European Council** (13 and 14 March). It will then focus on external relations, discussing the Western Balkans, in particular **Kosovo**, as well as trade issues, **Africa** (Kenya as well as Sudan/Chad), **Burma/Myanmar**, **European neighbourhood policy and Middle East**.*

**Press conference:** (possibly during or/and) at the end of the Council's work.

**Press conferences and public events can be followed by video streaming:**  
**<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/videostreaming>**

\*  
\*   \*

*In the margins of the Council:*

Monday 18 February

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

Tuesday 19 February

- 09.00: Association Council with Lebanon (to be followed by press conference at 11.30).

---

<sup>1</sup> This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office

## **SESSION ON GENERAL AFFAIRS**

### **Preparation of the Spring meeting of the European Council**

The Council will examine an annotated draft agenda prepared by the presidency for the Spring meeting of the European Council, to be held in Brussels on 13 and 14 March.

The European Council is due to focus on:

- the launch of a new three-year cycle of the EU's strategy for growth and jobs for the 2008-10 period;
- an integrated climate change and energy policy;
- the stability of financial markets.

The main accent of the new three-year cycle will be on implementation and delivery of reforms, given that the strategy for growth and jobs is now considered to be delivering on its objectives. The current priorities – knowledge and innovation, employment, the business environment and energy and climate change – continue to be valid. And whilst evolving challenges need to be addressed, economic and employment guidelines are not seen to need an overhaul.

The annotated draft agenda will serve as the basis for draft European Council conclusions to be prepared by the presidency and submitted to the permanent representatives committee.

The European Council will also review the international situation if necessary.

## **SESSION ON EXTERNAL RELATIONS**

### **Western Balkans**

The Council will discuss the situation in Western Balkans, most notably in Kosovo.

At the 14 December European Council, EU leaders agreed with the UN Secretary-General that the status quo in Kosovo is unsustainable and, thus, stressed the need to move forward towards a Kosovo settlement, which is essential for regional stability. Such a settlement should ensure a democratic, multi-ethnic Kosovo committed to the rule of law, and to the protection of minorities and of cultural and religious heritage.

They underlined that the EU stands ready to play a leading role in strengthening stability in the region and in implementing a settlement defining Kosovo's future status. They stated the EU's readiness to assist Kosovo on the path towards sustainable stability, including by an ESDP mission and a contribution to an international civilian office as part of the international presences. They noted that the EU will also be ready to assist economic and political development through a clear European perspective, in line with the European perspective of the region.

## **Africa**

### **- *Sudan/Chad/Central African Republic***

The Council will discuss the situation in Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic. With particular focus on Chad, the Council is expected notably to:

- condemn the recent attacks of armed groups against the government;
- call on all Chadian parties to renounce the use of force and engage in a constructive dialogue;
- support the African Union's efforts to find a lasting solution to the crisis;
- express concern regarding the regional ramifications of these attacks and to call for the respect of the sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity of Chad;
- call on Sudan and Chad to improve their relations;
- recall the importance of the 13 August 2007 political agreement as the cornerstone of a broader road map leading to legislative elections in 2009;
- express concern over the arrest of members of the unarmed political opposition in Chad.

The Council is also expected to emphasise the urgent need to protect civilians and improve the humanitarian situation in the whole region. It will reaffirm its full commitment to contribute to the implementation of UNSCR 1778 (2007) which authorises the deployment in Chad and the Central African Republic of a multidimensional presence, the military element of which will be provided by the EU. The mandate of the EU military operation, EUFOR Tchad/RCA, is to contribute to the protection of civilians in danger, particularly displaced persons and refugees, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of humanitarian personnel and to contribute to the protection of UN personnel, facilities, installations and equipment.

In accordance with this resolution, the EU has launched its military EU bridging operation. After a suspension due to the events in Chad, deployment of the force resumed on 12 February.

The Council is expected to note that in the light of recent events the need for deployment of EUFOR Tchad/RCA and MINURCAT to contribute to the required security in Eastern Chad has been underscored. In observance of its mandate EUFOR Tchad/RCA will act in an impartial, neutral and independent manner.

The Council is also expected to urge Sudan to facilitate a speedy deployment of UNAMID.

The Council will adopt conclusions along these lines.

### **- *Kenya***

The Council will review the situation in Kenya in the light of the violence that arose following the presidential elections.

It is expected to reiterate the urgent need for Kenya's leaders to engage seriously and flexibly in order to bring an immediate end to the violence and to ensure security, stability and the protection of human rights. It will call on Kenyan parties to engage constructively in order to find a legitimate political settlement, and reiterate its support for the efforts of the Panel of Eminent African Personalities, led by Kofi Annan.

The Council is expected to welcome the agreement reached between the parties on 1 February to take immediate steps and to establish a truth, justice and reconciliation commission to look at the root causes of the crisis. It will also welcome their agreement to an international investigation into

the violence. The Council will restate that until a legitimate political settlement has been agreed, the EU and its member states cannot conduct business as usual with Kenya.

The Council is due to adopt conclusions along these lines.

### **Burma/Myanmar**

The Council will discuss the situation in Burma/Myanmar following the announcement by the authorities on 9 February of a referendum on a new Constitution in May 2008 and multi-party elections in 2010.

It is expected to reiterate its concern regarding the situation in the country. It should underline that only a process that involves the full participation of the opposition and ethnic groups will lead to national reconciliation and stability.

The Council should also reiterate its full support for the UN Secretary General's good offices mission to help the transition to democracy and call on the authorities to cooperate fully with UN special adviser Ibrahim Gambari and UN special rapporteur on human rights Sergio Pinheiro. It will commend the work of EU special envoy Piero Fassino.

The Council is expected to reiterate the EU's readiness to review, amend or reinforce the measures it has already agreed in the light of developments.

It will adopt conclusions along these lines.

### **Middle East**

The Council is expected to discuss the situation in the Middle East. At its meeting on 28 January, it welcomed 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 last November. It expressed its concern about recent settlement activity, and about recent events in Gaza and the grave disturbances at the border between Gaza and Egypt. It also expressed concern at the continued absence of a head of state in Lebanon and regretted that it had not yet been possible to elect a new president.

### **European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)**

The Council is due to be briefed by the Commission on progress under the ENP, notably on the basis of the Commission's December 2007 communication "A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy" It is due to adopt conclusions.

### **WTO - Doha Development Agenda**

On the basis of a general overview by the Commission, the Council is expected to discuss the situation regarding prospects for negotiations under the WTO's Doha Development Agenda following the circulation of revised draft modalities papers on agricultural and non-agricultural market access on 8 February.

## **Economic partnership agreements (EPAs)**

The Council will be briefed by the Commission on the state of play of negotiations on EPAs with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions and states, after the results achieved in 2007. Discussions have resumed at technical level with African countries and regions.

## **OTHER ITEMS**

A number of items are expected to be adopted by the Council without discussion, including:

- **Enlargement - Croatian Ecological and Fisheries Protection Zone:** conclusions recalling the Council's December 2007 conclusions. The Council is due to return to the issue in a forthcoming meeting.
  - **Republic of Moldova** - conclusions on EU-Republic of Moldova relations.
-