



Brussels, 7 February 2014

BACKGROUND¹
FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL
Monday 10 February 2014 in Brussels

The Council, starting at 12.00, will be chaired by Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

*During lunch, ministers will hold an in-depth discussion on the **Eastern Partnership** and recent events in **Ukraine**.*

*From 15.00, the Council will exchange views on the **Syrian crisis**, on the situation in the EU's southern neighbourhood, including **Egypt, Libya and Tunisia**, and on **Yemen**. Ministers will also be briefed on the state of play concerning the EU military operation in the **Central African Republic**.*

A dinner of EU foreign ministers with their counterparts from EU candidate countries is to take place at 19.00 in the premises of the European External Action Service. It will be dedicated to a debate on the EU's eastern and southern neighbourhood.

Press conference:

- after the Foreign Affairs Council (+/- 18.30)

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

P R E S S

Eastern Partnership

The Council will take stock of developments in the EU's Eastern Partnership. It will also exchange views on recent events in Ukraine and discuss how to support Moldova and Georgia.

Following her visit to Kiev earlier this week, the EU High Representative stressed her great concern that perpetrators of violence be brought to justice in a transparent and independent process. She also offered the EU's expertise and advice on possible constitutional reforms in Ukraine. At the same time, the High Representative underlined the importance of supporting the economy in Ukraine, albeit conditional on economic reforms. See [remarks](#).

The EU remains committed to Ukraine's political association and economic integration with the EU, based on the respect for common values. In this context, the EU has reiterated the importance it attaches to each country's right to freely define its relations with other states in accordance with international law. Stronger relations with the EU do not come at the expense of relations between Eastern partners and their other neighbours, such as Russia.

The Association Agreements with Moldova and Georgia were initialled at the Vilnius Eastern Partnership summit in November 2013. This locks the texts, which are currently undergoing legal-linguistic revision. Their signature is to take place as soon as possible and before the end of August (see [European Council conclusions](#) of December 2013, para 47).

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 were allocated to support its implementation.

Syrian conflict and regional implications

The Council will debate the latest developments regarding the Syrian conflict, in particular the peace talks that started on 22 January ("Geneva II"), the humanitarian situation and the spill-over of the crisis into neighbouring countries, namely Iraq and Lebanon.

For the EU, the only solution to the conflict is a genuine political transition, based on the full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012, and preserving the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. The EU High Representative participated in the opening of the "Geneva II" peace talks where she reiterated the EU's longstanding position that the talks should lead to a political solution to the conflict. She also commended the efforts of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Joint Representative Lakhdar Brahimi, the Russian Federation and the United States and stressed the importance of women in the future of Syria.

The EU and its member states have been quick to support the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons. The EU is the largest financial contributor to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and supports its work towards the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile, including through the provision of armoured vehicles and satellite imagery. Individual member states have also provided resources to assist the destruction programme.

The EU and its member states are the largest humanitarian donor for the Syrian crisis. The total response from EU and member states to the crisis stands now at € 2.6 billion.

For more details on EU positions and restrictive measures, see [factsheet European Union and Syria](#).

The Council is due to adopt conclusions on Iraq, reaffirming its commitment to assist Iraq in its transition to democracy and expressing its deep concern about the deteriorating security situation, the increased terrorist threat and the marked increase in violence. The Council is set to encourage the Iraqi government to take decisive measures to promote inclusiveness and advance reconciliation, while confirming its readiness to cooperate with Iraq on a comprehensive response to terrorism that is compliant with human rights and international humanitarian law. The Council is also set to commend Iraq for receiving civilians fleeing the violence in Syria and to recall the importance of maintaining an open borders policy. Finally, it is to underline the utmost importance of the general elections on 30 April for Iraq's continued democratic transition.

The Council will also discuss the spillover effects of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon. EU is committed to supporting the people and government of Lebanon. It has identified specific areas for enhanced EU support to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). This is a follow-up to the commitment to support Lebanon's institutions and security forces made by the EU in December. It confirms the EU's determination to actively contribute to stability, peace and security in Lebanon, a field where the LAF play a key role.

Southern neighbourhood

- Egypt

The Council will take stock of the situation in Egypt so as to give a full assessment of the constitutional referendum of 14/15 January. It is due to adopt conclusions.

The Council is set to reaffirm the importance of the EU's relationship with Egypt and the EU's continued support to the Egyptian people in their desire to establish a democratic and prosperous society that enshrines dignity, the rule of law and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights.

The referendum brought an ample majority of votes in favour of the new constitution, which enshrines fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, assembly and women's rights. The EU High Representative commented: "All existing and future legislation will have to be in compliance with the new constitution. I also expect that the constitution will be applied in a way that gives full effect to civilian pre-eminence." See [statement](#).

The constitutional referendum in Egypt was observed by an EU election expert mission. The EU is also due to observe both the upcoming presidential and the parliamentary elections.

- Libya

The Council will take stock of the political and security situation in Libya.

The EU supports the people and elected political institutions of Libya, a successful conclusion of the transition process outlined in the Constitutional Declaration, the consolidation of democracy and the establishment of a stable and prosperous state based on national reconciliation, justice, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Elections for the Libyan Constitutional Drafting Assembly are to take place on 20 February. Once the assembly is elected, it will have 120 days to draft a new constitution, which would then be submitted to a referendum. The EU encourages a genuinely inclusive constitutional exercise, in which all components of Libyan society feel adequately represented.

The EU integrated border assistance mission in Libya (EUBAM Libya) supports the Libyan authorities in improving and developing the security of the country's borders, both by working on a long-term integrated border management strategy and by training the country's border personnel. This civilian mission responds to an invitation by Libya and is part of the EU's strategy to support the Libyan post-conflict reconstruction. For more information, see [factsheet](#).

- Tunisia

The Council will debate latest events in Tunisia and adopt conclusions.

The Council is set to congratulate Tunisia on the adoption of the new democratic constitution and to underline its value as an example to all those fighting peacefully for the acknowledgement of their rights and fundamental freedoms. It is to encourage the new government to continue the democratic transition while stressing that the EU is ready to support the transition and the next elections. The Council will confirm that EU stands ready to support Tunisia in its efforts to face numerous security challenges and improve the socio-economic situation of the country.

European Council President Herman Van Rompuy called the adoption of the new Tunisian constitution a "historic victory, not only for Tunisia, but also for those fighting for democracy as well as fundamental freedoms and rights in the world and your region". See [statement](#).

In November 2013, the Council reiterated the EU's support for the transition process in Tunisia. It encouraged the holding of inclusive, transparent and credible general elections within a reasonable timeframe. See [Council conclusions](#).

Yemen

The Council will exchange views on the situation in Yemen, following the conclusion of the national dialogue conference. It will adopt conclusions.

The Council is set to salute the positive conclusion of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which has closed an essential phase in Yemen's transition. The EU is committed to supporting Yemen in the subsequent steps of the constituent phase. The Council is due to reiterate the EU's growing concern about the deteriorating security situation and to condemn in the strongest terms the recent wave of violence and terrorist attacks.

The EU is one of its main partners for humanitarian assistance for Yemen, the poorest country of the Arab peninsula and host to more than 240.000 refugees, mainly from the Horn of Africa. In 2013, the EU and its member states provided humanitarian aid worth € 53 million. For more details, see [factsheet](#).

Central African Republic

The Council will adopt conclusions on the Central African Republic (CAR) welcoming the new transitional authorities that were established on the basis of wide consultation and in compliance with the Constitutional Charter. This provides a new opportunity to relaunch the transition. The EU is set to invite the new transitional authorities to work together to address the complex challenges the country is facing. It stands committed to support them in their efforts to implement the transition agreement, restore public order and to meet the needs of the population. The EU remains deeply concerned at the escalating cycle of violence and retaliation with dramatic consequences for civilians and serious regional implications.

The Council will also be briefed on preparations for the deployment of the EU military operation in the CAR. The operation, entitled EUFOR RCA, is to contribute to providing a safe environment in the Bangui area, for up to six months, with a view to handing over to African partners.

Following authorisation by the UN Security Council, the Council is also due to establish the legal basis for EUFOR RCA and to formally nominate Major General Philippe Pontières as Operation Commander.

In addition, the EU supports the stabilisation in CAR through its contribution to the African-led international support mission for the Central African Republic (MISCA), which is intended to protect civilians and to contribute to the stabilisation of the country. The EU has mobilised € 50 million from the EU's African Peace Facility in support of the mission. Its predecessor, Micopax, received € 55 million from the EU.

The EU is the main humanitarian and development partner of the Central African Republic. For more information, see [fact sheet](#).

Other items

The Council is set to adopt several other items without discussion, including:

- Cuba

The Council is expected to adopt a negotiating mandate for a political dialogue and cooperation agreement with the Republic of Cuba. The EU's main objectives with such an agreement are to consolidate relations with Cuba, encourage the reform process and engage in a dialogue based on the respect for human rights, democratic principles and good governance.

- Human Rights

The Council is to adopt conclusions on EU priorities at UN human rights fora.
