



Brussels, 9 June 2006

BACKGROUND ¹

GENERAL AFFAIRS and EXTERNAL RELATIONS COUNCIL

Monday 12 & Tuesday 13 June in Luxembourg

*The Council will start at 10.00 hrs with a session on general affairs, focusing on preparation of the **European Council** in Brussels on 15 and 16 June, as well as **migration** issues.*

*A session on external relations will follow, featuring **Iraq, Iran, the Middle East** (all three items will be discussed at lunch), as well as the **Western Balkans, Cuba**, preparation of the summit with the **United States** in Vienna on 21 June, the **Doha world trade** round and negotiations on a free trade area with the **Gulf states**.*

The president of the Council will hold a press conference at the end of the meeting.

After the Council meeting, Accession conferences at ministerial level are expected to be held with Turkey and Croatia respectively (see below) for the opening of the Science and Research chapter of accession negotiations with these countries.

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In the margins of the Council:

Monday:

- 12.40 Signature of the EU-Albania stabilisation and association agreement, *plus photo and film opt*
- 16.30 EU-Turkey association council + Accession conference with Turkey, *to be followed by a press conference*
- 17.00 EU-European economic area council, *to be followed by a press conference*
- 19.00 Accession conference with Croatia, *to be followed by a press conference*

Tuesday 13 June:

- 9.30 EU-Israel association council, *to be followed by a press conference*
- 11.30 EU-Egypt association council, *to be followed by a press conference*

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¹ This note was prepared under the responsibility of the press office.

SESSION ON GENERAL AFFAIRS

Preparation of the European Council

The Council will examine draft conclusions for the European Council to be held in Brussels on 15 and 16 June.

The items to be addressed by the European Council are as follows:

- the future of Europe: the constitutional treaty and EU enlargement;
- the EU's policy agenda, including security, energy, sustainable development, education, the environment and migration;
- improvements within the framework of the existing treaties: transparency, subsidiarity and comitology, the efficiency and coherence of external policy.

The European Council is also expected to issue declarations on certain external policy issues.

An annotated draft agenda was discussed by the Council at its session on 15 May; work has since been carried out by the permanent representatives committee. Ministers also discussed the issues at an informal meeting in Klosterneuburg (Austria) on 27 and 28 May.

Migration

The Council will discuss migration issues, following recent events in the Canary Islands and with a view to an EU-African ministerial conference to be held in Rabat on 10 and 11 July and a United Nations high-level dialogue meeting planned for September in New York.

The Rabat conference is expected to approve measures to ensure more efficient cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination along the migratory route from central and western Africa to Europe. Spain, France and Morocco are playing a prominent role in this initiative and an envisaged action plan could serve as a model for other migratory routes.

Another ministerial conference, involving the EU and all members of the African Union, will be organised after the New York meeting on migration and development.

SESSION ON EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Note: the European Council on 15-16 June is expected to adopt a series of declarations on foreign policy issues, including the Western Balkans, the Middle East, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran and Africa.

World trade negotiations – Doha Development Agenda

The Commission will brief the Council on developments in the current round of trade negotiations under the World Trade Organisation's Doha Development Agenda. WTO Ministers are expected to meet in Geneva at the end of June to consider draft modalities for agricultural market access and for the reduction of customs tariffs for industrial goods. The Council should agree on the principle of holding a meeting to be convened by the Presidency in the margins of the WTO ministerial as necessary in the light of developments.

Relations with the Gulf states - Negotiations on a free trade area agreement

The Commission will brief the Council on developments in negotiations on a free trade area agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait).

Relations with the United States - Summit preparation

The Council will be briefed on preparations for the EU-US summit to be held in Vienna on 21 June. Leaders should address issues under the following headings: promoting peace, democracy and human rights in the world; confronting global challenges, including security; and fostering prosperity and opportunity.

Western Balkans

The Council will review the situation in the Western Balkans and is due to adopt conclusions.

It is also expected to adopt conclusions on Montenegro, following the referendum of 21 May and the declaration of independence passed by the Parliament of Montenegro on 3 June.

On the day of the Parliament's declaration, the presidency, on behalf of the EU, reiterated that the EU would fully respect the decision of the people of Montenegro. It called on Belgrade and Podgorica to pursue a direct and constructive dialogue on their future relations. It also called on the Montenegrin government and opposition to engage in a dialogue and to cooperate constructively in the implementation of political, social and economic reforms.

The Council is expected to give guidance for the development of relations with the Republic of Montenegro. It will then be for the member states to take the necessary measures in accordance with international law and practice.

The more general draft conclusions on the Western Balkans focus on:

- International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia: expressing concern at the lack of progress on the arrest and transfer of six remaining fugitives. The draft conclusions call on

all countries concerned to take decisive action to ensure that the indictees, in particular Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, are finally brought to justice.

- Albania: welcoming the signature of an EU-Albania stabilisation and association agreement as an important step on the country's path towards the EU. The Council is expected to call on Albania to push ahead with its reform agenda and encourage all political forces to unite their efforts to accelerate that process.
- Regional cooperation in the Western Balkans: welcoming the results of a regional table meeting held in Belgrade on 30 May under the stability pact for South-East Europe, and supporting the creation of a regional cooperation council, to be operational by 2008.

Cuba

The Council is due to adopt conclusions reviewing the EU's common position on Cuba, emphasising its determination to pursue a genuine dialogue with the Cuban authorities as well as with Cuba's peaceful political opposition and civil society. It is expected to hold a brief exchange of views.

The draft conclusions deplore a further deterioration of the human rights situation in Cuba since the last evaluation in June last year, noting that the number of political prisoners has risen, including detentions without charge or trial. The text urges the Cuban government to release unconditionally all political prisoners, including a group of 75 detained and sentenced in 2003, and expresses particular concern at several dozen acts of violent harassment and intimidation.

In its conclusions, the Council is expected to call on the Cuban government to show its commitment to dialogue by making concrete improvements in the human rights situation. It is expected to extend for a further year the suspension of diplomatic measures decided in June 2003, and to give the go-ahead to work on a medium- and long-term strategy on Cuba.

Iraq

Over lunch, ministers will discuss the situation in Iraq following the formation of the new national unity government on 20 May. In the margins of the Council, a meeting between the presidency and the Foreign Minister of the new Iraqi government, Mr. Hoshyar Zebari is also foreseen.

At its meeting on 15 May, the Council expressed the EU's readiness to engage actively with the new government in order to achieve a secure, stable, unified, prosperous and democratic Iraq, including by discussing concrete measures to enhance EU-Iraq relations based on Iraqi priorities in the new government's programme and on shared values.

Iran

Over lunch, ministers will be briefed by High Representative Solana on his visit to Tehran on 6 June when he presented to the Iranian authorities a new proposal for resolving the Iranian nuclear issue through a long-term agreement based on mutual respect and the establishment of international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's programme.

The proposal was supported by all countries represented at a meeting of the foreign ministers of

France, Germany, the UK, as well as China, Russia and the US in Vienna on 1 June.

At its 15 May meeting, the Council reaffirmed the right of Iran to the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in conformity with its obligations under the NPT. It also expressed the EU's readiness to support Iran's development of a safe, sustainable and proliferation-proof civilian nuclear programme, if international concerns were fully addressed and confidence in Iran's intentions established, and hoped that Iran would not fail to take up such an offer.

Middle East peace process

Over lunch, ministers will return to the situation in the Middle East and to prospects for a re-launch of the peace process.

They will also review work on a temporary international mechanism for direct delivery and supervision of assistance to the Palestinian people.

At its 15 May meeting, the Council had welcomed the willingness of the Middle East Quartet to endorse such a mechanism. It had noted that the EU was working urgently to develop such a mechanism which as a matter of priority will be aimed at contributing to meet basic needs including health services. It would consult International Financial Institutions and other key partners, and invite other donors to actively join in the effort to establish the mechanism as soon as possible.

Other business

France is expected to brief partners on developments regarding the **International Facility for the purchase of medicine**.

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Other items

Items to be adopted without discussion include the following:

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): decision to launch a military operation EUFOR RD Congo in support of the UN's force (MONUC) during the election period.

Africa: conclusions on the situation in Sudan, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Somalia.

Human Rights Defenders: conclusions on the first review of the EU guidelines.
