



Brussels, 7 April 2006

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BACKGROUND ¹

GENERAL AFFAIRS and EXTERNAL RELATIONS COUNCIL

Monday 10 and Tuesday 11 April in Luxembourg

*The Council will start at 10.00 hrs and will focus on **Belarus**, the **Middle East** and **Iran** (both items at lunch), as well as the Doha **world trade** negotiations.*

*On Tuesday (9.00), the Council will resume with **development** issues, focusing on the ACP-EU partnership (10th European development fund), humanitarian assistance and the effectiveness of EU aid. At a dinner on Monday evening, development ministers will have discussed notably migration and energy issues.*

The presidency will hold a press conference at the end of the meeting on Monday, as well as after discussion of development issues on Tuesday.

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In the margins of the Council:

Monday:

- *The presidency will sign an agreement on cooperation and assistance between the EU and the International Criminal Court (17.00)*
- *EU-Croatia: 2nd meeting of the stabilisation and association council (18.00, to be followed by a press conference)*

Tuesday:

- *EU-Moldova: 8th meeting of the co-operation council (08.45, to be followed by a press conference)*
- *EU-Lebanon: first meeting of the association council (15.00 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 EXTERNAL RELATIONS

World trade – Doha Development Agenda

The Council will be briefed by the Commission on recent developments and the prospects for further progress in the current round of trade negotiations under the World Trade Organisation's Doha Development Agenda.

The Council has, on a number of occasions, asserted the need for a balanced outcome to all the main items on the Doha agenda - with specific focus on the needs of developing countries - and for all partners to make contributions commensurate with their level of development.

At the end of the WTO ministerial conference at Hong Kong in December, the Council approved the WTO ministerial declaration whilst highlighting the EU's determination to ensure an ambitious and balanced outcome to the following stages of the negotiations in 2006.

Ukraine

The Council will discuss the situation in Ukraine following the 26 March parliamentary elections.

On 29 March, the EU took positive note of the preliminary conclusion of the OSCE/ODIHR-led International Elections Observation Mission that the elections were free and fair, consolidating the democratic breakthrough in Ukraine.

The EU welcomed these elections which, stand as testimony to Ukraine's commitment to a truly democratic process. It also looked forward to continued work on deepening its partnership with Ukraine, building on shared values expressed in the quality of Ukraine's democracy and reforms. It noted that the elections and the subsequent formation of a new government would provide a strong basis for renewed efforts to move forward in key reforms aimed at strengthening the rule of law, the transformation of society and strengthening market economy.

Belarus

The Council will discuss the situation in Belarus after the 19 March presidential elections, which the EU, on the basis of the preliminary OSCE/ODIHR assessment, has considered fundamentally flawed.

In the days following the elections, the EU has condemned the violence used by the Belarusian authorities against demonstrators and the ensuing arrests of demonstrators and members of the opposition.

The Council is expected to express deep concern at the treatment of all the political detainees, to demand their immediate release and to urge the Belarusian authorities not to penalise or discriminate against those exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, including the leaders of the opposition parties.

In view of the recent events and in line with the declaration adopted by the European Council on 23-24 March, the Council is expected to decide to adopt restrictive measures against President Lukashenko, the Belarusian leadership and officials responsible for the violations of international

electoral standards and international human rights law, as well as for the crackdown on civil society and democratic opposition.

These steps will be in addition to those already taken by the Council in 2004 against Belarusian officials.

At the same time, the Council is also likely to reiterate its commitment to engage with Belarusian society by further strengthening its support for civil society and democratisation as well as to intensify and facilitate people-to-people contacts and enhance access to independent sources of information.

Middle East Peace Process

Ministers, over lunch, will discuss the situation in the Middle East peace process following the swearing in of the new Palestinian government and the elections in Israel.

On 30 March, the Middle East Quartet (UN, EU, US and Russia) reiterated its call for the new Palestinian government to commit to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap.

The Quartet also:

- welcomed Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas' call for the new Palestinian government to commit to a platform of peace and, having carefully assessed the program of the new government, noted with grave concern that it had not committed to the principles spelled out above;
- recalled its view that future assistance to any new government would be reviewed by donors against that government's commitment to the principles outlined above, and concurred that there inevitably would be an effect on direct assistance to that government and its ministries;
- encouraged continued humanitarian assistance to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian people and noted in that context the importance of improved movement and access.

Consistent with the Quartet statement, the EU is reviewing its assistance to the Palestinian government against its commitment to the aforementioned principles. On Monday, the Council is likely in particular to note the EU's continued commitment to providing necessary assistance to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian population and to underline the importance of improved movement and access.

Concerning the outcome of the Israeli elections, the Council is expected to note the importance of a strong commitment by the new Israeli government to work towards a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on existing agreements, the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the principles laid down in the Road Map.

Iran

Over lunch, ministers will discuss Iran, in particular the Iranian nuclear programme. They should welcome the UN Security Council Presidential Statement of 29 March, which reinforced the role of the IAEA and called upon Iran to take the steps required by the IAEA Board of Governors. These steps are essential to build confidence in the exclusively peaceful purpose of its nuclear programme.

They should also welcome the conclusions of the Ministerial meeting in Berlin on 30 March, which reflected the international community's unity and determination to uphold the authority of IAEA Board resolutions and to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The Council is also expected to reiterate the EU's continued commitment to a diplomatic solution.

The Council should also address the human rights situation in Iran, about which it has repeatedly expressed concern. The Council is due to adopt conclusions.

Development issues:

At dinner on Monday, ministers will discuss the following issues:

Migration and development

Development ministers will hear a report on the meeting of the UN commission on population and development that took place from 3-7 April in New York.

They will also hear a report from the Belgian minister on a conference held in Brussels on this subject on 15 March.

They will be briefed on the Commission's plans to present a communication to the Council on this subject during 2006.

The ACP-EU Council will debate the question of migration and development when it meets in Papua New Guinea in June. It has been examined recently in different fora, including the European Council and the United Nations

Energy in development

Ministers will be briefed on a seminar on this subject organised by the presidency in Vienna in January.

They will also hear a presentation by Professor Nebojša Nakicencovic, a specialist for energy scenarios and climate change of the International Institute for applied system analyses at the Technical University in Vienna.

Ministers will agree principles on the role of energy in development. It will be noted that increased development is inevitably accompanied by increased energy consumption. The principles refer, in particular, to the need for:

- energy sources to be demand-driven;
- energy efficiency and conservation;
- energy systems to be sustainable.

Development cooperation and economic cooperation instrument

Ministers will take note of progress on the EU' development cooperation and economic cooperation instrument. No discussion is expected on the content but rather on the approach to be taken so that legislation can be agreed on this subject as soon as possible.

The Commission proposed this instrument as part of a package of external financing instruments. It will be decided in co-decision with the European Parliament. It will replace various current

instruments used to finance development in mostly non-ACP countries as well as projects in industrialised countries. ACP countries will also benefit from thematic programmes to be financed under the instrument (for example environment, food security, migration and energy projects).

On Tuesday morning, ministers will address the following issues:

ACP-EU partnership - 10th EDF: financial framework 2008-2013

The Council will hold a debate on the 10th European development fund (EDF), that constitutes the financial framework for the period 2008-2013 regarding the Community's financial assistance to the ACP group of states, the member states' overseas countries and territories (OCTs) and administrative expenditure for implementation.

The framework of the 10th EDF as agreed by the European Council in December 2005, allocating 22,7 billion EUR, is an intergovernmental fund with a contribution key different to that applicable to the Community budget.

The debate is seen as a start in preparing the Council's position in view of the ACP-EC Joint Council of Ministers on 1-2 June in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, where ACP and EU ministers will agree jointly on this financial framework ensuring the continued support for the ACP states.

Effectiveness of EU aid

The Council will adopt conclusions on how member states, the EU and other donors should work for maximum effectiveness, in response to a set of communications from the Commission (7066/06, 7067/06 and 7068/06).

In view of imminent increases in overseas development assistance (ODA) for which the EU and its member states have made commitments, the conclusions establish principles so that financial resources are spent as efficiently as possible in pursuit of the goals of reducing poverty and promoting development.

Current EU aid to developing countries amounts to about EUR 35 billion (representing 55% of total world aid). Commitments made in 2005 will make an additional EUR 20 billion available by 2010 (about two-thirds of world aid). This "scaling up" must be accompanied by greater rigour on the effectiveness of the spending, as increased funds alone will not improve development.

The Council will also endorse the revised framework for country strategy papers, which should also be the basis for common programming by the Commission and member states and thus brings the EU in the forefront regarding the implementation of commitments under the Paris declaration.

Policy coherence for development

The Council will adopt Conclusions on how to operationalise and improve policy coherence for development, ensuring that non-aid policies can assist developing countries in achieving the millennium development goals. The Council will invite member states, in cooperation with the Commission, to prepare a rolling work programme by June 2006 comprising priorities for action in 12 policy areas.

Humanitarian assistance

The Council will discuss humanitarian assistance, on the basis of a questionnaire prepared by the presidency, in order to assess the EU's humanitarian assistance system and possibly to draw conclusions for the future.

Natural disasters in 2005 highlighted the need to continually review and reinforce national and international systems for delivering and coordinating humanitarian assistance.

Other business:

- *United Nations world summit follow-up*

At the request of Sweden and Ireland.

(Note: the Council will also adopt, without debate, conclusions on the summit).

Items to be adopted without debate (including:)

Peace Facility for Africa - As part of the follow up to the EU Strategy for Africa adopted by the European Council in December 2005, the Council will agree that the European Development Fund (EDF) will continue funding the Africa Peace Facility for three years as from 2008. The peace facility is used to support African-led peacekeeping operations; the African Union operation in Darfur (Sudan) is an example.

Economic partnership agreements - The Council will adopt conclusions welcoming the priority given to the economic partnership agreements (EPAs) in the programming currently being discussed for the 10th EDF, considered as instruments for development, and invite the Commission to present a review identifying the major challenges before the entry into force of the EPAs in January 2008.

EU strategy for the Caribbean

The Council will adopt conclusions on developing the EU's partnership with the Caribbean states, bearing in mind their specific geographic and economic situation. The conclusions follow a communication from the Commission.

Kosovo - possible rule of law mission - The Council is due to adopt a Joint Action establishing an EU planning team regarding an envisaged EU crisis management operation in the field of rule of law and possible other areas.