



Brussels, 11 April 2014

BACKGROUND¹
FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council
- including security and defence issues -
14 and 15 April 2014 in Luxembourg

Foreign ministers - Monday

The Council will start at 12.30 and be chaired by Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The Council will begin with a brief **public deliberation** to adopt legislative A-items, including the EU autonomous trade preferences for Ukraine.

Over lunch, ministers will assess developments related to the crisis in **Syria** and hold an in-depth exchange on **Bosnia and Herzegovina**. The Council will then discuss the situation in **Ukraine**. The Council is set to adopt conclusions on these three items.

The **EU-Tunisia Association Council** will start at 18.15, chaired by Dimitris Kourkoulas, Greek Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs (TV/photo opportunity). At 18.00, a protocol to the EU-Tunisia Association Agreement will be signed (TV/photo opportunity).

Defence ministers - Tuesday

Defence ministers will meet from 9.30 onwards, first as the **European Defence Agency Steering Board**, chaired by the High Representative as Head of the Agency.

The Council will convene from 10.30 and hear presentations on the proposed **EU Maritime Security Strategy** and the launch of the EU military operation in the **Central African Republic**.

The Council will then debate the implications of the crisis in **Ukraine** on security and defence policy, in the presence of NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. This discussion will continue over lunch.

Press conferences:

- after the Foreign Affairs Council (Monday at +/- 18.00)
- following the EU-Tunisia Association Council (Monday at +/- 19.30)
- on the Foreign Affairs Council - Defence (Tuesday at +/- 14.00)

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Press conferences and public events by video streaming: <http://video.consilium.europa.eu/>
Video coverage in broadcast quality (MPEG4): <http://tvnewsroom.consilium.europa.eu>
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¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office

P R E S S

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Syria

Over lunch, ministers will consider the latest developments in the Syrian conflict, in particular the state of play in diplomatic efforts to bring an end to the crisis, on the ground and the implementation of the UN Security Resolution (2139), on humanitarian access, and progress in the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons. The Council is due to adopt conclusions.

The Council is set to reiterate that there can only be a political solution to the conflict, based on the full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012, which the EU High Representative has made clear means the establishment of a transitional governing body, and a genuine Syrian-led inclusive political process to establish a democratic and pluralistic Syria. The Council will reiterate support for the UN and Joint Special Representative Brahimi and call for the Syrian regime to show a clear commitment to the negotiation agenda. It will also reiterate that any elections in Syria should only take place within the framework of that the Geneva communiqué.

The Council will strongly condemn war crimes and crimes against humanity; in addition, it will deplore grave abuses committed by terrorist groups. Once more, the Council will insist on unfettered humanitarian access, calling on all parties to immediately comply with a related UN Security Council resolution (2139).

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 with €5 million for armoured cars and technical assistance and €12 million for the destruction phase. Member states have also contributed financially and in kind.

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](#).

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Also over lunch, ministers will hold a substantive discussion on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Council will adopt conclusions. This comes in the wake of a trip by the EU High Representative to Sarajevo in March where she discussed the situation with politicians and members of civil society.

The Council will reaffirm its unequivocal commitment to the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as a sovereign and united country and to condemn secessionist and divisive rhetoric as unacceptable.

The Council will state that it has heard the public protests and the calls for an improved social and economic situation. It will urge the BiH institutions and leadership to reach out actively to civil society and to focus on socio-economic issues. The EU is ready to support such efforts. The Council will welcome Commission initiatives to improve economic governance, competitiveness and stimulate economic growth, including the launch of a "compact for growth".

In October 2013, the Council reiterated its unequivocal support for BiH's EU perspective as a sovereign and united country enjoying full territorial integrity. It also expressed its serious concern at the on-going failure of the BiH political leaders to implement the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the Sejdić/Finci case. See [Council conclusions](#).

Ukraine

The Council will assess developments in Ukraine and adopt conclusions.

The Council will express its support to Ukraine and is set to adopt several elements of the support package proposed on 5 March: it will approve macro-financial assistance to Ukraine in order to support the country's economic stabilisation and reforms. The aid, in the form of a medium-term loan of up to €1 billion, is intended to contribute to covering Ukraine's urgent balance-of-payments needs as identified in the government's economic programme supported by the IMF. This comes in addition to the already approved, but not yet disbursed macro-financial assistance of €610 million.

The Council will also grant autonomous trade preferences to Ukraine until 1 November so as to advance the application of certain provisions of the Association Agreement on a deep and comprehensive free trade area. According to the Commission, the fully-fledged free trade area, as envisaged in the Agreement, would save Ukrainian exporters almost €500 million in customs duties annually.

The Council will strengthen EU sanctions targeting persons responsible for misappropriating Ukrainian state funds. On 5 March, the Council had imposed an asset freeze on 18 persons subject to related judicial investigations in Ukraine.

The political chapters of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement were signed on 21 March. The first meeting under the political dialogue envisaged in the Agreement is to take place this month. At the same time, EU remains committed to signing the full agreement including the deep and comprehensive free trade area.

The European Council of 20/21 March strongly condemned the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation and refused to recognise it. At the same time, the European Council reiterated that further steps by Russia to destabilise the situation in Ukraine would lead to additional and far reaching consequences for relations between the EU (and its member states) and the Russian Federation in a broad range of economic areas. As requested by leaders, the Commission is currently evaluating the legal consequences of the annexation of Crimea for the EU.

In response to Russian actions so far, the European Council cancelled the next EU-Russia summit; member states' regular bilateral summits with Russia were also annulled. Instead of the G8 summit in Sochi, the G7 will meet in Brussels in June. In addition, negotiations on visa matters and a new agreement with Russia have been suspended. The EU has also targeted 33 persons responsible for actions that threaten or undermine the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine with an asset freeze and a ban from entering the EU.

For more details, see [European Council conclusions](#) and [factsheet](#) on EU-Ukraine relations.

The EU will remain at the forefront of efforts to facilitate and engage in a meaningful dialogue involving Ukraine and Russia, with a view to finding a political solution. In this respect, EU High Representative Ashton is set to meet the Foreign Ministers of Ukraine, Russia and the United States next week.

The Council will also take the opportunity to reiterate support to Georgia and Moldova. The Association Agreements with Moldova and Georgia were initialled at the Vilnius Eastern Partnership summit in November 2013. Their signature will be accelerated so as to take place before the end of June 2014.

Other items

On Monday, the Council is also expected to adopt several other items without discussion, including:

- EUCAP Sahel Mali

The Council is likely to establish a new civilian mission under the Common Security and Defence Policy to assist the internal security forces in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) so as to enable the Malian state to ensure constitutional and democratic order as well as fight against terrorists, organised crime and cross-border trafficking. EUCAP Sahel Mali will deliver strategic advice and training for managers of the three internal security forces in Mali, i.e. the police, *Gendarmerie* and *Garde nationale*.

- Central African Republic

The Council will adopt conclusions on the Central African Republic, including on the launch of the EU military operation in the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA). A debate on the operation is scheduled for Tuesday, see below.

- Myanmar / Burma - restrictive measures

The Council is set to extend the EU's restrictive measures against Myanmar / Burma by one year, i.e. until 30 April 2015. The sanctions consist in an arms embargo and an embargo on equipment that may be used for internal repression. For more information on EU relations with Myanmar / Burma, see [factsheet](#).

- Indonesia

Following the consent by the European Parliament, the Council is expected to approve, on behalf of the European Union, the conclusion of the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation between the European Union and its member states and the Republic of Indonesia.

EUROPEAN DEFENCE AGENCY STEERING BOARD

Ministers for Defence will meet for the European Defence Agency (EDA) Steering Board, under the chairmanship of Catherine Ashton as the Head of the Agency.

Defence ministers will be updated on progress regarding the implementation of the European Council conclusions on security and defence issues of 19 December 2013, including the Agency's work on the four major capability programmes: Air-to-Air Refuelling, Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, Governmental Satellite Communications and Cyber Defence. First deliverables for the key enablers standardisation and certification will be submitted by mid-June. Defence ministers are expected to welcome EDA's work, in close cooperation with the European Commission, on research and innovation, with a view to stimulating cooperation in dual-use technologies and developing the CSDP Preparatory Action. Defence ministers will be updated on the recent establishment of the SESAR Cell within EDA.

Defence ministers are also expected to discuss initial elements for a policy framework for more systematic and long-term cooperation.

EDA member states are the EU member states excluding Denmark.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL – Ministers of Defence

Maritime security

The Council will receive a presentation about the joint communication "For an open and secure global maritime domain: elements for an EU maritime security strategy" ([doc. 7537/14](#)).

Europe's maritime interests are fundamentally linked to the well-being, prosperity and security of its citizens and communities. Some 90% of the EU's external trade and 40% of its internal trade is transported by sea. The future EU Maritime Security Strategy is intended to facilitate a strategic and cross-sectoral approach to maritime security.

The communication identifies five areas where a coordinated approach based on already existing tools could have an added value: external action; maritime awareness, surveillance and information sharing; capability development and capacity building; risk management, protection of critical maritime infrastructure and crisis response; and maritime security research and innovation, education and training.

Work is ongoing to define the EU Maritime Security Strategy, which is due to be approved as part of an overall EU maritime strategy by the European Council of 26/27 June.

In the margins of the recent EU-Africa summit, the EU High Representative hosted a meeting with several African states to explore further cooperation on maritime security. For more details, see [press release](#).

EU military operation in the Central African Republic

The Council will be briefed on the state of play concerning the EU military operation in the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA) by the EU Operation Commander, Major-General Philippe Pontiers.

On 1 April, the Council gave the green light for the launch of operation EUFOR RCA. It provides temporary support in achieving a safe environment in the Bangui area, with a view to handing over to a UN peacekeeping operation or to African partners. The force thereby contributes both to international efforts to protect the populations most at risk and to the creation of the conditions for providing humanitarian aid. EUFOR RCA focuses its operations in the Bangui airport and in adjacent neighbourhoods.

The force will have its Operation Headquarters in Larissa, Greece. It is set to reach initial operational capability at the end of this month while full operational capability is expected to be declared at the end of May. The operation's six-months mandate is due to commence at that point.

During this discussion, questions related to EU Battlegroups may also be raised.

For more information, see [factsheet on the Central African Republic](#) and [factsheet on EUFOR RCA](#).

Ukraine

The Council will discuss the implications of the crisis in Ukraine on EU defence and security policy, in particular on capability development and defence cooperation in Europe. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen will be present for this debate.

The European Council of December 2013 started work on strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the availability of future-oriented capabilities and on reinforcing the European defence industry. By mid-2014, the Council is due to receive a progress report on the on-going work in a large number of fields, ranging from strategies to counter emerging security threats, defence capabilities to the financing of CSDP missions and operations.

Other items

On Tuesday, the Council is set to adopt several defence-related items without discussion, including:

- EUTM Mali

The Council is due to extend the EU training mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) by two years, i.e. until 18 May 2016. The mission supports the training and reorganisation of the Malian Armed Forces so as to help improve the military capacity of the Malian Armed Forces. The extension of the mandate will allow military training of four more battalions. At the same time, the Council will approve additional tasks for the mission. For more details about the mission, see [factsheet](#).
