



Brussels, 25 June 2014

BACKGROUND¹
EUROPEAN COUNCIL
Thursday 26 and Friday 27 March in Ypres and Brussels

*On Thursday heads of state or government will gather in **Ypres for a commemoration to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War**. The ceremony will begin in the late afternoon and will be followed by an informal dinner where leaders will have an exchange of views on the **strategic agenda for the Union** in the coming years.*

*On Friday morning in Brussels, the heads of state or government will sign the **Association Agreements with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and the remaining points of the Agreements with Ukraine**.*

*The European Council will start its working session by discussing the agenda for growth, competitiveness and jobs. In this context, leaders will discuss and politically conclude this year's **European Semester**. They will also evaluate progress in the area of **regulatory fitness** and discuss next steps.*

*Leaders will then discuss and define strategic guidelines for legislative and operational planning in the area of **freedom, security and justice**.*

*The European Council will take stock of progress made on the **2030 climate and energy policy framework** and look at a set of most urgent measures to strengthen **Europe's energy security**.*

*Over lunch on Friday, leaders will first have a discussion on the situation in **Ukraine** before turning to the discussion on the decision proposing to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission.*

Indicative programme:

Thursday:	16.30	arrivals in Ypres
	17.30	ceremony commemorating the start of World War I
	18.30	family photo
	18.45	informal dinner
Friday:	09.00	signature of Association Agreements with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine
	10.00	exchange of views with acting President of the European Parliament
	10.30	working session
	13.00	working lunch
	17.00 (tbc)	press conference of Presidents Van Rompuy and Barroso and Greek Prime Minister Samaras

[Full media programme](#)

[Invitation letter by President Herman Van Rompuy](#)

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

P R E S S

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Strategic agenda for the Union

At an informal dinner on Thursday evening in Ypres, and continuing on Friday lunch, heads of state or government will have an exchange of views on priorities and a strategic agenda for the EU in the next five years. As agreed by all leaders at their May informal meeting it is important to set priorities and the strategic agenda for the crucial years ahead, as the Union is facing a number of challenges. The Union and its member states must anticipate change rather than react to it, and shape the future through joint action underpinned by a common vision. In doing so, the Union should concentrate its actions on those areas that make real difference in the daily lives of people and businesses. The EU should deliver tangible results and live up to commitments to provide shelter to European citizens and to protect their rights, welfare and well-being.

Key priorities for the coming years should include:

- A Union of jobs, growth and competitiveness
- A Union that empowers and protects citizens
- Towards an Energy Union
- A Union of freedom, security and justice
- A Union as a strong global actor

Growth, Competitiveness and Jobs

The European Council will, in the presence of ECB President Draghi, endorse the country specific recommendations and thus politically conclude this year's European Semester exercise. The European Semester involves simultaneous monitoring of the member states' fiscal, economic and employment policies during a six-month period every year. Based on principles of national ownership and social dialogue, member states should respect the recommendations in their forthcoming decisions on budgets, structural reforms and employment and social policies.

In its discussions on the 2014 European Semester in December and March, the European Council put particular emphasis on policies enhancing competitiveness, supporting job creation and fighting unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, and on the follow-up to reforms to improve the functioning of labour markets.

Leaders are also expected to take stock of progress made in the area of regulatory fitness on the basis of the recent [Commission Communication](#). In particular, leaders will note progress achieved in the implementation of the REFIT programme, which has already led to an effective reduction of the regulatory burden. The European Council is expected to call for continued implementation and for the Council to follow-up on the Commission Communication.

Freedom, Security and Justice

The European Council will define the strategic guidelines for legislative and operational planning for the coming years in the area of freedom, security and justice. This will include coherent policy measures in respect to asylum, immigration, borders, and police and judicial cooperation. The overall priority should be to consistently transpose, effectively implement and consolidate the legal instruments and policy measures in place.

It is essential to provide a genuine area of security for European citizens by preventing and combating serious and organised crime, including human trafficking and corruption, and an effective EU counter terrorism policy is needed. At the same, leaders are expected to emphasise that it will be equally important to ensure the protection and promotion of fundamental rights, including data protection, whilst addressing security concerns.

In terms of asylum and immigration the European Council is expected to underline the need for an efficient and well-managed migration, asylum and border policy, guided by solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility. It will also emphasise the need to offer protection for those in need while tackling irregular migration resolutely. Addressing the root causes of irregular migration flows will need to be an essential part of EU policy, and in this context leaders are expected to call for improving the link between the EU's internal and external policies, as results in one field will have an effect in the other.

The leaders are also expected to call for increased trust in each others' justice systems, as a sound European justice policy will contribute to economic growth by helping businesses and consumers to benefit from a reliable business environment. Actions will include; calls for the use of technological innovations such as e-justice, strengthening the rights of accused, facilitating enforcement in family law and in civil and commercial matter with cross-border implications, and enhancing mutual recognition of decisions and judgements in civil and criminal cases.

Climate and Energy

Leaders will take stock of progress made towards a final decision in October on a framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030. The European Council is expected to reaffirm the importance of the UN Climate Summit in September 2014 and confirm that the specific EU target for 2030 for greenhouse gas emission reductions will be fully in line with the agreed EU objective for 2050. They will also address issues such as energy infrastructure and energy efficiency. Leaders are equally expected to reconfirm the objectives of completing the internal energy market by 2014 and developing interconnections so as to put an end to any isolation of member states from European gas and electricity networks by 2015.

On the basis of the [Commission's European Energy Security Strategy](#), leaders are expected to have a first discussion and call for increased efforts to reduce Europe's high energy dependency. The European Council is expected to support the immediate implementation of a set of most urgent measures to strengthen Europe's resilience and increase its energy security. In particular, leaders are to agree on; existing emergency and solidarity mechanisms, including gas storage and reverse flows, to be reinforced, relevant energy infrastructure investments to be robustly enforced, and the full engagement with international partners to reduce the risk of disruption of gas deliveries.

Ukraine

The European Council will have an exchange of view with the newly elected Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, who will provide his assessment of the situation in Ukraine, before the leaders will continue their discussion over lunch on the basis of the discussions held in the [Foreign Affairs Council on 23 June](#), with the participation of EU High Representative Catherine Ashton.

Decision on a candidate for President of the Commission

The European Council will at the lunch turn to the decision of proposing to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission.

Following the mandate received by heads of state or government on 27 May, the President of the European Council has conducted intensive consultations with the political groups and all heads of state or government in order to facilitate the appointment of the next President of the European Commission.

The procedure for nominating the President of the Commission, is laid down in the Treaty of the European Union Art. 17, 7 (1st para): *"Taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission. This candidate shall be elected by the European Parliament by a majority of its component members. If he does not obtain the required majority, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall within one month propose a new candidate who shall be elected by the European Parliament following the same procedure."*

Furthermore, the Treaty outlines (in Declaration 11) that the smooth election of the President of the European Commission is a joint responsibility of the European Parliament and the European Council. To this end, it is agreed that there will be consultations between the two institutions. These consultations will also have to take into account the elections to the European Parliament.

Other items

The European Council will also welcome Lithuania's entry into the euro area and is likely to endorse the granting of candidate status to Albania.

Signature of Association Agreements

In the margins of the European Council and in the morning of Friday 27 June, the heads of state or government will be signing the Association Agreements including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with Georgia and the Republic of Moldova as well as the remainder of the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with Ukraine.

Factsheet on Association Agreements:

http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-430_en.htm?locale=en
