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Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg, 23 April 2012

President

Ms Catherine Ashton

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy

P R E S S

Rue de la Loi 175 B – 1048 BRUSSELS Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 9442 / 6319 Fax: +32 (0)2 281 8026
press.office@consilium.europa.eu <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/Newsroom>

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Main results of the Council

*The Council expressed its respect and appreciation for the historic changes in **Myanmar/Burma** over the past year. As a means to welcome and encourage the reform process, the Council agreed to suspend EU restrictive measures on the government, with the exception of the arms embargo. The Council will shortly adopt legal acts to that effect.*

*The Council discussed **Syria** and welcomed the UN Security Council resolution establishing a UN supervision mission to monitor the cessation of armed violence. It strongly urged the Syrian government to allow the effective operation of the mission and reaffirmed its full support to Special Envoy Kofi Annan and his six-point plan. In view of the gravity of the situation, the Council approved further sanctions against the Syrian regime.*

The Council also discussed recent events in several African countries:

*It expressed support for the efforts of ECOWAS to restore constitutional order in **Mali** and the EU's intention to closely monitor progress in the transition process. It confirmed the importance of accelerated implementation of the EU strategy for security and development in the Sahel and the deployment of the proposed civilian CSDP mission to Niger.*

*The Council also expressed its deep concern about the escalating conflict between **Sudan and South Sudan** and called on both governments to stop attacks on each other's territory and cease hostilities.*

*Finally, the Council strongly condemned the coup d'état in **Guinea-Bissau**. It demanded the immediate reestablishment of the legitimate government and showed itself ready to impose restrictive measures against individuals who engage in acts that threaten the peace, security and stability of Guinea-Bissau.*

*During lunch, ministers debated the **Middle East Peace Process** and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory as well as the talks with **Iran** on its nuclear programme, led by the EU High Representative.*

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¹ Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

PARTICIPANTS

High Representative

Ms Catherine ASHTON

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Belgium:

Mr Didier REYNDERS

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign, External Trade and European Affairs

Bulgaria:

Mr Ivan NAYDENOV

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Karel SCHWARZENBERG

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark:

Mr Villy SØVNDAL

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

Mr Michael LINK

State Minister of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ireland:

Mr Eamon GILMORE

Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Greece:

Mr Dimitris DOLLIS

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr José Manuel GARCÍA-MARGALLO MARFIL

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

France:

Mr Henri de RAINCOURT

Minister with responsibility for Cooperation, attached to the Ministre d'État, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

Italy:

Ms Marta DASSU'

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

Ms Erato KOZAKOU-MARCOULLIS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Edgars RINKĒVIČS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Audronius AŽUBALIS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg:

Mr Jean ASSELBORN

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Hungary:

Mr Zsolt NÉMETH

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Malta:

Mr Tonio BORG

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Netherlands:

Mr Pieter de GOOIJER

Permanent Representative

Austria:

Mr Michael SPINDELEGGER

Vice Chancellor, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Poland:

Mr Radosław SIKORSKI

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Portugal:

Mr Miguel MORAIS LEITÃO

State Secretary attached to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, with responsibility for European Affairs

Romania:

Ms Luminita ODOBESCU

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Karl Viktor ERJAVEC

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Miroslav LAJČÁK

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Erkki TUOMIOJA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Sweden:

Mr Carl BILDT

Minister for Foreign Affairs

United Kingdom:

Mr William HAGUE

First Secretary of State, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Commission:

Mr Štefan FÜLE

Member

Mr Andris PIEBALGS

Member

The Government of the Acceding State was represented as follows:

Croatia:

Ms Vesna PUSIĆ

Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

ITEMS DEBATED

Burma/Myanmar

The Council held an in-depth discussion of the situation in Burma/Myanmar. It adopted the following conclusions:

1. "The European Union has followed with respect and appreciation the historic changes in Myanmar/Burma over the past year and encourages the wide-ranging reforms to continue under President U Thein Sein, the Government and the Parliament, in a developing partnership with political and civil society actors, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. These reforms will need time to implement and to bear fruit. The foundation for development is legitimate government, the rule of law and national reconciliation. The EU praises the peaceful nature of the process and the readiness of the parties to work towards the same goals, with a shared vision for political, social and economic reforms.
2. It also welcomes the concrete steps taken towards these ends:
 - the overall transparent and credible conduct of the by-elections on 1 April, resulting in the election of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and members of the National League for Democracy party, which will support steps towards national reconciliation;
 - the progress on changes in law and practice to enable freedom of assembly and of association and to eliminate the use of forced labour;
 - the release of a substantial number of political prisoners and the Government's willingness to work on open cases;
 - the Government's efforts to conclude cease-fire arrangements with armed groups in the ethnic regions, in particular with Karen National Union, and its readiness to look towards wider and more durable political settlements.
3. These and other unprecedented developments allow the EU to open a new chapter in its relations with Myanmar/Burma. The Council therefore welcomes the upcoming official visit of the High Representative to the country, marking a new beginning in bilateral relations, as highlighted by the opening of an EU Office in Yangon.

As a means to welcome and encourage the reform process, the Council will suspend restrictive measures imposed on the Government, with the exception of the arms embargo, which it will retain. The Council will monitor closely the situation on the ground, keep its measures under constant review and respond positively to progress on ongoing reforms.

4. In this regard, the EU still expects the unconditional release of remaining political prisoners and the removal of all restrictions placed on those already released. It looks forward to the end of conflict and to substantially improved access for humanitarian assistance, in particular for those affected by conflict in Kachin State and along the Eastern border, as well as to addressing the status and improving the welfare of the Rohingyas.
5. The EU wants now to enter into an active collaboration with Myanmar/Burma as a whole, with a view to assisting the reform process and contributing to economic, political and social development.
6. On the basis of the discussion the EU Development Ministers will have in May, the EU will continue to engage in a dialogue and cooperation with the authorities and other stakeholders, including in the following areas:
 - the EU looks forward to collaborating with the central and local authorities and others concerned to support the process of bringing peace and stability to ethnic regions and to open a long-term perspective for their development, as part of national reconciliation;
 - the EU and its Member States have announced significant new funding for economic and social development, democratic transformation and the strengthening of civil society and the public administration's capacity at central and regional level, in order to help improve governance and to establish an effective administration in a democratic and inclusive state;
 - the EU stands ready to assist all actors in their endeavour to strengthen the rule of law and the respect for human rights. In this regard, the EU looks forward to working with the legislature and the national Human Rights Commission. The EU will also work with the authorities, including the Election Commission, in reviewing the electoral system with a view to the general elections in 2015.

In all these areas, donor coordination will be important and the EU looks to the Myanmar/Burma authorities to show leadership in this, fostering a wide-ranging consultation with all stakeholders, including political parties, regional authorities and civil society, applying principles such as participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability. This will be discussed at the next Foreign Affairs Council/Development.

7. The EU recognises the vital contribution the private sector has to make to the development of Myanmar/Burma and would welcome European companies exploring trade and investment opportunities. This should be done by promoting the practice of the highest standards of integrity and corporate social responsibility. These are laid out in the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, UN guiding principles on business and human rights and the EU's own CSR strategy 2011-2014. The EU will work with the authorities, the private sector and the people of Myanmar/Burma to create the best possible regulatory environment.
8. The Council supports reinstating the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for Myanmar/Burma as soon as possible once the required conditions are fulfilled, following the assessment of the International Labour Organisation.
9. The EU also welcomes the willingness of the Government to address environmental risks, in particular those related to deforestation and the loss of biodiversity. It therefore encourages the Government to begin a dialogue with the EU on ways to ensure the sustainable management of Myanmar/Burma's forests and harvesting of timber in compliance with national legislation, consistent with fighting poverty and securing livelihoods. It will work with the authorities to promote transparency and accountability in extractive industries as well as in environmental protection, in particular through Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT).
10. The EU now looks forward to a future in which it will be able to collaborate constructively with the Government and the people of Myanmar/Burma to foster unity and build prosperity."

Afghanistan

Ahead of the NATO Summit on 20/21 May in Chicago, the Council exchanged views on the EU approach to Afghanistan. This debate will feed into another exchange and the adoption of conclusions scheduled for the next Council meeting on 14 May.