



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

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At its meeting on 23 January 2012, the Council adopted Council Conclusions set out in the Annex to this note.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

on

Burma/Myanmar

1. The Council welcomes the remarkable programme of political reform undertaken by the Government and Parliament in Burma/Myanmar, together with its commitment to economic and social development. These changes are opening up important new prospects for developing the relationship between the European Union and Burma/Myanmar. The EU stands ready to respond accordingly.
2. The EU considers that the recent release of a substantial number of political prisoners marks a crucial step forward and clearly shows the determination of the Government to continue on the path of reform.

The Council also welcomes the Government's efforts to seek peace with ethnic groups; the legislation permitting trade union activity, establishing freedom of assembly and loosening censorship of the media; as well as the creation of a Human Rights Commission. These elements are essential steps towards establishing a democratic state under the rule of law.

3. The Council welcomes the dialogue between President U Thein Sein and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the changes to the Electoral Law adopted by the Parliament. The Council is pleased by the NLD's decision to register as a political party and, together with other parties, contest the by-elections on 1 April. The EU attaches particular importance to the free and fair conduct of these elections.
4. The EU welcomes the resolve by the Government to engage with ethnic groups through an inclusive political process, thus bringing to an end the armed conflicts in the country, including the recently concluded cease-fire with the Karen National Union. The Council underlines the need for all actors concerned to establish a credible and sustained process for handling the difficult issues involved in securing long-term peace and national reconciliation. It stresses the importance of improved humanitarian access, especially to areas affected by ethnic conflicts.
5. The Council notes the commitment by the Government to continue and complete these reforms, notably by the unconditional release of the remaining political prisoners within the next few months and by the free and fair conduct of the by-elections. The Council also welcomes the Government's continued commitment to credibly addressing the ethnic conflicts through an inclusive political process. The Council confirms that the ongoing reform process has already led to improved relations between the EU and Burma/Myanmar and that this, together with meeting the above mentioned expectations, would lead to the further easing or lifting of the restrictive measures, in the Council's Decision by the end of April. The Council decides, as a first step, that restrictive measures (visa ban) concerning the President, the vice-Presidents, cabinet members and the Speakers of the two Houses of Parliament should be suspended and mandates relevant working groups to implement it, and to consider further steps. A further review of the Council's Decision imposing restrictive measures is ongoing.

6. The European Union wishes to assist Burma/Myanmar in advancing reforms. It will promote economic development through increases in assistance to reduce poverty and build capacity, and through strengthened sectoral dialogue with the Government. The EU invites progressive engagement by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to support Burma/Myanmar in developing its strategy. The EU stands ready to back the peace processes with the ethnic groups, for example through financial assistance for the process of the reintegration of returnees. The Council looks forward to a visit by the High Representative to the country. It also reaffirms its full support for her decision to open an EU Office in Yangon and looks forward to its early opening.
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