



Council of the European Union

PRESS
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BACKGROUND¹
Brussels, 20 May 2016

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Monday 23 May in Brussels

The Council, starting at 11.45, will be chaired by Federica Mogherini, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. It will be preceded by the annual **Eastern Partnership ministerial meeting** formally beginning at 9.00.

The Council will start with a debate on the EU's regional strategy for **Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat**. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions.

Over **lunch**, ministers will discuss the **EU global strategy** on foreign and security policy.

The Council will then discuss the **external aspects of migration** and is expected to adopt conclusions.

Under any other business, the Council is expected to touch upon the situation of **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** as well as in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**.

Press opportunities on Monday 23 May:

+/- 08.55	Doorstep statement by High Representative F. Mogherini
+/- 17.30	Press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council

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Press conferences and public events by video streaming: <http://video.consilium.europa.eu>

Video coverage in broadcast quality (MPEG4) and photo gallery on: www.eucouncil.tv

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

EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat

Ministers will review the **implementation** of the EU's regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat. The strategy was adopted by the Council on 16 March 2015. It outlines actions to be undertaken by the EU and its member states to help restore peace and security in Syria and Iraq and provides guidance in dealing with the threat of Da'esh.

Ministers will discuss the implementation of the main chapters of the EU strategy and the impact of ongoing humanitarian and stabilisation efforts. The Council is expected to adopt **conclusions** outlining its priorities in working to achieve lasting peace, stability, security in Syria, Iraq and the wider region and ending the suffering of the people of Syria and Iraq. The conclusions are also intended to outline ways in which the implementation of the strategy should adapt to respond to the change of circumstances since March 2015.

Da'esh poses a clear threat to the people of Syria, Iraq and other countries in the region, as well as Europe and beyond. It has sponsored terrorist attacks on European soil and against EU citizens overseas. The EU works actively to **uproot the organisation inside Syria and Iraq** by denying it access to funds, fighters and resources. The EU supports the efforts of the global coalition to counter Da'esh. In addition, the EU has stepped up its counter-terrorism engagement with countries affected by Da'esh in North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey and the Western Balkans. The EU has also engaged in activities to counter Da'esh's ideological influence. The Council is expected to reaffirm the EU determination to tackle the threat posed by Da'esh and its violent ideology, and to further enhance its counter-terrorism action, coordinating both the external and internal aspects.

Ministers will also discuss support to the political process and democratic governance in both Syria and Iraq as an essential element in defeating Da'esh.

The EU is actively supports a process leading to a credible and inclusive **political transition in Syria**. The High Representative Federica Mogherini is representing the EU in the International Syria Support Group. The Council is expected to welcome the outcome reached at the Group's ministerial meeting in Vienna on 17 May 2016. The EU has also stepped up its humanitarian diplomacy, helping to reach almost 800 000 Syrians in besieged and hard to reach areas in 2016.

In **Iraq**, the global coalition against Da'esh has made significant progress. The Council is expected to reaffirm its support to the **stabilisation** process of liberated areas. The EU is also determine to support the government's efforts to **achieve reform, inclusive governance and reconciliation**, and to continue its support to the consolidation of democratic institutions and economic development.

The EU has substantially increased its **financial efforts** to support the regional strategy for Syria and Iraq and the Da'esh threat and its main objectives.

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, the EU and its member states have mobilised EUR 6.4 billion to address its causes and consequences at regional level. At the London conference in February 2016, the EU and its member states made nearly two third of the 2016 pledges, including a further EUR 2.39 billion from the EU budget to assist the Syrian people for the period 2016-2017.

Previously, the European Commission had established in 2014 the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis, the "Madad Fund" that has now reached a funding of EUR 730 million in contributions from the EU budget, from 21 member states and from Turkey. The trust fund will notably finance actions in support to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq with a focus on increased access of refugees to education, training, livelihoods and healthcare. In addition, the facility for refugees in Turkey provides a mechanism to coordinate contributions from member states and the EU budget amounting to EU 3 billion.

[EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/ Da'esh threat](#)

[Response to foreign terrorist fighters and recent terrorist attacks in Europe](#)

EU global strategy

Over lunch, ministers will have an informal discussion on the future EU global strategy on foreign and security policy. This strategy is intended to guide the European Union's foreign and security policy in the coming years.

[EU global strategy on foreign and security policy](#)

External aspects of migration

The Council will take stock of recent developments related to the external aspects of migration. Ministers will notably be invited to provide their views on how to further **strengthen cooperation with the countries of origin and transit**. The EU integrated the migration issue as a permanent component of its foreign policy based on the EU agenda on migration. It stepped up its engagement and has strengthened its cooperation with third countries on migration, at both bilateral and multilateral levels. Ministers will take stock of the progress achieved in this regard.

The Council is expected to adopt **conclusions on the external aspects of migration**.

The discussion follows a debate by ministers for development held at the Foreign Affairs Council (Development) of 12 May. Development ministers reviewed the implementation of the Valletta action plan, six months after its adoption. They took note of the state of play of the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa: projects worth more than EUR 750 million in support of the Sahel and Lake Chad regions, as well as the Horn of Africa have already been approved.

Foreign affairs ministers are expected to focus their discussion on the state of play of **high-level dialogues** on migration with partner countries to better cooperate on the management of migration flows.

Ministers are also expected to look at the **implementation of the EU-Turkey statement from March 2016**, and to stress their commitment in tackling the migration challenge in a collective way. On 18 March 2016, EU heads of state or government held a meeting with Turkey to strengthen their cooperation on the migration and refugee crisis. The two sides agreed that Turkey would take back all migrants and refugees, including Syrians, who reach Greece illegally by sea. For every Syrian refugee returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian refugee will be resettled from Turkey to the EU. The resettlement process is carried out with the support of UNHCR.

Ministers may also touch upon **CSDP missions** currently ongoing and contributing to fighting human smugglers and traffickers. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia (see below "other items"). The EU is currently conducting two civilian missions in the Sahel region, EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUCAP Sahel Mali, which support national authorities in strengthening their security capabilities and stabilising the region. EUCAP Sahel Niger notably supports the Nigerian authorities in preventing irregular immigration and combatting associated crimes. It has recently been reinforced by the opening a field office in early 2016 in Agadez, a major trafficking hub on the road to Libya. In addition, the military training mission EUTM Mali, which supports the restoration of Malian territorial integrity and the implementation of structural reforms, was prolonged in March 2016 by two years until May 2018.

[Finding solutions to migratory pressures](#)

Any other business

former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Ministers are expected to touch upon the political situation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

[Joint statement by High Representative Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Johannes Hahn on the latest developments in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)

[EU relations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia \(EEAS website\)](#)

Democratic Republic of Congo

Ministers are expected to touch upon the political situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Council is due to adopt conclusions on the Democratic Republic of Congo (see below, "other items").

Other items

The Council is due to take a number of decisions without discussion, including:

EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the agreement reached by the Political and Security Committee on 12 May to extend the mandate of EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia by one year and, while retaining the focus on its core mandate, to add two further supporting tasks:

- capacity building and training of, and information sharing with, the Libyan Coastguard and Navy, based on a request by the legitimate Libyan authorities taking into account the need for Libyan ownership;
- contributing to information sharing, as well as implementation of the UN arms embargo on the high seas off the coast of Libya on the basis of a new UN Security Council Resolution.

A Council decision will be required to extend and amend the operation's mandate and start the implementation of the new tasks.

Since the operation had moved to phase 2 at high seas which enables the identification, capture and disposal of vessels used or suspected of being used by migrants' smugglers or traffickers, it has contributed to the arrest and transfer to the Italian authorities 69 suspected smugglers and traffickers. The operation has also neutralised 114 vessels and contributed to the neutralisation of a further 208 assets. In addition the operation has helped save close to 14 000 lives so far. The Council is expected to commend the role of the operation and of member states in this regard.

[Statement by the High Representative on EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia of 13 May 2016](#)
[EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia](#)

South Sudan

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions following the formation of a transitional government of national unity in South Sudan on 29 April 2016. The EU is expected to encourage the transitional government to take swift and decisive steps to restore peace and stability in the country and to move forward promptly with implementation of the 2015 agreement on the resolution of the conflict in South Sudan.

[EU relations with South Sudan \(EEAS website\)](#)

Democratic Republic of Congo

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is expected to call the government and all relevant parties to create the necessary conditions for the holding of free, transparent and peaceful elections, in line with the constitution and as requested by UN Security Council resolution 2277. It will also remind those responsible for human rights violations that they will be held accountable.

[EU relations with the Democratic Republic of Congo \(EEAS website\)](#)

In the margins of the Council

Eastern Partnership ministerial meeting

Before the Council, EU Foreign Affairs ministers will meet their counterparts from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine for the 7th annual Eastern Partnership ministerial meeting. The meeting will be chaired by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini.

This meeting will provide the opportunity to take stock of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) one year after the fourth Eastern Partnership Summit held in Riga on 21-22 May 2015. Ministers will discuss how to advance the cooperation agenda agreed in Riga, how to maintain steady progress in reforms and the contribution of the EaP to stability in the region.

The EaP Summit reconfirmed the strategic importance the EU attaches to the EaP and demonstrated strong engagement and a firm determination to pursue closer, tailor-made relations with the six partner countries. Since then, and with a view to the next EaP Summit in 2017, cooperation in the EaP has been focusing on the implementation of commitments across the key areas of cooperation agreed at Riga, namely the strengthening of institutions and good governance; mobility and people-to-people contacts; taking advantage of market opportunities; and enhancing interconnections, notably in the areas of transport and energy. The EU has continued consolidating its differentiated and tailor-made relations with each of the EaP partners, as also provided for by the European Neighbourhood Policy review, which has a particular focus on stability.

Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova signed association agreements with the EU, including deep and comprehensive free trade areas (DCFTAs), in June 2014. Provisional application of these agreements began in the autumn of 2014, except for the DCFTA part of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, which is provisionally applied as of 1 January 2016.

The EU and Armenia recently opened negotiations on a new framework agreement for deepening bilateral relations. A mandate for negotiations of a new framework agreement with Azerbaijan is under preparation. Recognising positive developments in Belarus, the EU decided in February 2016 not to prolong most of its restrictive measures and is implementing several measures aimed at enhancing cooperation. Tangible steps by Belarus to respect democracy and human rights will continue to be necessary for the shaping of the EU's future policy towards this country.

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine participate with the EU in the EaP, which was launched in 2009. It sets out to promote political association and economic integration with the EU, as well as multilateral dialogue and cooperation among the EaP countries. It is based on the common values of democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights and freedoms, and commitment to market economy principles.

[December 2015 Council conclusions on review of the European Neighbourhood Policy](#)

[Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit \(Riga, 21-22 May 2015\)](#)

[Eastern Partnership \(Council website\)](#)

[EU Relations with Eastern Partnership \(EEAS website\)](#)

[Fact sheet on EU-Armenia relations](#)

[Fact sheet on EU-Azerbaijan relations](#)

[Fact sheet on EU-Belarus relations](#)

[Fact sheet on EU-Georgia relations](#)

[Fact sheet on EU-Republic of Moldova relations](#)

[Fact sheet on EU-Ukraine relations](#)