



FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council

16 March 2015 in Brussels

The Council will start at 10.00, chaired by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini.

The Council will begin with a strategic and comprehensive debate on **EU relations with Africa**. Ministers will then take stock of UN-brokered talks between parties in **Libya** and discuss options for further EU engagement.

Over lunch, ministers will discuss how EU foreign policy can contribute to tackling Europe's **migration** challenges, with Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship.

In the afternoon, the Council will exchange views on the preparation for the **Eastern Partnership summit** in Riga on 21-22 May 2015.

The Council is also expected to take a decision on an **EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Da'esh threat** and launch a military advisory mission in the **Central African Republic**.

The **EU-Moldova Association Council** will take place at 18.00 (TV/photo opportunity), chaired by Moldovan Prime Minister Chiril Gaburici. Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs will lead the EU delegation.

The **EU-Tunisia Association Council** will be presided by High Representative Federica Mogherini, starting on 17 March at 9.00 (TV/photo opportunity). At 9.45, a protocol enabling the participation of Tunisia in EU programmes will be signed (TV/photo opportunity). Foreign Minister Taieb Baccouche will head the Tunisian delegation.

<u>Press conferences:</u>	16 March at +/- 16.30	Foreign Affairs Council
	16 March at +/- 19.20	EU-Moldova Association Council
	17 March at +/- 11.05	EU-Tunisia Association 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

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

Africa

The Council will hold an in-depth discussion on EU relations with Africa, covering peace and security, prosperity and partnership with regional African organisations. In addition, it will adopt conclusions on Burundi, Mali, Ebola and approve an EU Gulf of Guinea action plan.

The EU has two top priorities in Africa: to promote peace and security through the prevention of conflict and terrorism and to accelerate sustainable growth and development. Partnership with Africa is essential in achieving these objectives.

Peace and security

The Council is set to discuss how the EU can best support Africa's own efforts to prevent conflict and combat terrorism.

The EU contributes to peace and security in Africa through a variety of actions, in partnership with member states, African governments and regional organisations. It acts diplomatically through EU Special Representatives for the Horn of Africa and the Sahel as well as the EU delegations. Under the Common Security and Defence Policy, five civilian missions and four military crisis management operations concretely support security and stability in Africa. The Council will also launch an additional military advisory mission in the Central African Republic (see below).

The African Peace Facility is another element of the EU's efforts in this area. Since 2004, it has contributed more than €1.2 billion to help finance ongoing Africa-led peace support operations. For the period from 2014 to 2016, €750 million have been allocated to the African Peace Facility.

Work is also ongoing to develop the EU's "train and equip" initiative. It sets out to enable and support countries and regional organisations to take more responsibility for their own security. Somalia and Mali have been identified as priority pilot cases, together with the strengthening of the African peace and security architecture.

Prosperity

Stimulating faster and more inclusive economic growth in Africa is critical for both poverty reduction and security reasons. It is not made any easier, though, by the decrease in commodity and energy prices and the Ebola epidemic. The EU remains Africa's largest economic partner, both for trade and investment. Between 2007 and 2012, EU imports from Africa increased by 46%. Throughout this time, the EU remained Africa's prime source of imports (34% of total African imports) as well as its main export market (40% of African exports). The EU is also Africa's largest donor. Between 2007 and 2013, the EU and its member states disbursed around €141 billion in aid to support Africa's development.

Ministers will debate how to ensure coherence between EU development policies and action to curb corruption, conflict and terrorism. They will also consider how to improve the investment climate in Africa and to encourage growth that generates jobs and reduces the incentive to migrate.

Partnership

The EU is committed to building strong partnerships with the African Union and other regional African organisations. There are many shared interests and closer cooperation is required on global issues like climate change and the post-2015 agenda for sustainable development. Ministers are due to explore what the EU can do to help African regional organisations become more effective in managing crises, improving governance and in promoting regional economic integration.

Action plan on the Gulf of Guinea

Without discussion, the Council is due to adopt an EU Gulf of Guinea action plan for 2015 to 2020. It sets out EU and member state actions in support of local efforts to combat piracy, illegal fishing and organised crime and to ensure maritime security. In doing so, the EU aims to promote the sustainable development of the economies of the coastal states.

Actions will be designed to help nations in the region build robust institutions and capabilities to ensure maritime awareness, security and the rule of law. The EU and member states will also intervene to strengthen cooperation structures between the coastal states for mitigating the threat. Finally, building an improved common understanding of the scale of the threat will be supported as well as the prosperity and resilience of coastal communities. Some projects are already under way, for instance aid for maritime security information sharing and regional cooperation.

The action plan puts into practice the EU strategy on the Gulf of Guinea, which the Council adopted in March 2014. The European External Action Service will appoint a Senior EU Coordinator for the Gulf of Guinea to ensure the coherent implementation of both strategy and action plan.

[EU strategy on the Gulf of Guinea](#)

Burundi

In conclusions, the Council is set to encourage inclusive, peaceful and transparent elections in Burundi and call on the authorities to guarantee civil rights and freedoms. It will also voice concern about the legal prosecution of numerous opposition leaders and human rights defenders. At the same time, the Council will remind the importance of fully implementing the Arusha Accords, in particular when it comes to deciding on a third presidential mandate. The Council will urge the authorities to address this question in a spirit of reconciliation and with a view to calming down tensions. The EU will support Burundi's elections through an electoral observation mission, expected to deploy in April 2015.

Ebola

In conclusions, the Council will endorse the statement of the co-chairs of the Ebola conference that took place in Brussels on 3 March 2015. It will also invite the EU and member states to rapidly disburse their funding pledges for the fight against Ebola, reiterating its firm commitment to ending the epidemic. At the same time, the Council will call on the European External Action Service and the Commission to explore options for upgrading their response capabilities in order to prevent a repetition of this tragedy.

Mali

The Council is set to strongly condemn the recent terrorist attack in Bamako and express its deep condolences to the families of the victims that included a French national, a Belgian employee of the EU as well as Malian and Chadian citizens. The recent proliferation of violent attacks reinforces the need to reach a swift signature and conclusions of the agreement reached on 1 March in Algiers. The Council considers the draft peace agreement as a unique window of opportunity for a political solution to the crisis and will strongly urge all remaining parties to initial the text without delay. The European Union is committed to assisting in the implementation of this peace agreement with all appropriate instruments at its disposal, the Council is set to say in conclusions.

[EU relations with Africa](#)

Libya

The Council will take stock of progress in the UN-brokered political dialogue between Libyan parties. Ministers will also discuss preparations for EU support to a possible positive outcome of the talks. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions.

The EU fully supports the efforts of UN Special Representative Bernardino León to secure a negotiated settlement and an end to fighting. It has funded the talks in Rabat, which are expected to resume in the near future, and is willing to contribute to the confidence building measures agreed in Geneva. On 9 March, the EU also hosted a meeting of business leaders from across Libya, where they decided to establish "The Libyan Union for Libyan Businessmen".

For the EU, there is no military solution to the conflict. Only a political solution can provide a sustainable way forward and contribute to peace and stability in Libya. The EU has also strongly

condemned the ongoing violence, the human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law committed in Libya.

In February, the Council reiterated the EU's readiness to introduce, as soon as necessary, restrictive measures against the spoilers of the dialogue process in line with UN Security Council resolution 2174 (2014). It said: "Those responsible for violence and those who obstruct or undermine Libya's democratic transition must face consequences for their actions."

The Council adapted EU sanctions to UN Security Council resolution 2174 (2014) on 6 March 2015. That paves the way for imposing asset freeze and travel bans on persons and entities involved in acts that threaten the peace, stability or security of Libya, or obstruct the political transition. No persons and entities have been targeted at this stage. Any such decisions will be taken in full coordination with the UN Special Representative.

Overall EU support to Libya stands at €50 million, with emphasis on humanitarian aid, migration, internally displaced people and support to civil society.

[Council conclusions on Libya, 9 February 2015](#)

Migration

Over lunch, ministers will discuss how EU foreign policy can contribute to comprehensively tackling Europe's migration challenges.

This will be a first discussion where ministers are due to explore potential EU actions in three strands:

- intensifying cooperation with countries along routes of migration and human trafficking,
- stepping up efforts to protect refugees, both in countries of origin and neighbouring countries, and
- enhancing the potential of regular well-managed migration.

This debate will feed into the preparation of more concrete proposals that can be decided at one of the next Foreign Affairs Councils.

[Preventing and fighting illegal migration](#)

Eastern Partnership

The Council will discuss preparations for the fourth Eastern Partnership summit that will take place in Riga on 21-22 May 2015. The summit, chaired by European Council President Donald Tusk, will bring EU Heads of State or Government together with those of Eastern partner countries.

The summit will take stock of the implementation of the three Association Agreements/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements, which were signed in June 2014 in Brussels. It is intended to develop, strengthen and differentiate relations with the six partners.

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine participate in the Eastern Partnership (EaP), launched in 2009. It sets out to promote political association and economic integration in 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 the commitment to a market economy. In 2014, the EU supported the Eastern Partnership with a budget of €730 million.

A meeting between EU foreign ministers and their counterparts from the Eastern Partnership countries is scheduled to take place in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council on 20 April 2015.

Other items

The Council is expected to take a number of decisions without discussion ("A-items"):

Regional strategy on Iraq and Syria and the ISIL/Da'esh threat

A vast array of actions, from diplomatic engagement, humanitarian aid, to anti-radicalisation programmes and border management projects, has been proposed in a joint communication on 6 February. The specific counter-terrorism/foreign fighters strategy for Syria and Iraq endorsed by the Foreign Affairs Council on 20 October 2014 is an integral part of this comprehensive effort. For the years 2015 and 2016, the Commission has allocated €1 billion to the implementation of the strategy. In addition to that, the Council will make every effort to mobilise adequate assistance from member states.

The strategy outlines how the EU and member states are planning to counter the threat posed by ISIL/Da'esh and help restore peace and security in Syria and Iraq. The EU aims at a comprehensive effort to address the underlying dynamics of the conflicts, through diplomacy and support for political reforms, economic development and reconciliation between different ethnic groups.

Among the actions are intensified diplomacy with regional actors, support to enhanced border security and reinforcing the resilience of Lebanon and other neighbours against spill-over effects of the crisis, for instance through security sector reform. The Council will reiterate the need for a Syrian-led process leading to a political transition and support efforts to unite the moderate opposition behind a common strategy. The Union will also assist the Iraqi government in making inclusiveness a reality and foster national reconciliation and economic development in the country. Moreover, the EU will continue providing humanitarian aid to the more than 17 million people in need in the region. Together with member states, the EU remains the leading donor in response to the Syrian crisis, with more than €3.2 billion allocated.

[Joint communication on elements for an EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat](#)

[Outline of the counter-terrorism/foreign fighters strategy for Syria and Iraq](#)

[Factsheet European Union and Syria](#)

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Council is set to welcome written reform commitments by Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), in line with an EU initiative in December 2014. The High Representative will recommend that the EU let the Stabilization and Association Agreement with BiH enter into force. This accord advances the country on its path towards the EU. For a membership application to be considered by the EU, however, meaningful progress on the implementation of reforms will be necessary.

Legal procedures will be launched shortly after the Foreign Affairs Council and are expected to take a few weeks. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement will enter into force two months after the Council has adopted the formal decision.

[Council conclusions on Bosnia and Herzegovina, 15 December 2014](#)

EU military advisory mission in the Central African Republic

The Council will launch the EU military advisory mission in the Central African Republic (EUMAM RCA). The mission sets out to support the Central African authorities in preparing a reform of the security sector, especially with respect to the management of the armed forces of the Central African Republic (CAR). It will advise on a military training programme and the reforms necessary to make the CAR armed forces a professional army, democratically accountable and representative of the entire nation. The mission comes in the wake of the EU military operation contributing to security in Bangui, EUFOR RCA, which wraps up its mandate on 15 March 2015.

[More information on EUMAM RCA](#)

In the margin of the Foreign Affairs Council

EU-Moldova Association Council

This will be the first meeting of the EU-Moldova Association Council, after the provisional application of the Association Agreement has started on 1 September 2014.

The meeting will be dedicated to discussions about the implementation of the accord, including on trade matters. A political dialogue will in particular look at the situation in Moldova: the EU will encourage the new Moldovan government to step up reform efforts in the justice and financial sector as well as the fight against corruption.

The Union has significantly increased its support for Moldova. For the four years between 2014 to 2017, up to €410 million are available for the country, depending on progress in key sectorial and cross-cutting reforms.

The meeting will also take stock of the Transnistrian issue. For the EU, efforts for a comprehensive and peaceful settlement of the conflict must be intensified, based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova with a special status for Transnistria.

EU-Tunisia Association Council

The EU-Tunisia Association Council will review the state of play in the bilateral relationship.

The EU has congratulated Tunisia on holding free, credible and transparent elections. It has provided considerable support to the electoral process in 2014 and is ready to assist with the upcoming local and regional elections.

The 28-nation bloc aims to support the new authorities in their reform efforts, and to strengthen relations with Tunisia across the board (political, economic, people to people, trade, security, migration), thus intensifying the EU-Tunisia privileged partnership. The EU will, in this context, reiterate its proposal to launch the negotiations for a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement.

The two sides will also discuss intensified cooperation in the fight against terrorism. This could take the form of a dedicated political dialogue on the issue as well as concrete projects to combat terrorism, prevent radicalisation and address the issue of foreign fighters.

The EU has kept up its substantial financial support for Tunisia, with €200 million from the European neighbourhood policy instrument in 2014 alone. For the years 2014 and 2015, the EU intends to support in particular socio-economic reforms, the consolidation of democracy and regional and local development in Tunisia.
