

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL and FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL (Development)

11 December 2017

The Foreign Affairs Council, chaired by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, will start with a review of the pressing issues on the international agenda. The High Representative and foreign ministers may touch upon the situations in North Korea, in Zimbabwe and Myanmar/Burma, the establishment of the EU/AU/UN Task Force to help migrants and the follow up on the Eastern Partnership summit.

The Council will have a debate on the latest developments in the wider **Middle East** region. It will discuss how the EU can help further contribute to preserving stability in the region, in particular in Lebanon, and how to prevent a further escalation of the crisis in Yemen.

The Council will discuss the situation in **Iraq** to guide the preparation of the new EU strategy for engagement with Iraq. The High Representative and the Commission are expected to present the new strategy in January.

The Council is expected to adopt a number of decisions and conclusions without debate, including the Council decision establishing **Permanent Structured Cooperation** (PESCO), and Council conclusions on **Thailand** and **the Democratic Republic of Congo**.

Foreign ministers will discuss **EU-G5 Sahel cooperation** over lunch with their counterparts from the Sahel G5 (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad).

Foreign ministers and development ministers will then have a joint session to discuss the follow-up to the African Union - European Union summit of 29 and 30 November in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire).

The Foreign Affairs Council (development) will then meet. Development ministers will exchange views on how **trade and investment** can contribute to development policies. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the subject with the aim of updating the joint EU strategy on aid for trade.

In the margins of the Council meeting, EU foreign ministers and the High Representative will have an informal breakfast with **Benjamin Netanyahu**, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel. They will discuss the Middle East Peace Process, bilateral relations and regional developments.

Press opportunities:

+/- 7.50 (tbc) Doorstep by High Representative F. Mogherini

+/- 13.30 Press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council

+/- 17.30 Doorstep by High Representative F. Mogherini following the Foreign Affairs Council (development)

[Press conferences and public events via video streaming](#)

[Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery](#)

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

Current affairs

The Foreign Affairs Council will start with a review of the pressing issues on the international agenda. The High Representative and foreign ministers may touch upon the situations in North Korea, in Zimbabwe and in Myanmar/Burma, the establishment of the EU/AU/UN Task Force to help migrants and follow up on the Eastern Partnership summit. The Eastern Partnership summit took place on 24 November 2017.

[African Union-European Union summit - Joint statement on the migrant situation in Libya](#)

[Statement by the Spokesperson on today's missile launch by the DPRK \(28/11/2017\) and read out of High Representative Federica Mogherini discussion with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea Kang Kyung-wha \(1/12/17\)](#)

[Statement by the High Representative Federica Mogherini on the situation in Zimbabwe, 21/11/17](#)

[Statement by High Representative Federica Mogherini on the signing of a bilateral repatriation agreement between the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh, 23/11/17](#) and [ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, 20-21/11/2017](#)

[Eastern Partnership Summit 24/11/17](#)

Middle East

The Council will have a debate on the latest developments in the broader Middle East.

Ministers will discuss how the EU can further contribute to preserving and fostering stability in the region. The EU continues to support the stability of Lebanon and considers it key to build on Lebanon's consensual achievements, in particular the new electoral law, an agreed budget; institutional functioning and holding of elections as scheduled next year.

Ministers may touch upon recent developments in Yemen, where the world's gravest humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding and in view of the recent escalation witnessed in the country. The EU has called on many occasions to re-invigorate UN-led efforts towards a political solution to the conflict in Yemen, in line with relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

In the discussion, ministers may also mention the situation in Syria, in particular to discuss ways to further support UN Special Envoy de Mistura. The EU will host a second Brussels conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region in the spring to show renewed international solidarity and support. The EU continues to support the UN-led Geneva process and considers it remains essential for finding a negotiated political solution in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 2254.

Finally, it can be expected that ministers will discuss consequences of the US President's announcement on 6 December regarding the status of Jerusalem, and its implications for the Middle East peace process and regional stability. In her reaction, the High Representative expressed the EU's serious concern about the announcement and the repercussions this may have on the prospect of peace. She confirmed that the EU position remains unchanged: The aspirations of both parties must be fulfilled and a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both states. She has also called on all actors on the ground and in the wider region to show calm and restraint in order to prevent any escalation.

[Statement by High Representative Federica Mogherini on the announcement by US President Trump on Jerusalem, 6 December 2017](#)

[Statement by the High Representative F. Mogherini on the situation in Yemen, 21 November 2017](#)

[High Representative Federica Mogherini met with Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil today in Brussels](#)

[Statement by the High Representative Federica Mogherini on the Conference of the Syrian Opposition in Riyadh](#)

Iraq

Ministers will discuss the situation in Iraq to guide the preparation of the new EU strategy for engagement with Iraq. The High Representative and the Commission are expected to present the new strategy in January 2018.

Iraq has suffered decades of violence and armed conflict. The successful campaign to defeat Da'esh has placed the country at a crossroads. Stability in Iraq is essential for the stability of the region and is in the EU's interest. The EU will continue to be a long-term partner of Iraq, cooperating in the fields of stabilisation, security and the political and economic reform agenda.

Ministers are expected to touch upon recent events in and around the Kurdistan region of Iraq, where the EU has encouraged restraint and dialogue on several occasions, based on the Iraqi constitutional framework.

The Council adopted conclusions on Iraq in June 2017. In its conclusions, the Council commended the Iraqi Government of Prime Minister al-Abadi and the Iraqi security forces for the significant advances they had made in the military campaign against Da'esh over the preceding months. It also reiterated its steadfast support for Iraq's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Council emphasised the importance of an inclusive process of reconciliation both at national and local level, and the need to make tangible progress on political reforms to enable full national reconciliation. The EU had expressed its highest concern about the humanitarian situation in Iraq, and remained fully engaged through its humanitarian assistance. Since 2015, the EU has contributed a total of € 350 million of humanitarian assistance to Iraq, including € 82.5 million in 2017.

The EU underscored the importance of security and the rule of law for stability in the liberated areas and across the whole country. It is essential that security agencies improve their relations with the civilian population. In this context, the Council launched in October 2017 a civilian CSDP mission focusing on assisting the Iraqi authorities in the implementation of the civilian aspects of the Iraqi national security strategy.

[Council conclusions on Iraq, 19 June 2017](#)

[Iraq: Council launches a civilian CSDP mission to support security sector reform](#)

Sahel G5 cooperation

Over lunch foreign ministers will discuss EU-G5 Sahel cooperation with their counterparts from the Sahel G5 (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad), together with the United Nations and African Union. This invitation follows a ministerial meeting which took place on 28 November in Abidjan in the margins of the African Union-European Union summit. The exchange will contribute to the preparation of the international Sahel conference which is set to take place in early 2018.

The discussion will be the opportunity to reaffirm the EU's commitment to working with Sahel partners on common challenges, including through the contribution to the G5 Sahel Joint Force. The initiative to establish the Joint Force was welcomed by the EU as a fundamental element for stabilisation in the region, in particular in the fight against terrorism, organised cross-border crime and trafficking, including human trafficking. Together with its support through CSDP missions, the EU is mobilising € 50 million to support it.

On 19 June, the Council adopted conclusions on Mali and the Sahel. The conclusions recall that the EU has a strong integrated approach towards achieving stability in the region, including a full range of relevant instruments in the fields of diplomacy, long-term development cooperation, support to human rights, stabilisation efforts, resilience building, humanitarian assistance, and migration management and security, including CSDP missions.

[Council conclusions on Mali and the Sahel, 19 June 2017](#)

African Union - European Union summit

Foreign ministers and development ministers will discuss the follow-up to the African Union - EU summit, which took place in Côte d'Ivoire on 29 and 30 November 2017. The AU-EU summit brought together EU and African leaders to define the direction for future cooperation between the two continents. Together they adopted a joint declaration outlining common priorities for the EU-Africa partnership in four strategic areas: economic opportunities for youth, peace and security, mobility and migration, and cooperation on governance.

Leaders also adopted a joint statement on the migrant situation in Libya, condemning the inhuman treatment of migrants and refugees by criminal groups and committing to work together to end the inhuman treatment of migrants and refugees in this country.

At the summit, African and EU leaders focused on investing in youth. This is a key priority for Africa and the EU as 60% of the African population is under the age of 25. The new EU external investment plan was presented to leaders on the occasion of the summit. This investment plan intends to trigger €44 billion of investment in Africa by 2020, thereby creating new job opportunities for young people across the African continent. EU and African leaders agreed to support the mobility of students, staff and academics across the African continent. They also agreed to enhance exchange programmes between Africa and Europe, such as ERASMUS+. Leaders also agreed to strengthen the relationship between the AU and the EU in the area of peace and security and to launch a continental dialogue on migration and mobility. Regarding migration, leaders discussed how to tackle migrant smuggling and how to address jointly the root causes of irregular migration.

In the margins of the summit, the EU agreed to establish a joint migration task force with the African Union and the UN. This task force will aim to save and protect the lives of migrants and refugees, in particular in Libya, accelerate assisted voluntary returns to countries of origin and speed up the resettlement of those in need of international protection.

[African Union-European Union summit - Joint statement on the migrant situation in Libya](#)

[Fifth AU-EU Summit, 29 and 30 November 2017](#)

[EU-Africa relations \(background information\)](#)

Trade and development

Development ministers will discuss the Commission communication "Achieving prosperity through trade and investment: updating the 2007 joint EU strategy on aid for trade", presented in November 2017.

They are expected to adopt conclusions reflecting the Council's position on the updated EU strategy, which aims to improve the integration of developing countries into the international trading system and to enable trade and investment to contribute to reducing poverty.

The initial "aid for trade" strategy was adopted in October 2007 in response to the WTO-led initiative of the same name. The updated strategy follows up on and reflects the policy priorities of the UN's 2030 agenda on sustainable development adopted in September 2015 and the European consensus on development endorsed by the EU and its member states in June 2017. The main objectives of the revision are to improve complementarity between trade and development policies and to increase the effectiveness of the strategy, enhancing allocations to the least developed countries, countries in situations of fragility and countries affected by conflict.

In particular the updated strategy aimed to increase the synergies between the array of development financing tools that the EU and its member states use to promote aid for trade; increase the impact of aid for trade programmes, through greater engagement with the private sector, civil society, and local authorities. The strategy also aim to ensure that increased trade benefits all the society, including women.

EU aid for trade complements other trade policy measures in favour of developing countries. These relate in particular to the EU's generalised scheme of preferences (GSP and GSP+ and Everything But Arms), which allows developing countries to pay less or no duty on their exports to the EU, and to bilateral trade agreements with trading partners. For example, the economic partnership agreements (EPAs) between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries create preferential trading conditions while protecting sensitive sectors of ACP economies.

The EU and its member states' aid in support of trade and productive capacities reached more than €13 billion in 2015, and almost €100 billion over the period 2008-2015. This represents a third of global aid for trade and makes the EU the biggest aid donor worldwide. In addition, an [independent study](#) on the economic benefits generated by EU trade regimes towards developing countries conducted in 2015 concluded that EU trade policy had significantly increased exports from developing countries and contributed to their economic diversification.

[Commission communication on achieving prosperity through trade and investment](#)
[2017 report of implementation of the aid for trade strategy](#)

Other items

The Council is expected to adopt a number of decisions and conclusions without debate, including the Council decision establishing **Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)**, and Council conclusions on **Thailand**, the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, and the annual report of implementation of the gender action plan.

Permanent Structured Cooperation - PESCO

The Council is expected to adopt the Council decision establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) following the notification handed over to the Council and to the High Representative on 13 November.

Member states participating in PESCO are also expected to identify initial list of 17 collaborative projects to be prepared in the PESCO framework, covering areas such as training, capabilities development and operational readiness in the field of defence.

EU leaders are expected to welcome the establishment of PESCO on the occasion of the European Council meeting of 14 December.

[Defence cooperation: 23 member states sign joint notification on the Permanent Structured Cooperation \(PESCO\)](#)

[Permanent Structured Cooperation \(factsheet\)](#) and [EU cooperation on security and defence](#)

Council conclusions on Thailand

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Thailand. It is expected to reaffirm the importance it attaches to the EU relations with Thailand. It is also set to express its appreciation of the constructive role which Thailand plays as the current country coordinator for EU-ASEAN Dialogue Relations.

The Council is due to reiterate its call for the urgent restoration of the democratic process in Thailand through credible and inclusive elections and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Political and civil rights and liberties have been severely curtailed in Thailand following the 2014 military coup. Freedom of expression and assembly remains highly restricted through a number of laws and Orders of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). Civil society activists and human rights defenders continue to face judicial harassment. The Council is due to stress the importance of such basic freedoms being restored as Thailand proceeds towards democracy.

[EU relations with Thailand](#)

Council conclusions on the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), following the announcement on 5 November of an electoral calendar. The Council is expected to state that it is fundamental, in particular for the legitimacy of the institutions in charge of the transition, to guarantee that the election date, now set for 23 December 2018, be respected.

The Council is due to condemn human rights violations and acts of harassment towards members of the political opposition, media and civil society representatives, and human rights defenders.

The Council last adopted conclusions on the DRC on 6 March 2017. The Council adopted sanctions against targeted persons on 12 December 2016 and on 29 May 2017. An EU declaration was also issued on the latter date.

[Council conclusions on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 17 October 2016](#)

[Democratic Republic of the Congo: EU adopts sanctions against a further 9 people, 29 May 2017](#)

In the margins

Informal ministerial breakfast with Israeli PM Netanyahu

In the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council, EU foreign ministers will have an informal breakfast with Prime Minister Netanyahu. They will discuss the Middle East peace process, bilateral relations and regional developments.

A similar invitation has been extended to President Abbas for the Foreign Affairs Council of 22 January 2018.

[The Middle East peace process](#)
