



FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

26 February 2018

The Foreign Affairs Council, chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, will start at 9.00 with a discussion on **current affairs**, allowing ministers to review pressing issues on the international agenda.

Foreign ministers will have an exchange of views on the **Republic of Moldova**, including the implementation of the Association Agreement, EU engagement with the Republic of Moldova and future perspectives ahead of the next parliamentary elections. They may also discuss the role of the Republic of Moldova within the Eastern Partnership and engagement in the field of security. The Council will adopt conclusions on the Republic of Moldova after the debate.

Foreign ministers will then have an exchange of views on the situation in **Venezuela**. The Council will have a discussion on the latest developments, and ahead of the Presidential elections scheduled for 22 April.

The Foreign Affairs Council will discuss the **Middle East Peace Process**, following up on previous Foreign Affairs Council meetings and the extraordinary session of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting held at ministerial level in Brussels on 31 January. The discussion will also prepare the lunch with foreign ministers, members of the Ministerial Delegation of the League of Arab States on Jerusalem, chaired by Jordan (Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, United Arab Emirates, as well as the SG of the League of Arab States).

The Council is expected to adopt a number of conclusions without debate, including on Myanmar, Cambodia and the Maldives, the special report by the European Court of Auditors: "EU support to fight human trafficking in South/South-East Asia", as well as on climate diplomacy.

Press opportunities:

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| (ttbc) | Doorstep by High Representative Federica Mogherini |
| +/- 13.00 | Welcome by the High Representative Federica Mogherini of the Foreign Ministers members of the League of Arab States Ministerial delegation on Jerusalem chaired by Jordan |
| +/- 13.20 | Press statements by High Representative Federica Mogherini and Jordan Foreign Minister Ayman Al Safadi |
| +/- 15.30 | Press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council |

[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 will follow up on the High Level Conference on the Sahel of 23 February, and may touch upon the situation in Afrin (Syria).

Republic of Moldova

Foreign ministers will have an exchange of views on the Republic of Moldova (thereafter Moldova), including the implementation of the Association Agreement, the EU engagement with Moldova and future perspectives ahead of the next parliamentary elections. They may also discuss the role of Moldova within the Eastern Partnership and engagement in the field of security. The Council will adopt conclusions on the Republic of Moldova after the debate.

In its conclusions, the Council is expected to reaffirm its **commitment to strengthening political association and economic integration between the EU and Moldova** by working in close partnership on the basis of the Association Agreement that entered into force in July 2016. The Council is due to recall that the EU remains committed to supporting progress in reforms which are needed in order to ensure that the citizens of Moldova reap the benefits of the Association Agreement, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, to the citizens of Moldova.

The Council last discussed and adopted conclusions on the Republic of Moldova on 15 February 2016. The conclusions focused on the reforms Moldova needs to carry out in line with its association agreement in order to fulfil citizens' expectations. Since then, the authorities of Moldova have adopted several legislative initiatives related to the priority reform areas identified in the Council conclusions. While acknowledging the reform steps already taken by Moldova, the Council is due to highlight that **it is crucial that the reforms started in 2016 are continued and implemented**.

Ahead of the upcoming elections, the Council is expected to express regret that the **new electoral law** did not address some of the key recommendations of the joint opinion of the Council of Europe Venice Commission and the OSCE/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, recalling that transparent, inclusive and credible elections at central and local level are of key importance.

The Council is also set to recall that **media freedom and pluralism** are prerequisites for a democratic society and, in this context, is expected to urge Moldova to pursue reforms which address the concentration of media ownership and guarantee media freedom and pluralism.

The Council is due to underline that renewed efforts should be urgently dedicated to a more decisive **fight against corruption** with tangible results that should be also accompanied by a thorough **reform of the judiciary**, including the prosecution service. The Council is due to underline that this should include thorough, impartial and comprehensive investigations and prosecutions of all those involved in the massive banking fraud that was exposed in 2014.

The framework of relations between the EU and Moldova is the Association Agreement, which provides for stronger political association and economic integration and has generated steadily growing trade between the partners. The EU's assistance supports the modernisation of Moldova through reforms for growth and jobs as well as for the respect of human rights and the strengthening of democracy. The EU has also agreed to provide macro-financial assistance to Moldova subject to the respect of precise and specific preconditions, including political preconditions. A memorandum of understanding, loan facility agreement and grant agreement for this macro-financial assistance was signed in November 2017.

[EU relations with the Republic of Moldova \(background information\)](#)

[EU-Moldova relations, Factsheet](#)

Venezuela

Foreign ministers will then have an exchange of views on the situation in Venezuela which continues to be challenging. The Council will discuss the latest developments, including the **suspension of Santo Domingo's dialogue** between the government and the opposition and the **Presidential elections** scheduled for 22 April.

The Council has followed closely the situation on Venezuela. It set out its position in conclusions which were adopted on 13 November. At the same time it agreed on an arms embargo and a framework for individual sanctions. As the situation failed to improve, the Council adopted sanctions on 7 individuals holding official positions on 22 January 2018.

In the declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU of 26 January 2018, the EU has regretted that the decision to organise presidential elections was taken outside the scope of the national dialogue. It recalled that elections should be based on a viable electoral calendar, agreed in the context of the national dialogue with all relevant actors and political parties, all of whom should assume their responsibilities.

The **political, social and economic situation** in Venezuela has been continuously deteriorating over recent months. The repercussions on the Venezuelan population and on neighbouring countries, are serious. The UNHCR estimate that 1.5 million people have left the country. The IMF predicts a drop by 15% in the GDP in 2018, leading to a cumulative GDP decline of nearly 50 percent since 2013. The IMF also forecasts an inflation rate for 2018 of 13 000%.

The **humanitarian situation** is also extremely worrying, with 90 to 95% people who need medicine unable to gain access to them. More than one million people are currently food insecure, and the percentage of children affected by global acute malnutrition has reached emergency levels. Diseases such as malaria and diphtheria that had disappeared are now spreading across the country (40 000 cases of malaria have been reported).

Foreign ministers may discuss measures that can be taken in light of these developments, as well as how to use all EU instruments to encourage shared democratic solutions that can bring political stability and allow the country to address the pressing needs of the population that is seriously affected by the present crisis.

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the latest developments in Venezuela, 26 January 2018](#)

[Speech by the High Representative on the situation in Venezuela, 8 February 2018](#)

[Council conclusions on Venezuela, 13 November 2017](#)

[Press release of EU sanctions on 7 individuals holding official position, 22 January 2018](#)

Middle East Peace Process

The Foreign Affairs Council will discuss the Middle East Peace Process, following up on previous Foreign Affairs Council meetings as well as on the extraordinary session of the international donor group for the coordination of the international assistance to Palestinians, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting held in Brussels on 31 January, hosted by the EU and chaired by Norway. The discussion will also prepare the lunch with foreign ministers, members of the follow-up committee of the League of Arab States, chaired by Jordan.

The EU Foreign Affairs ministers discussed the Middle East Peace Process in December and in January. They also had an informal meeting with Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu in December and with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in January.

EU leaders discussed the announcement by the United States on the status of Jerusalem at their last meeting on 14 December 2017. The European Council adopted conclusions, reiterating its firm commitment to the two-state solution and recalling that the EU position on Jerusalem remained unchanged.

[European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017](#)

[Council conclusions on the Middle East peace process of 18 January 2016](#)

[The Middle East peace process \(EEAS website\)](#)

[EU and Norway to convene an extraordinary session of the international donor group for Palestine \(AHLC\), 10 January 2018](#)

Informal lunch with the League of Arab States

EU foreign ministers and the High Representative will have a lunch with the **Secretary General of the League of Arab States** (LAS), Ahmed Aboul Gheit, and foreign ministers, members of the follow-up committee of the League of Arab States, chaired by Jordan (Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, United Arab Emirates). They will discuss the Middle East peace process.

Other items

The Council is expected to adopt a number of conclusions without debate, including Council conclusions on Myanmar/Burma, Cambodia and the Maldives, the Special Report by the European Court of Auditors: "EU support to fight human trafficking in South/South-East Asia", as well as on climate diplomacy.

Council conclusions on Myanmar/Burma

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Myanmar/Burma, taking stock of the situation in Myanmar/Burma, in particular in Rakhine State, which remains extremely serious. The Council is expected to condemn ongoing widespread, systematic grave human rights violations. In its conclusions, the Council is expected to invite the High Representative to make proposals without delay for:

- an extension of the existing embargo on arms and equipment which can be used for internal repression as well as options for its strengthening and
- targeted restrictive measures against senior military officers of the Myanmar armed forces (Tatmadaw) responsible for serious and systematic human rights violations.

[EU relations with Myanmar](#) (Factsheet)

[EU delegation to Myanmar](#)

Council conclusions on Cambodia

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Cambodia, in the light of worrying political developments and the continuing deterioration of democracy, respect of human rights and the rule of law, including the escalating repression of the opposition, media and civil society.

The Council is expected to strongly urge the Cambodian government to cease using the judiciary as a political tool to harass and intimidate political opponents, civil society, labour rights activists and human rights defenders. In the conclusions, the Council is due to underline that, in view of recent developments, it may consider specific targeted measures if the situation does not improve.

[EU delegation to Cambodia](#)

Council conclusions on the Maldives

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the Maldives, in light of the recent deterioration of the situation in the Maldives.

The Council is expected to call on the competent Maldivian institutions to immediately lift the State of Emergency, and restore all constitutionally guaranteed rights, and to engage with the leaders of the opposition in a genuine dialogue. As the current situation is not in accordance with the principles of democratic rule and separation of powers, the Council is expected to state that if the situation does not improve, it may therefore consider targeted measures.

[EU Delegation to Sri Lanka and the Maldives](#)

Council conclusions on climate diplomacy

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on climate diplomacy. They are expected to reconfirm that the EU will continue to lead the way in the global pursuit of climate action. The conclusions will also recognise the implications that climate change has for international security and stability.

The Council adopted conclusions on climate diplomacy on 15 February 2016 as well as March and June 2017.

[Council conclusions on EU climate and energy diplomacy, 6 March 2017](#)

[Council conclusions on climate diplomacy, 15 February 2016](#)

In the margins

Cooperation Council with Kazakhstan

The Cooperation Council will discuss bilateral relations between the EU and Kazakhstan. It will take stock of progress achieved since the previous Cooperation Council meeting on 4 October 2016.

The meeting will be chaired by Kairat Abdrakhmanov, Foreign Affairs Minister of Kazakhstan. The EU will be represented by Ekaterina Zaharieva, Deputy Prime Minister for judicial reform and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, currently holding the Council presidency.

The Cooperation Council will review the provisional application of the enhanced partnership and cooperation agreement. It will take stock of political developments in Kazakhstan, including the national institutional reform programme, as well as efforts to enhance the rule of law and human rights protection. The Cooperation Council will also discuss economic and trade relations between the EU and Kazakhstan and how to improve the business climate to attract more foreign investors. In addition, the Cooperation Council will exchange views on regional cooperation and developments, including in the field of security and connectivity, as well as the implementation of the EU-Central Asia strategy.

A press conference will take place at 18.30.

[Meeting page](#)