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OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3598th Council meeting

Foreign Affairs

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President **Federica Mogherini**
High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security
Policy

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¹ • Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
 • Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
 • Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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ITEMS DEBATED

Current Affairs

At the beginning of their meeting, the High Representative and the EU foreign ministers highlighted the situation in Eastern Ghouta, Syria. They called for urgent implementation of the UN Security Council resolution 2401 adopted on 24 February, which demands that all parties cease hostilities without delay. It was agreed that the High Representative would send a letter to the foreign ministers of the three guarantors of the Astana Process - Russia, Turkey and Iran - to ask them to work for the implementation of the resolution.

[Syria: Council response to the crisis](#)

Moldova

Foreign ministers held an exchange of views on the Republic of Moldova. The Council adopted conclusions at the end of the debate. In the discussion, foreign ministers reiterated the EU's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations. They also underlined the need to continue adopting and implementing key reforms for the benefit of Moldovan citizens.

[Moldova: Council adopts conclusions](#)

Venezuela

The Council discussed the latest developments in Venezuela. Foreign ministers discussed the dire humanitarian situation in the country and in neighbouring countries, as more than 1.5 million people have already left Venezuela. They exchanged views on the political stalemate in the country, with the suspension of Santo Domingo's dialogue between the government and the opposition and the presidential elections scheduled for 22 April.

Foreign ministers expressed their solidarity with Spain, following the decision by the Venezuelan authorities to declare the Ambassador of Spain in Caracas *persona non grata*. They agreed to continue closely monitoring the situation and to keep channels of communication open, both with the opposition and with the government.

Middle East Peace Process

The Council discussed the Middle East Peace Process, following up on previous Foreign Affairs Council meetings and on the extraordinary session of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting held at ministerial level in Brussels on 31 January. The discussion also prepared for the lunch with representatives of the League of Arab States.

Informal lunch

EU foreign ministers and the High Representative had a lunch with the Secretary General of the League of Arab States (LAS), Ahmed Aboul Gheit, and foreign ministers, members of the LAS ministerial delegation on Jerusalem chaired by Jordan, and including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, United Arab Emirates, and the Palestinian Authority.

They discussed ways of reviving the Middle East Peace Process in an inclusive manner, with the objective of achieving a two-state solution, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both states. They also discussed the importance of stepping up the international collective support given to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****Council conclusions on Myanmar/Burma**

The Council adopted the following conclusions on Myanmar/Burma:

- "1. The Council took stock of the situation in Myanmar/Burma, in particular in Rakhine State, which remains extremely serious. The Council condemns ongoing widespread, systematic grave human rights violations committed by Myanmar/Burma military and security forces, including rape and killings. It also reiterates its condemnation of attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and other militant groups.
2. More than 680 000 people, mostly Rohingya, fled their homes in Rakhine State and sought refuge in Bangladesh. The EU commends Bangladesh for sheltering these people and will continue to provide humanitarian and other assistance, in line with its longstanding engagement and its pledges during the donor conference that it co-hosted in Geneva on 23 October 2017.
3. Recalling priority issues set out in its conclusions of 16 October 2017, the EU deplores the fact that continued human rights violations, a climate of fear, insecurity, impunity and lack of rule of law continue to prevail in Rakhine State resulting in further, albeit smaller, refugee flows to Bangladesh and that humanitarian and development as well as media access to Rakhine State remains restricted. The EU stresses the importance of the roadmap established by the UNSC Presidential Statement of 6 November 2017 for the resolution of the crisis and will continue to raise the issue with the UN and key international stakeholders
4. The EU welcomes the signature by the governments of Myanmar/Burma and Bangladesh of an "Arrangement on return of displaced persons from Rakhine" (23 November 2017) and of a "Physical arrangement for repatriation of displaced Myanmar residents from Bangladesh" (16 January 2018) as very important first steps to address the ongoing refugee crisis. The EU invites both parties to fully associate the UNHCR with the process and to allow independent monitoring in order to ensure an effective implementation of these arrangements in accordance with international law.

5. The EU urges Myanmar/Burma to create conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons to their places of origin. Particular attention needs to be placed on the increased protection needs of female-headed households, victims of sexual and gender based violence and children, including unaccompanied minors and orphans. In this context, the Government of Myanmar/Burma should carry out a rigorous needs assessment in Rakhine State and establish a time-bound Action Plan regarding the full implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State to improve the living conditions and human rights situation there, including addressing the issue of physical security, statelessness and discrimination against the Rohingya. Returnees' access to appropriate shelter, services and livelihoods is crucial, along with providing proper rehabilitation for victims, in particular children and women and will require easing of the current restrictions on Rakhine State. The EU welcomes the intention expressed by the Government of Myanmar/Burma to undertake steps towards closing IDP camps in central Rakhine State and underlines the importance of an inclusive, transparent and consultative process in accordance with international standards. Myanmar/Burma should refrain from setting up new IDP camps for returnees from Bangladesh.

6. While noting the admission of some extrajudicial killings by the Myanmar military, the EU expects the Government of Myanmar/Burma and the armed forces to allow credible and independent investigations into alleged serious and systematic human rights violations as reported by various UN bodies, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC)'s Fact-Finding Mission and international human rights organisations. Perpetrators of such crimes must be brought to justice without delay. In line with relevant resolutions of the UN General Assembly Third Committee (16 November 2017) and the HRC (5 December 2017), the EU reiterates its calls on the Government of Myanmar/Burma to cooperate with the HRC's Fact-Finding Mission and to allow it full access to Myanmar in order to be able to investigate properly, taking also into account views of all communities of Rakhine State.

7. The EU strongly regrets the fact that Myanmar/Burma decided on 20 December 2017 to discontinue its cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar. The EU fully supports the UN Special Rapporteur and calls on the Government of Myanmar/Burma to reverse its decision. Given the gravity of the alleged crimes against humanity the EU invites Myanmar/Burma to become a party to the Rome Statute or to accept the exercise of jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court in accordance with Article 12 (3) of the Rome Statute.

8. The EU also reiterates its concern about the continued deterioration of the human rights and security situation in Kachin and Shan States, with increased fighting, reports of civilian casualties and more than 100.000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of them extremely vulnerable.. The EU recalls that all parties to the conflict must facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to civilians in need.
9. The EU looks forward to the 4th session of the EU-Myanmar Human Rights Dialogue led for the EU by its Special Representative for Human Rights and envisaged for 5 March 2018 in order to discuss issues related to the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and media, the situation in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States and cooperation of Myanmar/Burma with UN human rights mechanism and special procedures.
10. The EU and its Member States reconfirm their strong engagement in support of Myanmar/Burma's democratic transition, peace and national reconciliation process and inclusive socio-economic development. In this context, the EU stands ready to i) step up its humanitarian assistance, as needed; ii) further operationalise the humanitarian and development nexus, with focus on equal access to basic social services as well as on reconstruction, service infrastructure and rehabilitation of livelihoods in Rakhine State and other conflict-affected areas; iii) support the implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Rakhine State; and iv) continue its support to the peace and national reconciliation process and to ongoing reforms, including in the education sector. A strong role for the UNHCR in the refugee repatriation process and the tackling of the root causes by the Government of Myanmar/Burma, are essential for addressing the Rohingya crisis in a sustainable manner.
11. The EU calls on the Government of Myanmar/Burma and the security forces to ensure that security, the rule of law and accountability prevail in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States. In light of the disproportionate use of force and widespread and systematic grave human rights violations committed by the military and security forces including sexual and gender based violence and killings and the continuous climate of impunity, fear and insecurity in Rakhine State, the Council confirms the relevance of the existing embargo on arms and equipment which can be used for internal repression and invites the High Representative to make a proposal for the extension thereof and to present concrete options for its strengthening without delay. As regards practical defence cooperation with Myanmar/Burma, the EU and its Member States intend to reduce it to the strict minimum with the sole purpose of strengthening democratic principles, the respect of human rights and the rule of law.

12. The Council invites the High Representative to make proposals for targeted restrictive measures against senior military officers of the Myanmar armed forces (Tatmadaw) responsible for serious and systematic human rights violations without delay.
13. The Council recalls that the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms is a crucial part of the EU's trade policy and underpins the granting of trade preferences to Myanmar under "Everything But Arms" (EBA). The Council invites the Commission to continue monitoring the situation and to step-up engagement with Myanmar in light of the provisions of Regulation (EU) No. 978/2012."

[Press release on Council conclusions on Myanmar/Burma](#)

Council conclusions on Cambodia

The Council adopted the following conclusions on Cambodia:

- "1. The Council recalls the significant efforts and resources the European Union and its Member States have invested since the Paris Accords into supporting the reconstruction, the economic development and the pluralistic democratic transition in Cambodia.
2. The Council recalls that the 1991 Paris Accords, signed by Cambodia and 18 other countries, including France and the United Kingdom, have created binding legal obligations upon the parties, including the duty of the Cambodian government to maintain "a system of liberal democracy, on the basis of pluralism" as well as to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. These commitments are enshrined in the Cambodian Constitution.
3. It is therefore with particular concern that the Council has followed recent worrying political developments and the continuing deterioration of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, including the escalating repression of the opposition, media and civil society. The Council notes with deep concern the arrest of opposition leader Kem Sokha on 3 September 2017 and the closure or suspension of several NGOs and media outlets. Of equal concern are the enforced dissolution of the main opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) on 16 November 2017, the banning from politics of 118 CNRP senior members for five years, and the mandatory reallocation of all CNRP's local and national seats to unelected members of other parties, with the ruling party taking the vast bulk of local seats.

4. The Council strongly urges 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.
5. The EU reiterates its demands for the immediate release of Kem Sokha. It also calls on Cambodia to take the necessary measures to ensure that the dissolution of CNRP be swiftly reversed and that CNRP members of Parliament and CNRP local counselors be reinstated. The Council notes that CNRP won 44% of the vote in the 2017 local elections and 44.5% in the 2013 legislative elections. With general elections due in July 2018, the enforced dissolution of CNRP denies the will of the voters and undermines the credibility of the current election process. The Council reiterates that an electoral process from which the main opposition party has been arbitrarily excluded is not legitimate. In this context, recalling the recommendations of the 2008 and 2015 EU electoral missions in Cambodia and the importance of effective follow-up, the Council welcomes the decision of the Commission to put on hold the EU's financial assistance to the National Election Committee (NEC).
6. The Council invites the Commission and the High Representative to closely monitor the situation and to continue a thorough and comprehensive assessment of development cooperation programmes in close cooperation with Member States with a view to ensure the strengthening of democratic principles, respect for human rights and the rule of law.
7. The Council also invites the Commission and the High Representative to strengthen the EU support to civil society and human rights defenders.
8. The EU is Cambodia's biggest export market. The Council notes that Cambodia has been granted preferential access to the EU market under the "Everything But Arms" (EBA) scheme. In this context, the Council recalls that respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including labour rights, is also a crucial part of EU's trade policy and underpins the granting of EU trade preferences. The Council invites the Commission to enhance the monitoring of the situation and to step-up the engagement with Cambodia in light of the provisions of Regulation (EU) No 978/2012.
9. In view of recent developments, the Council may consider specific targeted measures if the situation does not improve.

10. The Council urges Cambodia to restore democracy and the government to engage in a constructive dialogue with the elected opposition. The Council also urges the Cambodian government to take all necessary measures to ensure a political environment in which opposition parties, civil society and media can operate freely. The EU remains ready to assist Cambodia in meeting its obligations in terms of democratization, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and to support its economic and sustainable development.
11. The EU will continue to closely monitor the situation in Cambodia."

[Press release on Council conclusions on Cambodia](#)

Council conclusions on the Maldives

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the Maldives:

- "1. The Council has followed with concern the recent deterioration of the situation in the Maldives, and calls on all in the country, in particular law enforcement forces, to act with restraint.
2. The Council takes note of the decision of the Supreme Court of the Maldives, in full bench, on 1st February 2018 to call into question the validity of criminal proceedings against leading political figures and to order their immediate release. The Supreme Court has also decided on the reinstatement of 12 members of Parliament.
3. The Council underlines that the Parliament and the Judiciary should be enabled to return to their normal functioning in accordance with the Constitution.
4. The Council expects the competent Maldivian institutions to immediately lift the State of Emergency, and restore all constitutionally guaranteed rights. The Council calls upon Maldivian authorities to respect the rule of law, and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression and the right to fair trial. The Council condemns politically motivated arrests and calls for the immediate release of all political prisoners. The Council also condemns any interference with the work of the Supreme Court of the Maldives and actions taken against the judiciary and the judges.
5. The Council is concerned about the possible impact of the current situation also on the security of foreign residents and visitors, including tourists.

6. The current situation is not in accordance with the principles of democratic rule and separation of powers. If the situation does not improve, the Council may therefore consider targeted measures.
7. The Council calls on the Government of the Maldives to engage with the leaders of the opposition in a genuine dialogue that paves the way for credible, transparent and inclusive Presidential elections. The EU is ready to support UN facilitation of such a dialogue."

[Press release on Council conclusions on the Maldives](#)

Council conclusions on Climate Diplomacy

The Council adopted conclusions on Climate Diplomacy ([6125/18](#)). The Council reaffirms that the EU will continue to lead the way in the global pursuit of climate action. It also recognises the implications that climate change has for international security and stability.

Council conclusions on EU priorities at United Nations human rights fora in 2018

The Council adopted conclusions on EU priorities at United Nations human rights fora in 2018.

This year, which marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the conclusions underline that the EU strongly supports the pledge by the UN Secretary-General to raise the profile of human rights and to make prevention and sustainable peace a priority of the UN system, by tackling the root causes of conflicts, and by addressing human rights violations and abuses. The EU also reiterates its firm belief that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and inter-related.

Council conclusions on EU priorities at UN human rights are adopted on a yearly basis. They set out the main lines of action for the EU at UN human rights fora in the coming months.

[Full text of the Council conclusions on EU Priorities in UN Human Rights Fora in 2018](#)

Council conclusions on human trafficking in South / South-East Asia

The Council adopted conclusions on Special Report No 9/2017 by the European Court of Auditors: "EU support to fight human trafficking in South/South-East Asia" ([6330/18](#))

[Special report no 09/2017: EU support to fight human trafficking in South/South-East Asia](#)

Sanctions on North Korea

The Council increased the restrictive measures against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) by finalising the transposition into EU law of the measures imposed by the latest UN Security Council resolution 2397 (2017).

The measures transposed include:

- the strengthening of the export ban to the DPRK of all refined petroleum products by reducing the amount of barrels that may be exported from 2 million barrels to 500,000 barrels per year;
- a ban on imports from the DPRK of food and agricultural products, machinery, electrical equipment, earth and stone, and wood;
- a ban on exports to the DPRK of all industrial machinery, transportation vehicles, and expansion to all iron, steel and other metals;
- further maritime restrictive measures against vessels where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the vessel has been involved in the breach of UN sanctions;
- the requirement to repatriate all DPRK workers abroad within 24 months, subject to applicable national and international law.

The full prohibition on the export of crude oil provided for in resolution 2397 (2017) had already been introduced in the EU on 16 October 2017.

When it adopted the measures, the UN Security Council reaffirmed in its resolution 2397 (2017) that the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, as well as their means of delivery, constitute a threat to international peace and security. The EU has repeatedly expressed its expectation that the DPRK engage in a credible and meaningful dialogue aimed at pursuing the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

The legal acts adopted today by the Council also took into account that 3 persons and one entity listed by the EU autonomously were now listed by the UN. The number of persons and entities under restrictive measures against the DPRK is 79 persons and 54 entities as listed by the UN and 55 persons and 9 entities designated by the EU autonomously.

The additional listings imposed by the UNSC resolution 2397 (2017) were transposed into EU law on 8 January 2018. The EU had added an additional 17 individuals to its own sanctions list on 22 January 2018.

Sanctions on Syria

The Council added the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Information of the government of Syria to the list of those targeted by EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime in view of the gravity of the situation in the country. These additions were made to take into account recent ministerial changes, as both ministers were appointed in January 2018.

This decision brings to 257 the total number of persons targeted by a travel ban and an assets freeze for being responsible for the violent repression against the civilian population in Syria, benefiting from or supporting the regime, and/or being associated with such persons.

In addition, 67 entities are targeted by an assets freeze. More broadly, sanctions currently in place against Syria include an oil embargo, restrictions on certain investments, a freeze of the assets of the Syrian central bank held in the EU, export restrictions on equipment and technology that might be used for internal repression as well as on equipment and technology for the monitoring or interception of internet or telephone communications. These measures were last extended on 29 May 2017 and are in place until 1 June 2018.

The EU remains committed to finding a lasting political solution to the conflict in Syria under the existing UN-agreed framework. As stated in the EU strategy on Syria adopted in April 2017, the EU believes that there can be no military solution to the conflict and strongly supports the work of the UN Special Envoy and the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva.

The legal acts adopted by the Council, including the names of the persons concerned, are published in the Official Journal of 26 February 2018.

See the [Council decision](#)

Sanctions on terrorism

The Council adopted legal texts imposing restrictive measures (a travel ban, assets freeze and arms transfer prohibition) on one person for his activities in support of Da'esh. This is the first ever designation under the EU autonomous sanctions regime against ISIL/ Da'esh and Al-Qaida.

[Press release on the legal framework for EU autonomous sanctions regime against ISIL/ Da'esh and Al-Qaida](#), 20 September 2016

See the [Council decision](#)

Common military list of the EU

The Council adopted the common military list of the EU. The list is updated annually in accordance with updates agreed by the relevant international export control regime. It lays down the scope of reference for member states' arms export control systems. It covers the full range of military items that have to be licensed by national authorities before export.

Support for think tanks in the area of non-proliferation and disarmament

The Council adopted a decision on the continuation of EU funding for the activities of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks, which was established in 2010. The Council decision provides for funding of €4.5 million to the network for the period 2018-2021.

Implementation of EU Strategy against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

The Council approved the request of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to extend the implementation of the EU Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction for nine months. The EU strongly supports the OPCW in meeting the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The duration of Council decision 2015/259/CFSP, which was adopted on 17 February 2015 and provides financial support of around €2.5 million, was extended until December 2018 with a view to the full implementation of the activities.

EU support for activities of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO)

The Council adopted a decision on continuing providing assistance to the Provisional Technical Secretariat (PTS) of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO). It will provide over € 4.5 million over two years to strengthen the capabilities of the CTBT monitoring and verification system, including in the field of radionuclide detection, to enhance the capabilities of States signatory to the CTBT to fulfil their verification responsibilities and to enable them to benefit fully from their participation in the CTBT regime.

The CTBTO has evolved from a mere blueprint to the custodian of the world's largest and most sophisticated multilateral verification system. The EU has consistently supported this progress based on the firm belief that effective multilateralism and a rules-based international system are indispensable in order to work effectively against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

EU position for the first meeting of the EU-Cuba Joint Council

The Council agreed on the annotated agenda for the Joint Council.

HEALTH

Food regulations

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of the following five Commission regulations regarding food additives and food flavourings:

- Regulation (EU) .../... amending annex II to regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 concerning the use of polyglycerol polyricinoleate (E 476) in emulsified sauces;
- Regulation (EU) .../... amending the annex to regulation (EU) No 231/2012 laying down specifications for food additives listed in annexes II and III to regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 of the as regards specifications for polyvinyl alcohol-polyethylene glycol graft-co-polymer (E 1209);
- Regulation (EU) .../.. amending annex II to regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 as regards the use of thaumatin (E 957) as a flavour enhancer in certain food categories;
- Regulation (EU) .../... correcting certain language versions of regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 of on food additives;
- Regulation (EU) .../... amending and correcting annex I to regulation (EC) No 1334/2008 concerning certain flavouring substances.

The Commission regulations are adopted through the so called regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the regulations, unless the European Parliament objects.