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3608th 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.

ITEMS DEBATED

Current affairs

At the beginning of their meeting, the High Representative and EU foreign ministers discussed pressing issues on the international agenda, in particular the Salisbury attack. They adopted a statement expressing the EU's unqualified solidarity with, and support for, the UK, including for the UK's efforts to bring those responsible for this crime to justice.

[Statement by the Foreign Affairs Council on the Salisbury attack](#)

Ukraine

The Council exchanged views on Ukraine. Ministers expressed their appreciation for the High Representative's visit to Kyiv on 11-12 March. They discussed the recent developments, in particular in the reform process. Ahead of the Ukraine reform conference to take place in Copenhagen on 27 June, they welcomed the progress achieved on economic reform, while underlining the need to step up efforts in some other areas, including the judiciary and anti-corruption.

One day after the fourth anniversary of the illegal annexation of Crimea, the Council reiterated its commitment to its non-recognition policy and support for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. Ministers expressed their concern over humanitarian issues in eastern Ukraine and reiterated their full support for the work of the OSCE in the region. They also reiterated that they would continue to follow developments in Ukraine, including events linked to the upcoming parliamentary election.

[EU relations with Ukraine \(background information\)](#)

Syria

Foreign ministers discussed the latest development in Syria with Staffan de Mistura, UN Secretary General Special Envoy for Syria. Ministers commended his tireless efforts to push for a political solution to the conflict. They expressed their full support for these efforts, recalling that the EU has always clearly stated there can be no military solution to the conflict.

Foreign ministers expressed their concern over the increasingly deteriorating humanitarian situation, in particular in Afrin and Eastern Ghouta. They urged all those involved to fully and immediately implement UN Security Council resolution 2401. They also discussed possible repercussions of the situation in Syria for the wider region.

The Council also discussed the upcoming second Brussels conference on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region' on 24-25 April 2018, which will be co-chaired by the EU and the UN. It will be an opportunity to mobilise humanitarian aid for the Syrians both inside the country and in the region, and to provide further political support at international and regional level for the intra-Syrian negotiations in Geneva. Like the first Brussels conference, it is expected to bring together participants from more than 70 countries and organisations at ministerial level.

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

Informal lunch on the Korean Peninsula

EU foreign ministers and the High Representative had an informal lunch with the South Korean Foreign Minister, Kang Kyung-wha. They focused on the situation on the Korean peninsula, in the light of the recent announcements made by the DPRK's leadership.

Ministers looked ahead to the summit between Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in scheduled for April and the announced meeting between Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump, as these summits could create the conditions needed to work towards a diplomatic solution aimed at the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

EU ministers welcomed South Korea's efforts aimed at the de-escalation of tensions in the peninsula and improved intra-Korean relations.

[Highlights of the press statements by High Representative Federica Mogherini and South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Kyung-wha \(VIDEO\)](#)

Iran

The Council discussed Iran. Ministers underlined the importance of the Iran nuclear deal – the JCPOA – for the security of the region and beyond. They highlighted the need to ensure continuous commitment of all parties involved to the agreement.

Ministers also discussed other issues outside the scope of the JCPOA, in particular Iran's ballistic missiles programme, as well as Iran's role in the increasing tensions in the region, including in Syria and Yemen. In her press conference the High Representative stressed that these topics had to be addressed outside the scope of the nuclear agreement, adding that there was unity both on the need to preserve the JCPOA and on the need to address regional issues with Iran through dialogue.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****Bosnia and Herzegovina: sanctions in response to the incidents in Mostar**

The Council lifted the restrictive measures against three persons who had perpetrated violent acts during the incidents in Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) on 10 February 1997. These 3 persons are under investigation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The decision was taken following a review of Council Common Position 97/193/CFSP on restrictive measures aimed at these individuals, adopted on 17 March 1997.

Sanctions in view of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Council prolonged for 12 months the validity of the Council decision of 21 March 2011 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The measures, now in force until 31 March 2019, make it possible to impose an asset freeze and a travel ban on persons whose activities undermine the sovereignty, territorial integrity and constitutional order of Bosnia and Herzegovina or seriously threaten its security situation.

The restrictive measures were put in place on 21 March 2011 and have been extended on a yearly basis since then. They are part of the EU comprehensive strategy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina as defined in the Council conclusions of 21 March 2011.

Sanctions in view of the situation in Syria

The Council added four persons to the list of those targeted by EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime. The EU added these 4 persons for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons against the civilian population, in line with the EU's policy of fighting the proliferation and use of chemical weapons.

These persons include a high-ranking military official and three scientists involved in chemical weapons proliferation and delivery. They work for the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC), an entity involved in the chemical weapons proliferation sector. This entity has been subject to EU restrictive measures since 1 December 2011.

The EU had already imposed restrictive measures on Syrian high ranking officials specifically for their role in the use of chemical weapons on 17 July 2017. Today's decision brings to 259 the total number of persons targeted by a travel ban and an asset 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 asset freeze. More broadly, sanctions currently in place against Syria include an oil embargo, restrictions on certain investments, a freeze of Syrian central bank assets held in the EU, and export restrictions on equipment and technology that might be used for internal repression and on equipment and technology for the monitoring or interception of internet or telephone communications. These measures were last extended on 29 May 2017 and remain in place until 1 June 2018.

See the [Council decision](#)

ENVIRONMENT

Marine biodiversity (UNCLOS)

The Council decided to authorise the Commission to open negotiations, on behalf of the Union, on an international legally-binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. It also agreed on directives for the negotiations.

This follows up on Council Decision (EU) [2016/455](#) of 22 March 2016 authorising the opening of negotiations on the elements of the draft text.

The Union and its Member States are parties to the UNCLOS. The Union concluded the UNCLOS by Council Decision [98/392/EC](#), in respect of those matters for which competences have been transferred to the Union by its Member States. The Union is the only international organisation which is a party to UNCLOS to date.

The European Parliament will be informed in accordance with Article 218(10) TFEU, and the decision and the negotiating directives will be transmitted to the European Parliament.