



FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

16 April 2018

The Foreign Affairs Council, chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, will start at 9.30 with a discussion on **current affairs**, allowing ministers to review pressing issues on the international agenda.

The Council will first discuss **Syria** in the light of most recent developments and ahead of the second Brussels conference 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region' (24-25 April 2018). The Council will adopt conclusions on Syria.

Following up on their discussion at the last Foreign Affairs Council (19 March), foreign ministers will discuss **Iran**, including the Iran nuclear deal, the JCPOA.

Foreign ministers will exchange views on the EU's relations with **Russia**, one month on from the presidential elections. They will discuss the latest developments in the aftermath of the Salisbury attack. They will also follow up on the European Council of 22-23 March. In this context, they will discuss the continued implementation of the five guiding principles agreed in March 2016 as a framework for the EU's policy towards Russia.

Over lunch, foreign ministers will discuss **the Western Balkans**. The discussion will prepare for the EU-Western Balkans Summit which will take place in Sofia on 17 May 2018.

Finally, as the Commission prepares its proposal for the future multiannual financial framework, the Council will have a preliminary exchange of views on the **future of external financing instruments**.

The Council is expected to adopt a number of decisions and conclusions without debate, including conclusions on South Sudan, chemical disarmament and non-proliferation, and malicious cyber activities.

Press opportunities:

+/- 08.25 Doorstep by High Representative Federica Mogherini

+/- 17.00 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 pressing issues on the international agenda. The High Representative and foreign ministers may refer to the situation in Gaza and latest developments in Venezuela.

[Statement by the Spokesperson on the latest development in Gaza, 7 April 2018](#)
[Federica Mogherini meets with interlocutors from Venezuela, press release 11 April 2018](#)

Syria

The Council will discuss Syria in the light of most recent developments and ahead of the second Brussels conference, 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region' (24-25 April 2018).

The Council will adopt conclusions on Syria, a year after it adopted the EU Strategy on Syria on 3 April 2017 and as the Syrian conflict entered its eighth year of continuous and widespread violence, persistent and brutal violations of international law, including abuses of human rights and international law, by all parties as well as the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and by Da'esh. The Council is expected to state that the Syrian regime bears the overwhelming responsibility for the catastrophic humanitarian situation and the suffering of the Syrian people.

The Council will also condemn in the strongest terms all attacks, both deliberate and indiscriminate, against civilian populations, and civilian infrastructure, hospitals and schools. It is also expected to recall that the continued deliberate denial and obstruction of humanitarian access to those in need is in blatant violation of international humanitarian principles and must stop.

The Council is expected to repeat once more that any sustainable solution to the conflict requires a genuine political transition in line with UN Security Council resolution 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué negotiated by the Syrian parties within the UN-led Geneva process.

In a statement of 8 April 2018, the EU condemned in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons, including, as reported, during the latest attack by the Syrian regime forces and its allies in Douma on 7 April. It reaffirmed that the use of chemical weapons is a war crime and crime against humanity and reiterated the strong need for accountability in Syria for all war crimes committed and in particular for the use of chemical weapons, and its commitment in this regard.

The EU will host the second conference on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region', which will be co-chaired with the UN. In the light of the latest developments in Syria, the conference will provide an opportunity for the international community to discuss the situation. The EU will reaffirm that only a political solution will ensure lasting stability in Syria and reiterate its support for the work of the UN Special Envoy for Syria and the UN-led process, as the primary process to achieve an intra-Syrian political solution.

In this context, the conference will aim to garner political support to a political solution to the conflict in Syria, consolidating global support for efforts in this regard within the for the UN-led intra-Syrian talks in Geneva. The conference will also aim to mobilise humanitarian aid to Syrians inside the country and in the neighbouring countries. The conference will be an opportunity for further pledges, but also for additional efforts to allow access to places where aid is urgently needed. The conference will bring together participants from more than 85 countries and organisations at ministerial level.

[Statement by the Spokesperson on the latest attack in Douma, 8 April 2018](#)
[Supporting the future of Syria and the region - Brussels conference, 24-25/04/2018](#)
[Syria: Council response to the crisis](#)

Iran

The Council will discuss Iran, including the Iran nuclear deal, the JCPOA. This discussion is a follow-up to the last Foreign Affairs Council (19 March), when foreign ministers underlined the importance of the JCPOA for the security of the region and beyond. They also highlighted the need to ensure the continuous commitment of all parties to the agreement.

Ministers also discussed other issues outside the scope of the JCPOA, in particular Iran's ballistic missile programme, as well as Iran's role in the increasing tensions in the region, including in Syria and Yemen.

As reiterated by all 28 Foreign Ministers in their statement of 16 October 2017, which was endorsed by the European Council on 19 October, the EU remains committed to the continued, full and effective implementation of the JCPOA. The agreement is delivering on keeping the Iranian nuclear programme in check and under close surveillance. This has been confirmed ten times by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which uses a comprehensive and strict monitoring system. The EU also expressed its concerns about ballistic missiles and the increasing tensions in the region in the statement of 16 October 2017, and reiterated the need to address those concerns outside the JCPOA.

[The EU and Iran \(EEAS website\)](#)

[EU statement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#)

[Joint statement by the EU High Representative and the Iranian Foreign Minister, and text of the JCPOA \(EEAS website\)](#)

Russia

Foreign ministers will exchange views on the EU's relations with Russia, one month on from the presidential elections. They will discuss the latest developments in the aftermath of the Salisbury attack. They will also follow up on the European Council of 22-23 March. In this context, the Council will discuss the continued implementation of the five guiding principles agreed in March 2016 as a framework for the EU's policy towards Russia.

In a statement on the Salisbury attack made at their last meeting, foreign ministers expressed the EU's unqualified solidarity with the UK and its support, including for the UK's efforts to bring those responsible for this crime to justice. The European Council adopted conclusions on 22 March 2018, agreeing with the United Kingdom government's assessment that it was highly likely that the Russian Federation was responsible for the attack and that there was no plausible alternative explanation. The European Council also requested the High Representative to recall the Head of the EU Delegation in Russia for consultations in Brussels. In addition, 19 EU countries decided to expel Russian diplomats from their territory, and 6 others recalled their ambassador in Russia for consultations.

The European Council also underlined that, in this context, the EU must strengthen its resilience to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear-related risks, including through closer cooperation between the EU and its member states as well as NATO. It also underlined that the EU and its member states should also continue to bolster their capabilities to address hybrid threats, including in the areas of cyber, strategic communication and counter-intelligence. The European Council invited the European Commission and the High Representative to take this work forward and report on progress by the June European Council.

EU relations with Russia deteriorated substantially following the illegal annexation of Crimea and the deliberate destabilisation of Ukraine. Since March 2014, the EU has progressively imposed restrictive measures against Russia. The sanctions include diplomatic measures, asset freezing and travel restrictions, restrictions on economic relations with Crimea and Sevastopol, economic sanctions, and restrictions on economic cooperation with Russia. These sanctions are still in place and are re-examined on a periodic basis.

In March 2016, EU foreign ministers agreed on five guiding principles for EU-Russia relations:

- demand the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, as a key element for any substantial change in EU-Russia relations;
- strengthen relations with the EU's Eastern Partners and Central Asia countries;
- strengthen EU resilience to Russian threats, including hybrid threats, an element even more relevant today following the European Council's tasking;
- engage selectively with Russia on foreign policy issues such as certain international issues such as Iran and the Middle East Peace Process, and other areas where there is a clear EU interest;
- support Russian civil society and engage in people-to-people contacts, in particular between the youth.

[European Council conclusions on the Salisbury attack, 22 March 2018](#)

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

[EU relations with the Russian Federation \(background information\)](#)

[EU restrictive measures in response to the crisis in Ukraine](#)

[Remarks by High Representative Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council, 14 March 2016](#)

[Statement by the Spokesperson on the presidential elections in Russia](#)

Western Balkans

Over lunch, foreign ministers will discuss the Western Balkans. This discussion will prepare for the upcoming EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia on 17 May. Foreign ministers will focus on enhancing cooperation on security issues with the region; enlargement issues will be discussed by the General Affairs Council in June.

As stated in the European Council conclusions of 20 March 2018, the Sofia Summit is expected to focus on reaffirming the European perspective of the region, launching concrete and visible initiatives to improve the physical and human connectivity within the region and with the EU, and addressing how to better engage together on shared challenges such as security and migration.

The Western Balkans was last discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council in March 2017. At that time ministers reconfirmed the EU's engagement and focus on the region, including through political and economic links. The Council also stressed the need for partners in the region to deliver on reforms to ensure that they made steady progress down the European path. The Western Balkans has a clear European perspective, which is essential for the stability, reconciliation and future of the region

[EU-Western Balkans summit in Sofia, 17 May 2018](#)

[Communication by the European Commission "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans", 6 February 2018 \(press release\)](#)

[The EU and the Western Balkans \(EEAS website\)](#)

Future of external financing instruments

In the afternoon, the Council will have a preliminary exchange of views on the future of external financing instruments. The Commission is currently preparing its proposal for the future multiannual financial framework, which is expected to be presented on 2 May.

The multiannual financial framework (MFF) sets the limits for the annual general budgets of the EU. It determines how much in total and how much for different areas of activity the EU can use each year when it enters into legally binding obligations over a period of - usually - 7 years. The current financial framework covers the period 2014 - 2020.

In the current MFF there are 17 external financing instruments, gathered under heading 4, 'Global Europe'. It includes, for instance, the European Neighbourhood Instrument, the Development Cooperation Instrument, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human rights, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, Macro-financial assistance, common foreign policy and security instruments or humanitarian aid.

The total amount allocated to heading 4 for 2014-2020 was just over €66 billion, which represents 6.1% of the total EU budget. In addition, the European Development Fund (EDF) finances the largest portion of EU cooperation with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and is distinctive in that it is not funded by the EU budget, but by EU member states separately. For 2014-2020, €30.5 billion were allocated to the 11th EDF.

[Multiannual financial framework: shaping EU expenditure \(background information\)](#)

Other items

The Council is expected to adopt a number of decisions and conclusions without debate, including Council conclusions on South Sudan, chemical disarmament and non-proliferation and malicious cyber activities.

Council conclusions on South Sudan

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on South Sudan, noting that 2018 is a critical year for securing peace in South Sudan as the term of the transitional government of National Unity as set out in the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) comes to an end. The Council is expected to state that while ARCSS remains the basis for the process, but the discussions must reflect the reality on the ground.

The Council is due to reaffirm the EU's deep concern at the continued fighting and grave violations and abuses of human rights that have inflicted horrific levels of human suffering and left the country in ruins. It is set to urge all parties to the negotiations to put the future of the country and the needs of its people first. It will also urge all parties to the conflict in South Sudan to immediately cease fighting and participate in the peace process in good faith. The Council is set to reaffirm that the EU remains ready to apply all appropriate measures to those obstructing the political process.

[EU delegation to South Sudan](#)

Council conclusions on malicious cyber activities

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on malicious cyber activities, stressing the importance of a global, open, free, stable and secure cyberspace where human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law fully apply.

The Council is expected to express its serious concern about the increased ability and willingness of third states and non-state actors to pursue their objectives by undertaking malicious cyber activities and to state that it will continue to bolster its capabilities to address cyber threats.

The Council is set to firmly condemn the malicious use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), including in Wannacry and NotPetya, which have caused significant damage and economic loss in the EU and beyond. It is due to stress that the use of ICTs for malicious purposes is unacceptable.

The Council is set to express its willingness to continue working within the UN and other fora to maintain international peace and stability in cyberspace.

[Draft Council conclusions on malicious cyber activities](#)

[Cyber attacks: EU ready to respond with a range of measures, including sanctions, press release of 19 June 2017](#)

Council conclusions on chemical disarmament and non-proliferation

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on chemical disarmament and non-proliferation with a view towards the fourth special session of the conference of the states parties to review the operation of the chemical weapons convention on the prohibition of the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and on their destruction. This session will take place in The Hague on 21-30 November 2018.

The Council is expected to recall that the European Union stands united in its support for the total prohibition and elimination of chemical weapons worldwide and that it strongly believes that use of chemical weapons, including the use of any toxic chemicals as weapons, by anyone, be it a State or a non-State actor, anywhere, and under any circumstances is abhorrent and must be rigorously condemned.

The Council will reaffirm that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable, constitutes a breach of international law and may amount to a war crime or a crime against humanity and that there can be no impunity and those responsible for such acts must be held accountable. It will underline that the most recent reports from Syria, which are truly shocking and must be urgently and independently investigated, only serve to reinforce the EU's shared determination.

Furthermore, the Council is expected to welcome the upcoming fourth review conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention and expresses its commitment to contributing constructively to its successive outcome.
