



FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

21 January 2019

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 discuss the **action plan against disinformation** presented by the European Commission on 5 December 2018. They will exchange views on the implementation of the action plan. Ministers are expected to focus on the external aspects of the challenges of disinformation.

The Council will have a preparatory discussion for the **EU-League of Arab States ministerial meeting** to be held in Brussels on 4 February 2019, ahead of the summit foreseen on 24 and 25 February 2019 in Egypt.

The Council will also discuss the 22nd **EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting**, that will take place on the same day in Brussels. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on EU-ASEAN relations.

The Council is expected to adopt a number of decisions and conclusions without debate, including conclusions on the situation in Nicaragua.

Press opportunities:

Monday 21 January

- +/- 08.45 Doorstep by High Representative Federica Mogherini
- +/- 12.45 Press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council
- +/- 18.15 Press conference following the EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting

Tuesday 22 January

- +/- 13.00 Press conference following the EU-AU ministerial meeting

[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. This will include **Venezuela**: foreign ministers will touch upon the latest developments in the country and the High Representative will update the ongoing exploratory work towards the setting-up of an international contact group which could help to create the conditions for a credible political process. The High Representative and foreign ministers may also refer to the latest developments in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, following the presidential election on 30 December 2018. The High Representative and foreign ministers may also touch on the latest developments in **Syria** ahead of the discussion planned at their informal meeting (Gymnich) on 1 February in Bucharest as well as ahead of the third Brussels conference on supporting Syria and the region.

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the new mandate of President Maduro \(10/01/2019\)](#)

[Declaration by the High Representative, on behalf of the EU, on relations with the Democratic Republic of Congo on the eve of its elections, 28 December 2018 and Statement by the Spokesperson on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 23 January 2018](#)

[EU to host third Brussels conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region, 27 September 2018](#)

Action plan against disinformation

The Council will discuss the action plan against disinformation presented by the European Commission on 5 December 2018. Following the June 2018 European Council conclusions, the action plan sets out actions to be taken by the EU, in cooperation with member states, to respond to the challenge of disinformation. In its conclusions of 14 December 2018, the European Council called for the prompt and coordinated implementation of the joint action plan so as to bolster EU capabilities, strengthen coordinated and joint responses between the EU and member states, mobilise the private sector and increase societal resilience to disinformation.

Foreign ministers will exchange views on the implementation of the action plan focusing on its external aspects. The General Affairs Council discussed disinformation at its meeting of 8 January 2019, taking particular account of the forthcoming European elections.

Foreign ministers are expected to discuss how to build partnerships and share resources and develop best practices with the EU's international partners, in particular NATO and the G7, to tackle the threat of disinformation and foreign interference. The debate may also cover cooperation with civil society in tackling disinformation, including with CSOs, NGOs, business and academia. Foreign ministers may also refer to the organisation of awareness raising campaigns on disinformation.

Ministers may also discuss the importance of addressing disinformation in the broader context of hybrid threats, foreign interference and strategic communication. Foreign ministers may also refer to the work of the three strategic communication task forces of the European External Action Service, set up in order to promote fact-based narratives about the EU in Eastern and Southern countries and in the Western Balkans. The task force East team also works on identifying, analysing and raising awareness of pro-Kremlin disinformation. With nearly 4000 cases of disinformation uncovered, this work has been widely recognised. These examples are available at <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>.

[Action Plan against Disinformation](#), 5 December 2018

[European Council conclusions](#), 14 December 2018

[Outcome of the General Affairs Council meeting](#), 8 January 2018

EU-League of Arab States relations

The Council will have a preparatory discussion for the 5th EU - League of Arab States (LAS) ministerial meeting to be held in Brussels on 4 February 2019, ahead of the first EU - LAS summit foreseen on 24 and 25 February 2019 in Egypt. The ministerial meeting will be an opportunity to reaffirm the strong EU - LAS partnership on a number of regional issues, as well as the need to cooperate in addressing common challenges in the region with concrete deliverables.

The decision to organise the summit was taken following the visit of President Tusk and Chancellor Kurz to Egypt on 16 September 2018 and the informal summit in Salzburg of 19-20 September. In its conclusions of 18 October 2018, the European Council welcomed the holding of the summit.

Ministers will exchange views on the state of play of preparations for the ministerial. They will in particular discuss regional issues which will likely be raised during the upcoming ministerial meeting, such as regional crises, migration, the fight against terrorism and climate change.

The League of Arab States is the only pan-Arab grouping gathering all Arab countries. It includes 21 member states from Africa and the Middle East: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Syria's membership was suspended in 2011.

Since the signing of a memorandum of understanding in 2015, the EU and LAS have maintained an advanced relationship, including biennial ministerial meetings and annual meetings between the EU Political and Security Committee and the LAS Permanent Representatives. The EU and the LAS have also launched in 2015 a strategic dialogue to develop the Euro-Arab operational cooperation on security issues.

[League of Arab States \(EEAS\)](#)

[Remarks by High Representative Mogherini during the opening session of 29th Summit of the League of Arab States](#), 15 April 2018

[EU - League of Arab States relations: joint communiqué of the EU Political and Security Committee and the League of Arab States Permanent Representatives](#), 28 November 2017

EU-ASEAN relations

The Council will discuss EU cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in view of the 22nd EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting that will take place on the same day in Brussels (see below). The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on EU-ASEAN relations.

In its conclusions, the Council is due to welcome the outcome of the EU-ASEAN leaders' meeting in Brussels on 19 October 2018. It is expected to state that the EU has a strategic interest in strengthening its relationship with ASEAN and that the Council is determined to deepen relations in 2019. It will underline its support for ASEAN regional integration.

Ministers may review the agenda of the EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting, including the strengthening of the relationship, promoting EU-ASEAN connectivity, enhancing political and security cooperation, addressing climate change and the environment, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and constructive discussions on key challenges facing Europe, Southeast Asia and the world.

[EU-ASEAN relations, factsheet](#)

[EU-ASEAN leaders held high level meeting to enhance cooperation](#), 19 October 2018

Other items

The Council is expected to adopt a number of decisions and conclusions without debate, including Council conclusions on Nicaragua.

Council conclusions on Nicaragua

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the situation in Nicaragua. Since April 2018, demonstrations in Nicaragua were brutally repressed by security forces and pro-government armed groups leading to clashes, several hundreds dead and injured and the arrest of hundreds of citizens, with widespread irregularities and arbitrariness in detention and judicial procedures.

The Council is due to underline that recent measures targeting civil society organisations and independent media constitute another blow to democracy, human rights and civic freedoms aggravating the political and social crisis. The EU is expected to firmly condemn the repression of the press and civil society and the use of anti-terrorist laws to repress dissenting opinions in Nicaragua

The Council is due to underline its readiness to use all its policy instruments to contribute to a peaceful negotiated way out of the current crisis and react to further deterioration of human rights and rule of law.

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the situation in Nicaragua](#), 10 October 2018

[Statement by the spokesperson on the revoking of legal status of civil society and journalists' organisations in Nicaragua](#), 15 December 2018

EU - ASEAN ministerial meeting

The EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting will bring together EU foreign ministers and their counterparts from the 10 member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Singapore Vivian Balakrishnan will co-chair the meeting.

Both sides will discuss cooperation on regional and international issues, including global challenges such as climate change and strengthening the rules-based multilateral system.

They will also exchange views on recent developments in the EU and in the ASEAN countries.

This meeting will also provide an occasion to take stock of EU-ASEAN relations as well as of efforts towards a strategic partnership.

Foreign ministers will discuss how to strengthen EU-ASEAN cooperation on connectivity. Both sides will also address priority areas for 2019 such as enhanced security cooperation, including counterterrorism, transnational crime, maritime security and cybersecurity.

The 10 ASEAN member states are: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar/Burma, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

[EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting, 21/01/2019](#)

[EU-ASEAN relations, factsheet](#)

[EU-ASEAN leaders held high level meeting to enhance cooperation](#), 19 October 2018

European Union - African Union ministerial meeting

The first inter-Summit EU-AU ministerial meeting will take place on 21-22 January in Brussels. EU foreign ministers will discuss EU-AU cooperation with their African counterparts. The ministerial meeting will cover three main themes:

- political aspects: peace, security and governance,
- economic: trade, investment and economic integration,
- multilateralism: strengthening cooperation in support of the rule-based global order.

The discussion is expected to focus on the implementation of the outcome of the 5th AU – EU Summit that took place in Abidjan on 29 and 30 November 2017, marking a milestone in reshaping the partnership into an even stronger, mutually beneficial partnership better adapted to a rapidly evolving global context.

On the political aspects, ministers may refer to the memorandum of understanding on peace, security and governance signed by the AU and the EU on 23 May 2018, which provides an opportunity for both organisations to cooperate and engage in a more strategic way on peace, security and governance.

On the economic aspects, ministers may discuss the Commission's proposal for an Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs. The proposal sets out a comprehensive economic agenda complementing the political strand of the partnership with job creation at its heart, bringing together the different elements of work on creating conditions for investment, promoting investment in critical sectors of digital solutions, energy, transport and agriculture and ensuring that the necessary skills are available. The EU remains Africa's largest trade and investment partner, with approximately 40% of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) worth €291 billion in 2016.

On multilateralism, ministers may discuss ways to deliver on the commitment, taken at the Abidjan Summit, to boost AU-EU cooperation on the global scene, working together to promote the rule based global order with the UN at its core and to support effective multilateralism. The AU and the EU called for stronger mutual engagement, and agreed to strengthen their high-level policy dialogue to adopt a more coordinated approach and converging positions in international negotiations, and to further identify areas for cooperation. Ministers may also refer to AU-EU-UN trilateral cooperation, which is a positive development demonstrating how cooperation can make a difference in crisis areas, as well as in tackling global challenges.

[EU-African Union ministerial meeting, 21-22/01/2019](#)

[Africa and the EU](#)

[Final Declaration of the AU - EU summit in Abidjan](#)

[Towards a new 'Africa - Europe Alliance' \(Commission press release, 12/09/2018\)](#)