



FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

18 March 2019

The Foreign Affairs Council, chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, will start at 10.00 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 political perspectives for EU engagement with the Republic of **Moldova** and the way forward, following the recent parliamentary elections on 24 February 2019.

The Council will then hold a wide-ranging and comprehensive exchange of views on **China** and EU-China relations. It will be a preparatory discussion for the debate amongst Heads of State or government at the European Council meeting of 21-22 March, and ahead of the **EU-China summit**, to be held on 9 April 2019 in Brussels.

Foreign ministers will have a lunch discussion with **Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi**.

The Council will finally review the situation in **Yemen**, focusing in particular on ways to support the implementation of the "Stockholm Agreement" reached between representatives of the Yemeni parties under the auspices of the United Nations in December 2018.

The Council is expected to adopt several decisions and conclusion without debate, including Council conclusions on "EU human rights guidelines on non-discrimination in external action".

Before the start of the Council meeting, the High Representative and foreign ministers are expected to mark the **fifth anniversary of the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russia**.

Press opportunities:

- +/- 07.50 Doorstep by High Representative Federica Mogherini
- +/- 09.40 Press point by High Representative Federica Mogherini and Chinese State Councillor / Foreign Minister Wang Yi following the EU-China Strategic Dialogue
- +/- 16.00 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 discussion on current affairs. The High Representative and foreign ministers may refer to the situation in **Venezuela**, as well as to **Syria**, in particular following the third Brussels conference on *Supporting the future of Syria and the region*, and to the **Central African Republic**. They may also highlight that the Council takes place on the 5th anniversary of the illegal annexation of **Crimea** by Russia.

[Venezuela: the Council's response to the crisis](#) (background information)

[Supporting the future of Syria and the region - Brussels III conference, 12-14/03/2019](#)

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

[Communiqué de presse à l'occasion de la rencontre du Président de la Commission européenne Jean-Claude Juncker et de la Haute Représentante et Vice Présidente Federica Mogherini avec le Président de la République centrafricaine, Faustin Archange Touadéra](#)

Republic of Moldova

Foreign ministers will have an exchange of views on political perspectives for EU engagement with the Republic of Moldova and the way forward, following recent parliamentary elections, which took place on 24 February 2019. Foreign ministers are expected to take stock of the situation, including post-election developments and their implications on future EU relations with Moldova.

According to the preliminary conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, the elections were *"competitive and fundamental rights were generally respected."* However, shortcomings were noted throughout the campaign and on the election day, including *"allegations of pressure on public employees, strong indications of vote buying and the misuse of state resources."* The Mission also noted that *"control and ownership of the media by political actors limited the range of viewpoints presented to voters."*

These were the first elections conducted under the newly introduced mixed electoral system. In its conclusions of 26 February 2018, the Council expressed its 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 EU had 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. However, the serious deterioration in the areas of the rule of law and democratic principles has led the EU to put on hold the first tranche of € 30 million out of total € 100 million macro-financial assistance, as well as budget support payments (worth € 44 million) until tangible progress is made on the rule of law, human rights and democratic principles. For the same reason, the EU substantially recalibrated and reduced EU financial assistance and redirected support to projects that impact directly citizens. In turn, the EU stepped up its support for citizens' empowerment, independent media and strategic communications and will support socio-economic development at regional level, focussing on Ungheni and Cahul.

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. Commitment to robust reform process and respect for the rule of law and democratic principles are the core the Association agreement.

[Statement by the Spokesperson on the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova, 25 February 2019](#)

[EU relations with Moldova, background information](#)

[Moldova: Council adopts conclusions 26 February 2018](#)

China

Foreign ministers will discuss China. Following-up on their discussion at the informal meeting of foreign affairs ministers (Gymnich) on 1 February 2019, they are expected to exchange views on the broad spectrum of aspects of the EU-China relationship. They will also serve as a preparatory discussion for the debate between Heads of State or government at the European Council meeting of 21-22 March, and ahead of the EU-China summit, to be held on 9 April 2019 in Brussels.

Ministers will have the opportunity to express their views on the joint communication by the High Representative and the Commission issued on 12 March 2019 ahead of the European Council meeting of 21-22 March. The joint communication reviews EU-China relations and the related opportunities and challenges. It recommends three objectives: to deepen its engagement with China to promote common interests at global level, to robustly seek more balanced and reciprocal conditions governing the economic relationship, and to adapt to changing economic realities and strengthen EU's domestic policies and industrial base. It sets out 10 concrete actions for discussion by EU Heads of State or Government. It aims to start a discussion on refining Europe's approach to be more realistic, assertive and multi-faceted.

Foreign ministers will discuss how to engage with China and deepen EU-China relations, in particular on key areas such as multilateralism, climate change, non-proliferation (including in the context on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - JCPOA, as well as in the Korean peninsula), peace-keeping and addressing regional security challenges, including Afghanistan. They might also review key EU messages to China, including on human rights, respect for international law including law of sea, and cyber security.

[EU relations with China, background information](#)

[2019 Joint Communication- EU-China – A strategic outlook, press release, 12 March 2019](#)

[Joint statement of the 20th EU-China Summit 16 July 2018](#)

[Council conclusions on EU strategy on China 18 July 2016](#)

[Delegation of the European Union to China](#)

Informal lunch

Foreign ministers will have a lunch discussion with Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. They are expected to explore the scope for closer cooperation in multilateral institutions and on global challenges, as well as on security and crisis management. This discussion will be preceded by the European Union-China Strategic Dialogue, with the High Representative and State Councillor Wang Yi at 08.00.

Yemen

The Council will review the situation in Yemen, focusing in particular on ways to provide support to the UN Special Envoy in the implementation of the "Stockholm Agreement" reached between representatives of the Yemeni parties under the auspices of the United Nations in December 2018. Ministers will also discuss the dire humanitarian situation and the challenges in the delivery of humanitarian aid in the country.

Ministers may stress the need to keep the political momentum on Yemen and push the parties to urgently fulfil their commitments under the Agreement. They are expected to reiterate the EU's support for United Nations Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and for the United Nations mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), highlighting the need to see immediate progress on the ground, starting with planned redeployments of forces as proposed by the UN. They may reiterate that fulfilling confidence-building measures will allow for the political consultations to resume with the aim of reaching an inclusive, negotiated, mutually-agreed, enforceable and sustainable solution within a UN-led framework to end the conflict. In particular, they may highlight the importance of fully associating Yemenite women to the process.

The Council adopted conclusions on Yemen at its last meeting, on 18 February 2019. The EU has contributed with over 560 million euros of assistance since the beginning of the conflict.

[Yemen: Council adopts conclusions, 18 February 2019](#)

[EU relations with Yemen](#), background information

[Statement by the spokesperson on new hostilities in the Kushar district, Yemen](#), 12 March 2019

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the consultations in Sweden between the representatives of the Yemeni parties and the Stockholm Agreement, 16 December 2018](#)

Other items

The Council is expected to adopt a number of decisions and conclusions without debate.

Council conclusions on EU human rights guidelines on non-discrimination in external action.

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions endorsing the EU human rights guidelines on non-discrimination in external action. The guidelines give the EU a new and dynamic tool for our common fight against discrimination. The Council is expected to reaffirm the EU's commitment to the purposes and principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that applies to all human beings without distinction of any kind.

The Council is due to recall that the actions of the EU on the international scene are guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.

The Council is also due to reiterate that the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union prohibits any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation.