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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

The High Representative and foreign ministers welcomed the results of the third Brussels conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region, which was the opportunity to reaffirm EU support for the UN-led political process, and which gave a strong signal of continued support for the Syrian people by successfully mobilising aid from the international community.

The High Representative briefed ministers on the ongoing work of the International Contact Group on Venezuela. Foreign ministers expressed their concern as the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. They reiterated the urgent need to find a way towards a political process.

The signature of the peace agreement in the Central African Republic and the recently announced US measures on the International Criminal Court were also among the other issues mentioned.

Republic of Moldova

The Council discussed Moldova following the parliamentary elections of 24 February. Foreign ministers highlighted the importance of a transparent and credible government formation process, which should reflect a genuine parliamentary majority that respects the outcome of the elections. They stressed the importance of non-interference in the formation process and recalled that the EU does not support individual parties and specific political actors, but values and principles.

The Council recalled that the basis for EU cooperation with Moldova was the implementation of the Association Agreement, including a strong commitment to the reform agenda and respect for the rule of law and democratic principles.

Foreign ministers confirmed the importance of the principle of conditionality in delivering macro-financial assistance, which had to be withheld following a serious deterioration in the areas of rule of law and the upholding of democratic principles. In this context, they highlighted the critical importance of delivering tangible benefits to Moldovan citizens and continued support for civil society.

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

China

The Council held a wide-ranging and comprehensive exchange of views on China and EU-China relations, ahead of its discussion with Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The discussion will feed into the preparation for the debate amongst heads of state or government at the European Council meeting of 21-22 March ahead of the EU-China summit to be held on 9 April 2019 in Brussels.

The discussion was informed by the joint communication by the High Representative and the Commission entitled 'EU-China: A strategic outlook' which had been adopted on 12 March. Ministers welcomed the assessment made in the joint communication and the proposed actions. While the 2016 China strategy remains the basis for EU cooperation with China, the joint communication provides useful guidelines on how to refine Europe's approach to China to be more realistic, assertive and multi-faceted.

Foreign ministers stressed the paramount importance of unity, solidarity, and consistency at EU level for a productive engagement with China, as only a united EU can effectively tackle the challenges presented by China today. They also emphasised the importance of EU values and principles and the need to safeguard the EU's strategic interests in the EU-China relationship. They highlighted the importance of respect for human rights and of the EU-China human rights dialogue. They underlined the need for better reciprocity in economic relations, as well as the development of a level playing field and equal market access for EU businesses. Ministers also referred to cybersecurity, investment screening, and the need to protect critical EU infrastructure and industry.

Ministers called for deeper cooperation with China on areas such as multilateralism, climate change, non-proliferation (in the context of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - JCPOA and in the Korean peninsula), peace-keeping and addressing regional security challenges.

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

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

Yemen

Ministers recalled that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Yemen and that the only way forward is the implementation of the Stockholm agreement in all its parts. They stressed the need to keep up the political momentum and to push the parties to urgently fulfil their commitments under the agreement, as well as the need to see immediate progress on the ground.

The Council reiterated the EU's full support for the UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and his efforts in finding a lasting, sustainable, enforceable, inclusive and negotiated political solution within a UN-led framework. Foreign ministers highlighted in particular the importance of fully involving Yemeni women in the political process.

Ministers expressed concern at the lack of improvement in the dire humanitarian situation, in particular in regard to access for humanitarian aid. The Council reiterated that the EU and its member states would continue their humanitarian assistance efforts and lend political support as necessary.

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

[EU relations with Yemen \(EEAS\)](#)

In the margins

– ***Fifth anniversary of the illegal annexation of Crimea***

As the meeting took place on the fifth anniversary of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, the High Representative and foreign ministers marked the event by publicly reiterating the key elements of the EU position.

[EU foreign ministers mark the fifth anniversary of the illegal annexation of Crimea \(video\)](#)

– ***Informal lunch with Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi***

Over lunch, foreign ministers held an open and wide-ranging discussion with Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

Before the Council meeting, the EU High Representative and the State Councilor held the EU-China strategic dialogue.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****Council conclusions on guidelines on non-discrimination in external action**

The Council adopted the following conclusions approving the EU guidelines on non-discrimination in external action:

- “1. The Council reaffirms 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.
2. The Council recalls that the Treaty on the European Union establishes that the action of the Union on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlarging, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: 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.
3. The Council further recalls 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.
4. With the view to enhancing the EU’s effectiveness in combatting discrimination on any grounds and the visibility and awareness of the EU’s values and action in combatting discrimination in its external action, the Council approves the EU Human Rights Guidelines on Non-Discrimination in External Action.
5. These Guidelines on Non-discrimination deliver on the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, complement and reinforce all other EU Human Rights Guidelines and support the EU’s Right Based Approach to Development Cooperation encompassing all Human Rights.

6. The Guidelines on Non-discrimination shall be disseminated widely and their accessibility be ensured including for persons with disabilities. The effective operationalisation of these Guidelines on Non-discrimination will be undertaken jointly by the European Union and its Member States. The Council Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) will support the implementation while involving, when appropriate, other Council working groups. Regular exchanges of views will be held on the implementation and review of these Guidelines.”

[EU guidelines on non-discrimination in external action](#)

[Promoting and protecting human rights](#)

Sanctions on South Sudan

The Council reviewed the sanctions regarding the situation in South Sudan, and agreed to maintain the restrictive measures currently in place against one person.

Exercise specifications for EU crisis management - MILEX 19

The Council approved the specifications for the 2019 military crisis management exercise (MILEX 19). It is a command post exercise which concentrates on decision-making and planning at the military strategic and operational levels for the launch of an autonomous CSDP military operation.

The exercise will be held from 4-5 November 2019, with follow-up phases up to 15 November 2019. It will take place in Brussels, as well as in Larissa and Nea Santa Kilkis (Greece).

The exercise focuses on the interaction between the EU Operation Headquarters (OHQ), the EU Force Headquarters (FHQ) and the EU Military Staff (EUMS). The United Nations has been invited to participate in the exercise.

The exercise has the objectives of ensuring the effective coordination of different EU instruments through an integrated approach and of further enhancing the EU military capacity to respond to external conflict and crises.

EU-Republic of North Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council

The Council established the EU's position for the 15th meeting of the EU-Republic of North Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council, which will take place on 19 March 2019 in Brussels.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND HUMANITARIAN AID**Transparency of EU funds implemented by NGO funds**

The Council adopted conclusions on the European Court of Auditors Special Report 35/2018: 'Transparency of EU funds implemented by NGOs: more effort needed'. The Council concluded that NGOs are important partners in implementing EU funding programmes and in delivering EU external assistance. Therefore, transparency regarding the funding chain is essential for the efficiency of the respective initiatives.

[Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors Special Report 35/2018](#)

EU-Ukraine Association Council

The Council adopted a common position to allow for the update of the annexes of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, to reflect the evolution of the EU acquis in the energy sector and facilitate Ukraine's approximation efforts in this field.

ENERGY**Conclusions on the first European topical peer review for nuclear safety**

The Council adopted conclusions on the first European topical peer review for nuclear safety.

The topical peer review was carried out in accordance with Article 8e of the amended Nuclear Safety Directive ([Council Directive 2014/87/Euratom](#)). Nineteen countries, including 16 EU member states, and the Commission as an observer participated in the first topical peer review. The subject of the first topical peer review was ageing management, as identified by the European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (ENSREG). ENSREG published a report on the peer review on its website in October 2018.

The main conclusion of the peer review is that ageing management programmes exist in all countries with nuclear power plants. No major deficiencies were identified in European regulation and implementation of ageing management programmes, but the review identified areas where further work would enhance ageing management. In terms of next steps, ENSREG will prepare an action plan setting out how the challenges of the topical peer review will be addressed. The participating countries will prepare national action plans on the implementation of their country specific findings.

The Council conclusions adopted today welcome the adoption and publication by ENSREG of the report on the first topical peer review. They call on the member states to deliver their national action plans and on the Commission to ensure that ENSREG will prepare the action plan on the necessary measures to address the challenges of the peer review. The Council also promotes actions for further cooperation and transparency. ([7073/19](#))
