



Foreign Affairs Council 22 February 2021

The Foreign Affairs Council meeting will be chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep **Borrell**, starting at **09.15h**.

Under current affairs, the Council will take stock of the latest international developments. These should include: a review of the situation in **Myanmar**, on which the Council is also due to adopt conclusions, a report on the **G5 Sahel Summit**, **Ethiopia**, and an update on **Belarus**.

The main agenda items will be strategic discussions on **Russia**, the **Strategic Compass** and **Hong Kong**.

In the afternoon the **United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken** is expected to join by video conference for an exchange of views focusing on the **EU-US relations**.

Press conference: +/- 17.15 in a virtual format

[Foreign Affairs Council meeting page](#)

[Video coverage of the event in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery](#)

[Press conferences and public events via video streaming](#)

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the Council press office.

Current Affairs

The Foreign Affairs Council will start with a discussion on **current affairs**, during which ministers will have the opportunity to be updated on recent developments that are most pressing in the international agenda.

The High Representative will first refer to the situation in **Myanmar** after the military coup, with a focus on the EU's response to the actions taken by the military, and EU's outreach to regional and international partners. Ministers will discuss the EU's engagement with the country with a view to defining a possible package of actions, aimed at changing the behaviour of key actors, while minimising the negative impact on the general population and on the most vulnerable.

The Council is due to adopt conclusions on this issue.

The Finnish minister of Foreign Affairs will then debrief the Council on his visit to Sudan and **Ethiopia** on behalf of the High Representative on 7-10 February. The aim of the visit was to engage with Ethiopian authorities on the crisis in Tigray and to address regional issues to avoid further destabilisation in an already fragile region.

On the basis of his observations and recommendations, ministers will reflect on what action the EU may take with other international and regional partners, including the African Union, to address the worrying humanitarian situation, and support the de-escalation of conflict and peace efforts.

Next the High Representative will debrief the Council on the **G5 Sahel Summit** which took place in Chad on 16 February, which he joined by video-conference together with President of the European Council Charles Michel.

The High Representative will briefly refer to the joint communication on "**Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood**", which will inform the February EUCO discussion on the Southern Neighbourhood.

Furthermore, the High Representative will mention the adoption on 17 February of the joint communication on "**Strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism**", which lays out the EU's expectations and ambitions for the multilateral system.

Finally, the High Representative will raise the issue of further deterioration of situation in **Belarus** and the ongoing crackdown against human right defenders, civil society and journalists.

- [Myanmar: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union, 2 February 2021](#)
- [Ethiopia: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union, 20 December 2020](#)
- [Intervention du président Charles Michel au sommet G5 Sahel par vidéo conférence, 16 February 2021](#)
- [Southern Neighbourhood: Joint Communication on a renewed partnership / A new Agenda for the Mediterranean](#)
- [Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism](#)
- [EU relations with Belarus, policy page](#)

Russia

Following the recent visit of the High Representative to Moscow on 4-6 February 2021, the Council will hold a comprehensive and strategic discussion on EU-Russia relations.

The discussion is expected to focus on the EU's response to the sentencing of Alexei Navalny and the crackdown on thousands of peaceful demonstrators across Russia, as well as on how to provide further support to independent Russian civil society and enhance people-to-people contacts.

Ministers will be invited in particular to elaborate on how the EU can better use its leverage - including together with its partners - to firmly defend and pursue its values, interests and objectives across the spectrum of its relations with Russia, in line with the five guiding principles. They will also focus on the specific steps that could be envisaged in response to the continued pattern of negative Russian actions and internal repression by the Russian government, and how the EU can step up its support for human rights, Russian civil society and the most vulnerable groups.

Finally, ministers will reflect on how to preserve space for engagement, where this is in the EU's interest.

The ministerial discussion on EU-Russia relations aims at informing the strategic debate at the European Council in March.

- [Russia: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the sentencing of Alexei Navalny, press release 3 February 2021](#)
- [Russia: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the arrest of Alexei Navalny upon his return, 18 January 2021](#)
- [Russia: The EU prolongs economic sanctions for another six months, press release 17 December 2020](#)
- [Use of chemical weapons in the assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny: EU sanctions six individuals and one entity, 15 October 2020](#)

Strategic Compass

Following up on the video conference of defence ministers of 20 November 2020, and ahead of the leaders' discussion on security and defence at the informal video conference of the members of the European Council on 26 February, the Council will exchange views on the Strategic Compass

The Strategic Compass aims to give the EU a common strategic direction in the area of security and defence and should enhance the implementation of the EU's level of ambition in this field.

In early November 2020, the EU finalised its very first threat analysis. The exercise was based on input provided by civilian and military intelligence services of EU member states, and conducted by the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity, bringing together the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (EU INTCEN) and the Intelligence Directorate of the EU Military Staff.

Following the results of the threat analysis and the recently presented Scoping paper ministers will be invited to reflect on how to strengthen EU's security and defence policies in response to the changing security situation and strategic context. They will focus in particular on how the EU can enhance its ability to act autonomously when needed, better protect itself against threats, increase its resilience, in close partnership with NATO and in strengthened cooperation with the UN and key regional partners.

The aim of the discussion is to develop concrete and actionable proposals that help advance the work on the four baskets of the Strategic Compass: (1) crisis management, (2) resilience, (3) capability development, and (4) partnerships.

- [Video conference of defence ministers, 20 November 2020](#)
- [Video conference of the members of the European Council, 25-26 February 2021](#)
- [Factsheet: Strengthening EU security and defence](#)

Hong Kong

The High Representative will brief ministers on the latest political developments in Hong Kong. The Council will then exchange views on immediate measures to respond to the deteriorating situation, as well as possible additional medium-term actions, should the Beijing authorities take further steps to limit the democratic space or curb the independence of the judiciary. Coordination with like-minded countries will also be considered.

On 30 June 2020 China imposed the National Security Law (NSL) on Hong Kong, which is not in conformity with China's international commitments under the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 or with the Hong Kong Basic Law. The NLS also called into question China's will to uphold its international commitments. Following the introduction of the NSL, the Council responded with conclusions setting out a package of measures to be taken at both national and EU level.

At the Foreign Affairs Council of 7 December 2020, ministers considered the possibility to step up the implementation of the measures contained in the Council conclusions, and to introduce additional measures in case of a further deterioration. The Foreign Affairs Council of 25 January 2021 confirmed this approach.

The EU has reacted publicly to the deteriorating political situation and raised its concerns directly with the Chinese leadership at the Summit in June 2020, and the Leaders' meetings held in September and December 2020.

- [Hong Kong: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the mass arrest of people involved in the July 2020 pro-democracy primary elections, 7 January 2021](#)
- [Hong Kong: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the disqualification of Members of the Hong Kong Legislative Council, 12 November 2020](#)
- [Hong Kong: Council expresses grave concern over national security law, press release 28 July 2020](#)
- [Declaration of the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on the adoption by China's National People's Congress of a National Security Legislation on Hong Kong, 1 July 2020](#)
- [Foreign Affairs Council of 25 January 2021](#)
- [Foreign Affairs Council of 7 December 2020](#)

Informal video conference with the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken

Ministers will have a first opportunity to exchange views with the new US Secretary of State the substantive agenda for EU-US cooperation on key global, foreign and security policy issues.

The exchange is expected to focus on strengthening multilateralism to tackle global challenges, COVID response and recovery, climate change and strengthening democracy in the world. The discussion will also focus on how the EU and the US could better cooperate on a number of key foreign and security policy priorities.

Council Conclusions

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on **Myanmar/Burma, Human-rights-based post-COVID-19 recovery**, and **EU Priorities in UN Human Rights Fora 2021**.
