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President

Josep Borrell

High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security
Policy

P R E S S

CONTENTS¹

ITEMS DEBATED

Current Affairs	4
Southern Neighbourhood	5
Video Conference with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet	6

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

– EU Kuwait Terms of Reference Human Rights Dialogue	7
– Council Decision on the establishment of a warehouse capability for civilian crisis-management missions	7
– Council Decision establishing a European Peace Facility and General Guidelines and Safeguards	7
– Council decision and implementing regulation concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses	8
– Council decision and implementing regulation concerning restrictive measures against Myanmar/Burma	8
– Council Decision and Regulation concerning restrictive measures against Myanmar/Burma - amending designation criteria	8

ECONOMIC AND MONETARY AFFAIRS

– External auditors of the Deutsche Bundesbank and Eesti Pank	9
– VAT - Derogation - United Kingdom	9
– Methodology for the identification of global systemically important institutions	10
– Contributions to the administrative expenditures of the Single Resolution Board	10

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.

TRADE POLICY

- EU-Indonesia: green light for the signing of the Agreement on the modification of post-Brexit WTO tariff rate quotas..... 10
- EU-Pakistan: green light for the signing of the Agreement on the modification of post-Brexit WTO tariff rate quotas..... 11
- EU-Australia: green light for the signing of the Agreement on the modification of post-Brexit WTO tariff rate quotas..... 11
- EU-Panama: authorisation for opening of negotiations regarding the withdrawal of certain WTO tariff rate quotas..... 11

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

- 64th session Commission on Narcotic Drugs 11
- EU cybersecurity strategy..... 12

ENVIRONMENT

- Marine environment - ECA Special Report..... 12

ITEMS DEBATED**Current Affairs**

The Council took stock of the situation in Myanmar, which continues to deteriorate following the military coup on 1 February 2021. In briefing ministers, High Representative Borrell stressed that the EU would continue with its diplomatic efforts to help defuse the situation, and work towards restoring democracy and the legitimate civilian government.

Ministers were then updated about the Western Balkans and, in particular, recent and upcoming events such as the Stabilisation and Association Councils and the recent visit to the region by the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues, Miroslav Lajčák.

The Council also had a brief discussion on Russia, during which ministers confirmed that the five guiding principles remained very relevant, and that within those principles, the EU will push back, constrain, or engage with Russia as the situation merits it. EU leaders will have a discussion on the relationship with Russia at their video conference on 25-26 March.

The High Representative briefed ministers about the EU-Georgia Association Council held on 16 March, and about the EU's mediation efforts over the past weeks to overcome the political crisis in the country. The High Representative reiterated the need for all leaders of Georgia's political parties to put the interests of the Georgian people first, to make the necessary compromises, and to turn their attention to other urgent issues like the coronavirus pandemic, economic recovery, and Georgia's national security.

Venezuela was also discussed in light of recent events such as the expulsion of the Head of the EU Delegation to Venezuela from the country, and the EU's declaration of the Venezuelan ambassador to the EU as persona non grata. The debate highlighted that the stabilisation and re-democratisation of the country is possible, but it requires consistent effort.

Finally, the High Representative briefed ministers about the situation in Ethiopia and the daily reports of human rights violations of massive scale coming from the country. The EU will continue to increase pressure for humanitarian access to be allowed, independent investigations on human rights abuses to be launched, and Eritrean troops to be withdrawn. The High Representative stressed that the EU stands ready to activate all its foreign policy tools against those responsible for human rights violations, and that he had mandated the Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto to go back to the region for a second mission. Turkey

The Council assessed EU-Turkey relations in view of a joint report of the High Representative and the Commission prepared ahead of the video conference of the members of the European Council on 25-26 March.

Ministers generally considered the report as a good basis for discussions in the European Council.

In summarising the discussion, the High Representative underlined that since the December 2020 European Council conclusions, there had been positive signals from the Turkish leadership. Although steps were taken in the direction of de-escalation in the East Mediterranean, the process remained fragile and de-escalation efforts needed to be sustained.

Ministers agreed that it is important to keep the momentum and consolidate it, but also to keep all options on the table in case developments so require.

Southern Neighbourhood

The Council then exchanged views on the Southern Neighbourhood.

The debate highlighted the need for a stronger, closer and more effective partnership, and for the EU to work together with its partners to solve common problems such as: COVID, conflicts, migration, climate change, and terrorism.

Ministers focused particular on how to implement the joint communication on a Renewed Partnership for the Southern Neighbourhood of 9 February 2021, and make it operational. In their interventions they touched on various aspects such as: promoting reforms, working with civil society, using the potential of the green and digital transitions, etc.

Council conclusions on the Southern Neighbourhood will be adopted at a next Foreign Affairs Council.

Video Conference with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet

Ministers had an opportunity to exchange views with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on the state of human rights around the world, and recent development in this regard.

The video conference also launched of the Strategic Dialogue between the EU and the High Commissioner, which is a new initiative set out in the strategy on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

EU Kuwait Terms of Reference Human Rights Dialogue

The Council authorised the signing of the Terms of Reference for the Establishment of an Experts' Level Human Rights Working Group between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait and the European External Action Service.

Council Decision on the establishment of a warehouse capability for civilian crisis-management missions

The Council adopted a decision amending and extending decision (CFSP) 2018/653 on the establishment of a warehouse capability for civilian crisis-management missions. It also endorsed the budgetary impact statement.

Council Decision establishing a European Peace Facility and General Guidelines and Safeguards

The Council adopted a decision establishing the European Peace Facility (EPF), an off-budget fund worth approximately €5 billion for the period 2021-2027, to be financed through contributions from EU member states. The new financial instrument will cover all its external actions that have military or defence implications under the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

[EU sets up the European Peace Facility, press release](#)

The Council also approved the EPF "General Guidelines and Proposed Priorities for Assistance Measures during the Inception Period (2021-2023)", and a document titled "Providing Military Technology and Equipment in the Framework of the EPF Basic Principles for Compliance and Control" (the 'EPF Safeguards Paper').

Council decision and implementing regulation concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses

The Council decided to impose restrictive measures on eleven individuals and four entities responsible for serious human rights violations and abuses in various countries around the world. Together with the listing of four Russian individuals earlier this month, these 15 designations are part of the first broader package of listings under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime.

[EU imposes further sanctions over serious violations of human rights around the world, press release](#)

Council decision and implementing regulation concerning restrictive measures against Myanmar/Burma

The Council imposed restrictive measures on eleven individuals responsible for the military coup staged in Myanmar/Burma on 1 February 2021, and the subsequent military and police repression against peaceful demonstrators.

[Myanmar/Burma: EU sanctions 11 people over the recent military coup and ensuing repression](#)

Council Decision and Regulation concerning restrictive measures against Myanmar/Burma - amending designation criteria

The Council adopted a decision and an amending regulation amending the listing criteria set out in Council decision 2013/184/CFSP and Council regulation No 401/2013 concerning restrictive measures in respect of Myanmar/Burma.

The agreed amendment of the listing criteria widens the scope of this restrictive measures framework in response to the situation in Myanmar following the military coup carried out in Myanmar/Burma on 1 February 2021.

ECONOMIC AND MONETARY AFFAIRS

External auditors of the Deutsche Bundesbank and Eesti Pank

The Council adopted two decisions approving the external auditors of the Deutsche Bundesbank and Eesti Pank ([6001/21](#) + [6003/21](#)).

Baker Tilly GmbH & Co. KG Wirtschaftsprüfungsgesellschaft has been approved as the external auditors of the Deutsche Bundesbank for the financial years 2021 to 2026.

Ernst & Young Baltic AS has been approved as the external auditors of Eesti Pank for the financial years 2021 to 2025.

VAT - Derogation - United Kingdom

The Council authorised the United Kingdom, in respect of Northern Ireland, to fix, from 1 January 2021 until 31 December 2023, on a flat-rate basis, the proportion of VAT relating to expenditure on fuel used for private purposes in business cars ([6323/21](#)). The measure, which is optional for taxable persons, is based on the level of carbon dioxide emissions from the car, reflecting fuel consumption.

The UK was first authorised to use this measure in 2006 and as a result of the latest extension, in 2018, it applied until 31 December 2020.

In accordance with the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, which forms an integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement, EU law on VAT continues to apply to and in the UK in respect of Northern Ireland as regards goods, subject to the democratic consent referred to in Article 18 of the protocol. Therefore, taxable persons and certain non-taxable legal persons in the UK continue to be subject to EU law on VAT for transactions in goods in Northern Ireland.

Methodology for the identification of global systemically important institutions

The Council confirmed that it had no intention to object to the Commission delegated regulation of 11 February 2021 supplementing directive 2013/36/EU with regard to regulatory technical standards for the specification of the methodology for the identification of global systemically important institutions and for the definition of subcategories of global systemically important institutions ([6151/21](#)).

This mean that, unless the European Parliament objects to it, the delegated act will be published and enter into force.

Contributions to the administrative expenditures of the Single Resolution Board

The Council confirmed that it had no intention to object to the Commission delegated regulation of 11 February 2021 amending delegated regulation (EU) 2017/2361 as regards the arrangements for the payment of contributions to the administrative expenditures of the Single Resolution Board ([6148/21](#)).

This mean that, unless the European Parliament objects to it, the delegated act will be published and enter into force.

TRADE POLICY**EU-Indonesia: green light for the signing of the Agreement on the modification of post-Brexit WTO tariff rate quotas**

The Council adopted a Decision on the signing of the Agreement between the European Union and Indonesia relating to the modification of concessions on all the tariff rate quotas, included in the EU Schedule CLXXV, as a consequence of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union and a proposal for a Council Decision on the conclusion of this agreement (. After the signing, the draft Decision on the conclusion and the Agreement will be formally forwarded to the European Parliament for its consent.

EU-Pakistan: green light for the signing of the Agreement on the modification of post-Brexit WTO tariff rate quotas

The Council adopted a Decision (on the signing of the Agreement between the European Union and Indonesia relating to the modification of concessions on all the tariff rate quotas, included in the EU Schedule CLXXV, as a consequence of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union and a proposal for a Council Decision on the conclusion of this agreement. After the signing, the draft Decision on the conclusion and the Agreement will be formally forwarded to the European Parliament for its consent.

EU-Australia: green light for the signing of the Agreement on the modification of post-Brexit WTO tariff rate quotas

The Council adopted a Decision on the signing of the Agreement between the European Union and Australia relating to the modification of concessions on all the tariff rate quotas, included in the EU Schedule CLXXV, as a consequence of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union and a proposal for a Council Decision on the conclusion of this agreement. After the signing, the draft Decision on the conclusion and the Agreement will be formally forwarded to the European Parliament for its consent.

EU-Panama: authorisation for opening of negotiations regarding the withdrawal of certain WTO tariff rate quotas

The Council adopted a Decision authorising the opening of negotiations with Panama under Article XXVIII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 for an agreement regarding the withdrawal of Panama's WTO tariff rate quotas on liquid milk and evaporated milk.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

64th session Commission on Narcotic Drugs

The Council adopted a decision on the position to be taken, on behalf of the EU, at the 64th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on the scheduling of 8 psychoactive substances ([6193/21](#)).

EU cybersecurity strategy

The Council today adopted conclusions on the EU's cybersecurity strategy for the digital decade ([6722/21](#)). This strategy was presented by the Commission and the high representative for foreign affairs in December 2020. It outlines the framework for EU action to protect EU citizens and businesses from cyber threats, promote secure information systems and protect a global, open, free and secure cyberspace.

The conclusions note that cybersecurity is essential for building a resilient, green and digital Europe. They set as a key objective achieving strategic autonomy while preserving an open economy. This includes reinforcing the ability to make autonomous choices in the area of cybersecurity, with the aim to strengthen the EU's digital leadership and strategic capacities.

Find out more:

[Cybersecurity: Council adopts conclusions on the EU's cybersecurity strategy \(press release\)](#)

ENVIRONMENT**Marine environment - ECA Special Report**

The Council approved conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 26/2020 entitled "Marine environment: EU protection is wide but not deep". ([13783/20](#))

The Council welcomes the European Court of Auditors report and takes good note of its conclusions and recommendations. (6758/21)