



Council of the European Union

PRESS
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BACKGROUND BRIEF¹
Brussels, 18 May 2021

Informal video conference of foreign affairs ministers **18 May 2021**

The informal video conference of foreign affairs ministers will be chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, **Josep Borrell**, and will start at **14.00**.

The sole item on the agenda will be the latest **developments in the Middle East**, in particular the ongoing violent confrontation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Press conference: +/- 16.30 in a virtual format

[Informal video conference of foreign affairs ministers meeting page](#)

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

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

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

Developments in the Middle East

EU foreign affairs ministers will exchange views on the latest developments in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory and discuss how the EU can best contribute to ending the current violence.

Over the past days, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell has been continuing his outreach to support efforts to de-escalate the worrying situation in the region, especially in and around Gaza. In all his contacts, High Representative Borrell has condemned the indiscriminate firing of rockets against civilian targets in Israel by Hamas and other groups. The High Representative has also stressed that while Israel has the right to protect its population from these kinds of attacks, it must act proportionately and avoid civilian casualties.

The High Representative held discussions with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi. He also exchanged views with key regional players, including Foreign Minister of Egypt Sameh Shoukry, Foreign Minister of Jordan Ayman Safadi and Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu.

When reaching out to his interlocutors, HR Borrell has consistently underlined the need to immediately end the grave escalation of violence, prevent its further spill-over and ensure that civilians on all sides are protected. He has also called for full respect for international humanitarian law and for full humanitarian access to be granted to those most in need in Gaza. The HR underlined that root causes which have led to this situation must be addressed and that the status quo of the holy sites needs to be respected and any acts of incitement around them avoided. He also reiterated the EU's long-standing position on the need to cease settlement activities, demolitions and evictions, including in East Jerusalem.

The HR has instructed the EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, Sven Koopmans, to work actively with other envoys from the Middle East Quartet, comprising the UN, the US, the EU and Russia, to address the crisis. On the ground, the EU Delegation in Tel Aviv and the EU Representation in Jerusalem are also engaging with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities and with member states' representatives.

The EU's priority and message in this context remains clear: the violence must end now. There is an urgent need to address the root causes of the conflict and to find a political pathway which allows a return to meaningful negotiations towards a two-state solution based on the internationally agreed parameters. Israelis and Palestinians alike have the right to live in safety and security, freedom and democracy. These constant cycles of violence must be brought to an end.

- [EU Statement – United Nations Security Council: “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”, 16 May 2021](#)
- [High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell in intense efforts to contribute to de-escalation of violence, 15 May 2021](#)
- [Statement by the High Representative on the escalation of confrontations, 12 May 2021](#)