



Foreign Affairs Council

Brussels, 20 March 2023

Foreign Affairs Council with Foreign Affairs ministers

The Foreign Affairs Council, chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, will take place in Brussels starting at 10.45.

The Council will discuss the **Russian aggression against Ukraine**, after a short intervention via videoconference of Ukraine's minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro **Kuleba**.

EU Foreign Affairs ministers will then exchange views on **Tunisia** and be informed about **current affairs**. Under this agenda item, ministers are expected to be briefed by the High Representative on the latest situation in **Iran** and be updated on the outcome of his high-level meeting of the **Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue**.

Foreign Affairs Council with Foreign Affairs and Defence ministers

In the afternoon, the Foreign Affairs Council will hold a **joint session** bringing together both **EU foreign affairs ministers and EU defence ministers**.

During this session, ministers will discuss the implementation of the **Strategic Compass** one year from its approval, and **EU support to Ukraine**.

Doorstep of the High Representative: +/- 10.00

Press conference on FAC: +/- 18.30 in a hybrid format

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[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](#)

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

Foreign Affairs Council with Foreign Affairs ministers

Russian aggression against Ukraine

The Foreign Affairs Council will discuss the Russian aggression against Ukraine, few days ahead of the European Council on 23-24 March.

Before the beginning of the Council discussion, Ukraine's minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba will join EU Foreign ministers via videoconference and update them on the situation on the ground, and Ukraine's current needs and priorities.

Ministers are expected to focus on the following work strands: accountability referring also to the issue of Ukrainian children forcibly transferred and deported to Russia, Ukraine's peace formula, global outreach and food security.

In the conclusions of the Special European Council of 9 February 2023, the EU reiterated again its resolute condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a blatant violation of the UN Charter, and has brought immense suffering and destruction upon Ukraine and its people.

The European Union's support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and its inherent right of self-defence against the Russian aggression remains unwavering.

The European Union will stand by Ukraine with steadfast political, military, economic, financial and humanitarian support for as long as it takes.

- [Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence: EU renews individual restrictive measures for six months \(press release, 13 March 2023\)](#)
- [One year of Russia's full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine, EU adopts its 10th package of economic and individual sanctions \(press release, 25 February 2023\)](#)
- [European Council conclusions, 9 February 2023](#)
- [EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine \(background information\)](#)

Tunisia

The Foreign Affairs Council will have an exchange of views on recent developments in Tunisia, and possible ways forward in terms of EU action.

Since embarking on its democratic transition in 2011, Tunisia has long been considered a leading example for democracy in the region after a successful political transition in the aftermath of the Arab spring. The EU has closely accompanied this process and invested heavily in the country, both politically and financially, to support the aspiration of many Tunisians for democracy, prosperity and stability. Tunisia is an important partner in the EU's immediate vicinity whose stability has a direct impact on European security.

The EU's interest in a close partnership with Tunisia has further increased in the current geopolitical context, marked by the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Following the events of July 2021, the EU's policy has been shaped by the continued need to support the Tunisian people in an increasingly difficult economic and political situation in the country, which also has effects onto migration. At the same time, the EU underlines the need for efforts of the Tunisian government towards structural reforms, which the EU is ready to support.

The EU has a longstanding relationship with Tunisia, notably via its Association Agreement of 1995, in force since 1998, and is the most important partner for Tunisia in terms of financial assistance (EUR 1.6 billion in grants – including around 60 per cent in the form of budget support – over the period from 2014 to 2020 and EUR 1.4 billion in macro-financial assistance until 2022). As regards trade, the EU is Tunisia's first partner, accounting for 56 per cent of the country's commerce in 2021. Negotiations on an ambitious Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) started in 2015 and were pursued over four rounds, but have been on hold since 2019.

- [Tunisia: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union, 11 July 2022](#)
- [Tunisie : Déclaration du haut représentant Josep Borrell sur les développements dans le pays, 22 February 2023 \(EEAS website\)](#)

Current Affairs

The Foreign Affairs Council will have a discussion on current affairs during which ministers will be able to exchange views on recent events and fast-moving developments in external relations.

The Council will discuss the latest developments in **Iran**, also following the February Foreign Affairs Council, with particular focus on: the human rights situation, Iran's role in the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, and the ongoing nuclear activities.

The High Representative will also brief ministers on the outcome of his meeting of the **Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue** taking place in Ohrid, North Macedonia, on 18 March.

- [Iran: EU imposes further restrictive measures against 32 individuals and two entities responsible for human rights violations \(press release, 20 February 2023\)](#)
- [Iran restrictive measures, policy page](#)
- [Media advisory - Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Next High-level Meeting on Saturday 18 March in Ohrid \(EEAS website\)](#)

Council Conclusions

The Foreign Affairs Council is due to approve Conclusions on **Afghanistan** and **EU priorities at OSCE**.

Foreign Affairs Council with Foreign Affairs and Defence ministers

Strategic Compass: implementation

The Council will hold a discussion on the first annual report on the implementation of the Strategic Compass. Ministers are expected to take stock of what has been achieved so far, and give guidance for further work.

The adoption of the Strategic Compass in March 2022 marked a major milestone for the EU. The Compass sets out an ambitious path to further strengthen the EU as a more capable actor and reliable partner in security and defence over the next 10 years. The Strategic Compass provides a shared assessment of the EU's strategic environment, i.e. the threats and challenges the EU faces and their implications for the EU. It proposes operational guidelines to enable the EU to become a even more relevant security provider and sets out ways and means to further improve the EU's collective ability to protect the Union and its citizens.

Member States are in the lead when it comes to implementing the commitments and the actions that they have agreed to in the Strategic Compass. The European External Action Service (EEAS), in close coordination with the European Commission services, the European Defence Agency (EDA) and the Presidency of the Council, assist Member States with the implementation and oversee tracking of progress.

- [A Strategic Compass for a stronger EU security and defence in the next decade \(press release 21 March 2022\)](#)
- [Infographic - A Strategic Compass for the EU \(background information\)](#)
- [Schuman forum \(EEAS website\)](#)

EU support to Ukraine

At the informal meeting of Defence ministers on 8 March 2023, ministers discussed how to speed up the delivery and production of ammunition for Ukraine and EU Member States, and in particular a three-track approach proposed by the High Representative together with the EDA and the Commission based on:

- ensuring an immediate delivery of more ammunition, notably 155mm, to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, through an existing Assistance package financed by the European Peace Facility (EPF),
- coordinating the demand and jointly procuring 155mm ammunition in order to fill Member States' stocks and ensure further support to Ukraine,
- supporting the ramp-up of the European defence technological and industrial base manufacturing capabilities to meet the increased demand.

- [Informal Foreign Affairs Council \(Defence\): Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell at the press conference \(EEAS website\)](#)