

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

6 March 2017

The Council, chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, will start with a joint session of defence and foreign ministers on the implementation of the EU global strategy in the area of **security and defence**. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions assessing progress achieved on the various lines of action agreed upon by the European Council of 15 December 2016. The conclusions will form the basis of a report for the European Council of 9 and 10 March 2017.

The discussion will be preceded by an **informal breakfast meeting of defence ministers** to allow a strategic outlook on Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) engagements in the EU's neighbourhood and beyond.

Over lunch, the foreign ministers will discuss **EU-Egypt relations** with Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs Sameh Hassan Shoukry. They will address political developments, economic reforms, and Egypt's role in the region.

In the afternoon, the Council will review the situation in the **Western Balkans**. The High Representative will brief ministers on her visit to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of 1-4 March.

The Council will have a discussion on **migration** as a follow-up to the informal meeting of heads of state or government in Malta on 3 February 2017, where the external aspects of migration were discussed, and the Valletta senior officials meeting on 8 February.

The Council will discuss the **Middle East peace process** to take stock of recent developments and contacts, including with the new US administration.

The Council will also turn to the situation in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, on which it will adopt conclusions. It will also adopt conclusions on EU climate and energy diplomacy. These conclusions are part of the implementation of the EU global strategy and are intended to strengthen synergies between EU climate diplomacy and energy diplomacy and to establish priorities for 2017 EU climate diplomacy.

Press opportunities:

+/- 7.45 tbc Doorstep statement by High Representative Federica Mogherini

+/- 18.30 Press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council

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

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

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

Security and defence

EU foreign and defence ministers will hold a joint session on the implementation of the EU global strategy in the area of security and defence. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions assessing progress in implementing the various lines of action agreed upon by the European Council of 15 December 2016. These conclusions will form the basis of a report for the European Council of 9 and 10 March 2017 and are expected, in particular, to review progress on:

- the **operational planning and conduct capability**, including the establishment of a military planning and conduct capability (MPCC). The idea is to establish a structure within the EU military staff (part of the EEAS) assuming command of non-executive military CSDP missions (at present: EUTM Somalia, EUTM RCA, EUTM Mali), which would work under the political control and strategic guidance of the Political and Security Committee.
- the possibility of **permanent structured cooperation** (PESCO). The Lisbon Treaty introduced the possibility for EU member states to strengthen their cooperation in military matters by establishing permanent structured cooperation (Articles 42(6) and 46 TEU). The idea is to make full use of this possibility by setting up an inclusive, modular system of permanent structured cooperation, through which member states could collaborate further in the area of security and defence, on a voluntary basis.
- the possibility of a member state-driven **coordinated annual review on defence** (CARD), which would establish a process to obtain a better overview at EU level of, for instance, defence spending and national investments and defence research efforts, with a view to better address European capability shortfalls, deepen defence cooperation and ensure optimal use and coherence of defence spending plans.
- ongoing work in other areas, such as on strengthening the EU's rapid response toolbox, including the EU battlegroups and civilian capabilities, capacity building in support of security and development, situational awareness and defence capability development. The Council will also take note of progress made in the implementation of the common set of proposals for EU-NATO cooperation and of the Commission's European defence action plan.

On 14 November 2016, the Council adopted **conclusions on implementing the EU global strategy in the area of security and defence**. These conclusions set out the level of ambition, meaning the main goals the EU and its member states will aim to achieve in the area of security and defence. The Council set out **three strategic priorities**: responding to external conflicts and crises, building the capacities of partners, and protecting the European Union and its citizens.

The implementation plan on security and defence was presented by the High Representative, acting as well in her roles as Vice-President of the European Commission and Head of the European Defence Agency, to member states at the Council meeting. It is part of the follow-up to the EU global strategy on foreign and security policy. The High Representative presented the EU global strategy 'Shared vision, common action: a stronger Europe' to the European Council on 28 June. The strategy is intended to guide EU foreign and security policy in the years to come. The Council adopted conclusions on the global strategy on 17 October 2016.

Security and defence is one of the priority areas for work on the implementation of the EU global strategy, which also includes building resilience and an integrated approach to conflicts and crises, strengthening the nexus between internal and external policies, updating existing or preparing new regional and thematic strategies and stepping up public diplomacy efforts.

Work on security and defence is further pursued through the implementation of the Commission's European defence action plan and of the joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of NATO. A full report will be presented to the European Council in June.

[EU cooperation on security and defence](#)

[European Council conclusions of 15 December 2016](#)

[Council conclusions on implementing the EU global strategy in the area of security and defence](#)

[EU global strategy on foreign and security policy \(website\)](#)

Egypt

Over lunch, EU ministers will discuss EU-Egypt relations with their Egyptian counterpart, Foreign Minister **Sameh Hassan Shoukry**. Together, they will address political developments, economic reforms, cooperation in various sectors, including counter-terrorism and migration, as well as Egypt's role in the region, in particular in regards to Libya, Syria and the Middle East peace process. This meeting follows the discussion EU ministers held in preparation at their last Council meeting on 6 February 2017,. On that occasion, they reviewed the situation in Egypt and the way forward for bilateral relations and addressed more specifically EU support for economic growth and job creation, dialogue democracy, the rule of law and human rights, cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism and migration, and Egypt's role in the region.

The framework for EU-Egypt relations is the Association Agreement, which provides for regular political dialogue between the two partners, enhanced cooperation in a number of key sectors, ranging from trade and investment to energy and education, as well as EU assistance to Egypt's reform efforts. EU bilateral assistance to Egypt for 2014-2016 amounted to €320 million.

The EU and Egypt will adopt their partnership priorities for 2017-2020 at the next Association Council, which is due to take place in spring 2017. Priorities are expected to include support for Egypt's sustainable economic and social development, strengthened cooperation in foreign policy and in the stabilisation process, in particular in the fields of democratic governance, security and migration. The EU will set out a new assistance programme for 2017-2020 to support these jointly agreed priorities.

Ministers may also touch upon the rule of law and human right, including the space for civil society, in the country.

The EU cooperates with Egypt on migration. Egypt is eligible for the EU Trust Fund for Africa (also know as the Valetta Emergency Trust Fund) and projects to increase cooperation in this field are under discussion. Cooperation in the field of migration and mobility is also included in the new partnership priorities with Egypt, which provide for an appropriate framework for stronger and more strategic engagement in this field.

The Council may also discuss how to engage with Egypt on regional issues, such as the crisis in Libyan, the Middle East peace process and Syria. Egypt is one of the key regional players with which the EU has engaged in the framework of its regional initiative on the future of Syria. Currently holding a seat in the United Nations Security Council, as well as in the African Union Political and Security Council, Egypt is – and can be even more so – an important partner of the EU on regional issues and beyond.

[Egypt and the EU](#)

[The European Union Delegation to Egypt](#)

Western Balkans

The Council will discuss the situation in the Western Balkans, in view of the European Council meeting of 9-10 March, at which a discussion on the situation in the region is expected. The High Representative will brief ministers on her visit to **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** on 1-4 March, where she met with government representatives, political parties and members of Parliaments, as well as with students and members of civil society.

The Western Balkans have a clear **European perspective**, which is essential for the stability, reconciliation and future of the region. The ministers are expected to reconfirm the **EU engagement** and focus on the region, including through **political and economic ties**. They might also stress the need to deliver on reforms, to ensure that the partners progress steadily on the European path. regional cooperation. In this context, good neighbourly relations continue to be crucial. Ministers may also underline the importance of reaching out to the populations of the region, in particular through **public diplomacy**, to better communicate the benefits that the EU path has for them.

Albania is a candidate country since 2014. In 2016, the Commission recommended the opening of negotiations provided the country implements the justice reform adopted in 2016 through Constitutional amendments and a law on the re-evaluation process for judges and prosecutors ("vetting law"). EU financial pre-accession assistance amounted to €89.7 million in 2016.

Bosnia and Herzegovina applied for EU membership in February 2016 and is currently working on the answers to a questionnaire that will serve as an input to the European Commission to prepare its opinion on the application. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to continue making progress on the economic reform agenda agreed with the EU, aiming at tackling the difficult socio-economic situation and advances the rule of law and public administration reforms. "). EU financial pre-accession assistance amounted to €42.7 million in 2016. The EU is also engaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina through a military-led mission, EUFOR/Althea.

A Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and **Kosovo** entered into force on 1 April 2016 and the first Stabilisation and Association Council took place on 25 November 2016. It is important for Kosovo to ensure the implementation of the European reform agenda, with the objective of improving the rule of law and socio-economic development. EU financial pre-accession assistance amounted to €88.7 million in 2016. In addition, the EU has in place a CSDP civilian mission to support the Kosovo authorities in upholding the rule of law, EULEX Kosovo.

Accession negotiations with **Montenegro** were opened in 2012. 26 chapters out of 35 have been opened to date, and 2 have been provisionally closed. It is important for Montenegro to make progress on implementation of rule of law reforms, especially as regards fight against corruption and organised crime at all levels. EU financial pre-accession assistance amounted to €37.4 million in 2016.

The **former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** has been a candidate country since 2005. General elections took place on 11 December 2016 but a government is yet to be formed. All political leaders and institutions are expected now to respect the result of elections and let the democratic process run its course in the interest of the country's citizens. It is important for the new government to move forward with the implementation of the Pržino Agreement and to make a substantial progress in the implementation of the "urgent reform priorities". EU financial pre-accession assistance amounted to €91.6 million in 2016.

Accession negotiations with **Serbia** were opened in 2014. 8 chapters have been opened to date, and 2 have been provisionally closed. The progress in the process of normalisation of relations with Kosovo under chapter 35 remains essential for the overall pace of the negotiating process, in line with the negotiating framework. EU financial pre-accession assistance amounted to €207.9 million in 2016.

[Western Balkans \(EEAS website\)](#)

[EU-facilitated dialogue: relations between Belgrade and Pristina \(EEAS website\)](#)

Migration

The Council will have a discussion on the **external aspects of migration** as a follow-up to the informal meeting of heads of state or government in Malta on 3 February 2017 and the Valetta senior officials meeting on 8-9 February. This discussion will also feed into the European Council meeting of 9-10 March.

The **Malta declaration** adopted on 3 February 2017 highlighted that the key element of a sustainable migration policy is to ensure effective control of our external border and stem illegal flows into the EU. EU leaders stressed the importance of stabilising Libya and expressed willingness to step up their work with Libya as the main country of departure for crossings of the Mediterranean sea, as well as with its North African and sub-Saharan neighbours. They also gave priority to certain elements of this work, including further efforts to train and equip the Libyan national coast guard and other relevant agencies, to disrupt the business model of smugglers, to ensure adequate reception capacities and conditions in Libya for migrants and to reduce the pressure on Libya's land borders.

Foreign ministers are expected to take stock of the implementation of the Malta declaration, an undertaking that is being taken forward by the Maltese presidency of the Council in close cooperation with the Commission and the High Representative.

The Council will also take stock of the progress made under the **partnership framework approach** and with the five priority countries, namely Mali, Niger, Senegal, Nigeria and Ethiopia, based on the third progress report on the partnership framework, issued on 2 March.

Ministers will further discuss the implementation of the **Valletta commitments** and further work needed in this regard as a follow-up to the Valletta senior officials meeting of 8-9 February 2017. At the Valetta Summit of 11-12 November 2015, a political declaration and an action plan were adopted. The action plan identified five areas of work: address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement; enhance cooperation on legal migration and mobility; reinforce the protection of migrants and asylum seekers; prevent and fight irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings; and work more closely to improve cooperation on return, readmission and reintegration.

The EU integrated migration as a permanent component of its foreign policy. It consequently stepped up its engagement and strengthened its cooperation with third countries on migration, at both bilateral and multilateral levels.

[Responding to migratory pressures](#)

[Commission reports on progress under the migration partnership framework and increased action along the Central Mediterranean Route - 2 March 2017](#)

Middle East Peace Process

The Council will discuss the Middle East peace process to take stock of recent developments and contacts, including with the new US administration.

On 6 February 2017, EU ministers reaffirmed the EU's strong commitment to long-standing consolidated positions; not least on the two-state solution, on settlements and on Jerusalem and to continue working to achieve a comprehensive peace deal, preserve the viability of the two-state solution and reverse ongoing negative trends on the ground. The High Representative Federica Mogherini, expressed the EU's readiness to continue working with the UN, the United States and Arab partners in order to achieve these goals. It was also agreed to start preparations for an Association Council with Israel, while maintaining a corresponding political dialogue with the Palestinian side.

The resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of relevant UNSC resolutions since 1947, Middle East Quartet recommendations, the Arab Peace Initiative (2002) and agreements already reached between the parties is of fundamental interest to the EU. A common objective is a two-state solution with an independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. The EU has striven to keep the Middle East peace process on the international agenda and has supported initiatives aimed at mobilising political will on both Israeli and Palestinian side to take concrete steps towards a two-state solution.

[Middle East Peace Process \(EEAS website\)](#)

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Council will be invited to adopt conclusions on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The situation in the DRC deteriorated over 2016 following the absence of steps to organise elections within the constitutional timeframe.

On 31 December 2016, an agreement was found between the political forces of the DRC, paving the way for a peaceful, consensual transition. This was the result of the mediation of the DRC Catholic Bishops' Conference, which the EU supported.

However, the subsequent failure to agree on how to implement the agreement prompted the African Union, the UN, the EU and the International Organisation for the French-Speaking World (OIF) to express in a joint statement on 16 February 2017 their shared concern that the current political situation in the DRC could undermine the political goodwill that led to the signing of the 31 December agreement. In this context, the four partner organisations called on all stakeholders in the DRC to work towards a speedy conclusion of the ongoing talks.

A further concern for the EU is the recent outbreak of violence in various localities, notably in the Kasai provinces, where members of the DRC armed forces allegedly committed atrocities against unarmed civilians, including children.

The EU last discussed the situation in the DRC on 12 December 2016. Foreign ministers agreed on a declaration on the DRC and adopted a Council decision imposing restrictive measures against seven individuals occupying positions of authority in the chain of command over perpetrators of violence which caused the deaths of at least 50 people on 19 and 20 September in Kinshasa.

Previously, in May and October 2016 the Council adopted conclusions on the DRC, expressing deep concern about the political situation and condemning serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Council also called for a substantive, inclusive, impartial and transparent political dialogue and supported the spirit of UN Security Council Resolution 2277 (2016) - which is due for renewal this month, stressing the crucial importance of a peaceful and credible electoral cycle, in accordance with the constitution, for stabilisation and consolidation of constitutional democracy in the DRC.

[EU Relations with Democratic Republic of Congo](#)

[Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\): EU adopts sanctions against 7 individuals responsible for violence](#)

Other items

Climate and energy diplomacy

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on EU climate and energy diplomacy, as a part of the implementation of the EU global strategy. The objective is to strengthen synergies and joined-up actions between the relevant elements of EU climate diplomacy and energy diplomacy and to establish priorities in this regard for 2017.

The conclusions are expected to underline that tackling climate change, supporting a climate-neutral and resilient future, and promoting the global transition to low greenhouse gas emissions, climate-resilient, competitive and sustainable economies and energy security are mutually reinforcing objectives. These objectives are integral parts of the global strategy on the EU's foreign and security policy.

[Environment and climate change \(EEAS website\)](#)

[A Global Strategy for the European Union \(dedicated website\)](#)

Children's rights

The Council is expected to adopt the EU Guidelines for the **promotion and protection of the rights of the child (2017) – Leave No Child Behind**". With these guidelines, the EU reaffirms its commitment to comprehensively protect and promote the rights of the child in its external human rights policy. Since the adoption of the previous EU Guidelines in 2007, there have been numerous developments in relation to the rights of the child globally making the present revision of the Guidelines necessary.

[Protection and promotion of human rights](#)
