

## **FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL**

### **14 October 2019**

The Foreign Affairs Council, chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, will start at 8h30 with a discussion on **current affairs**, allowing ministers to review the most pressing issues on the international agenda, including as a follow-up to discussions during the 74th United Nations General Assembly. They are expected to touch upon Iran, the situation in Libya and in Iraq. The High Representative and foreign ministers will also refer to Venezuela.

The Council will discuss **Syria**, following the latest developments, in particular the Turkish military operation in north-east Syria. The UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Syria **Geir Pedersen** will brief the Council on the recent formation of a constitutional committee in the framework of the UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), and on preparations for its first meeting.

The Council will also discuss **Turkey's continued drilling activities** in the Eastern Mediterranean, as Turkey is conducting further drilling activities 45 nm off the southern coast of Cyprus.

Foreign ministers will then have an exchange of views on **Afghanistan**, in particular following the Presidential election of 28 September 2019. They will take stock of recent developments towards finding a lasting and negotiated political solution to the conflict.

EU foreign ministers will also have a short discussion on **Ukraine**, in preparation for the exchange of views with the new Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, **Vadym Prystaiko** over working lunch.

The Council is expected to adopt a number of decisions and conclusions without debate, including Council conclusions on Nicaragua, Thailand, Cameroon, Bosnia and Herzegovina/Althea, as well as on democracy.

#### Press opportunities:

+/- 8.20 (tbc) Doorstep by High Representative Federica Mogherini

+/- 14.30 Press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council

[Council meeting page](#)

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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. ,

The High Representative and foreign ministers are expected to follow-up on discussions held during the 74th UN General Assembly (UNGA). They are expected to refer to **Iran**, as well as the situation in **Libya**. They may also touch upon the situation in **Iraq**.

The High Representative and foreign ministers will also refer to **Venezuela** following the meetings in the margins of UNGA, including of the International Contact Group, and ahead on the conference on the Venezuelan refugee and migrant crisis on 28-29 October.

[Joint statement by spokespersons of the High Representative of the European Union and the foreign ministries of France, Germany and the United Kingdom on the JCPoA, 13 September 2019](#)  
[EU relations with Libya](#)

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on Venezuela, 27/09/2019](#)  
[Venezuela: the Council's response to the crisis](#)

## Syria

The Council will discuss Syria following the latest developments, in particular the Turkish military operation in north-east Syria. The UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen will participate in the discussion and will brief the Council on the recent formation of a constitutional committee in the framework of the UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), and on preparations for its first meeting

The discussion is expected to focus on the situation on the ground, in particular in north-east Syria. In its declaration of 9 October, the EU called upon Turkey to cease the unilateral military action, underlying that renewed armed hostilities in the north-east will further undermine the stability of the whole region, exacerbate civilian suffering and provoke further displacements and that prospects for the UN-led political process to achieve peace in Syria will be more difficult. The EU also stated that unilateral action on Turkey's part threatens the progress achieved by the Global Coalition to defeat of Da'esh, of which Turkey is a member. Furthermore, the conflict in Idlib persists, as do hostilities in other parts of Syria.

In this context, foreign ministers are expected to underline the urgent need for positive developments on the grounds, in particular unhindered humanitarian access and full respect for international humanitarian law as well as a full and lasting ceasefire across the whole of Syria.

The EU has consistently affirmed that any sustainable solution to the conflict requires a genuine political transition in line with UNSCR 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué, negotiated by the Syrian parties within the UN-led process. In its declaration of 26 September 2019, the EU qualified the announced agreement on the formation of a constitutional committee as a definite step forward. The EU looks forward to the inaugural meeting of the committee at the earliest possible opportunity and will monitor developments thereafter very closely. Ministers are expected to discuss ways to support the UN Special Envoy for Syria in his efforts to find a permanent, sustainable, negotiated solution in this context.

On 24 September 2019, in the margins of the UN General Assembly, the EU hosted a ministerial meeting on the Syria crisis. The meeting gathered more than 30 foreign ministers. The EU expressed strong political support for the UN-mediated political solution and reiterated that the process should involve not only the institutions and political parties, but also civil society and women. It reiterated its position that there can be no normalisation, reconstruction and refugees' returns before the political and security conditions are in place.

The Council last discussed Syria at its meeting of 18 February 2019. The EU hosted and co-chaired with the UN the third Brussels conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the region" in March 2019. At the conference, participants announced pledges for both Syria and the region totaling US\$ 7 billion (€ 6.2 billion) for 2019 and multi-year pledges of close to

US\$ 2.4 billion (€ 2.1 billion) for 2020 and beyond. The progress report published on 23 September 2019 against the pledges made at the conference showed that that for 2019, donors have already contributed 92% (USD 6.4 billion) of the pledges made to provide funding in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

The Council put in place a series of autonomous restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria in 2011. They target individuals responsible for the violent repression of the civilian population in Syria, as well as individuals or entities associated with them. 270 individuals and 70 entities are currently targeted by a travel ban and an asset freeze.

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on recent developments in north-east Syria, 9/10/2019](#)

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on Syria, 26/09/2019](#)

[Statement by High Representative Federica Mogherini on the announcement regarding the formation of Syria Constitutional Committee, 23/09/2019](#)

["Supporting the future of Syria and the region" conference: new financial tracking report published, 23/09/2019](#)

[Syria: Council response to the crisis](#)

[The EU and the crisis in Syria \(EEAS website\)](#)

## **Turkish drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean**

The Council will discuss Turkey's continued drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, as Turkey is currently conducting further drilling activities 45 nm off the southern coast of Cyprus.

On 4 October 2019, High Representative Mogherini held a phone conversation with the Foreign Minister of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulides, during which they deplored Turkey's further drilling activities.

The Council adopted conclusions on Turkish drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean on 15 July 2019. In light of Turkey's continued and new illegal drilling activities, the Council decided to suspend negotiations on the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement and not to hold the Association Council and further meetings of the EU-Turkey high-level dialogues for the time being. The Council endorsed the Commission's proposal to reduce the pre-accession assistance to Turkey for 2020 and invited the European Investment Bank to review its lending activities in Turkey, notably with regard to sovereign-backed lending.

In accordance with the European Council conclusions of 20 June, the Council invited the High Representative and the Commission to continue work on options for targeted measures in light of Turkey's continued drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Council undertook to closely monitor developments and to revert to this issue as appropriate.

[Federica Mogherini spoke to the Foreign Minister of Cyprus, 4 October 2019](#)

[Council conclusions on Turkish drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, 15 July 2019](#)

[European Council conclusions, 20 June 2019](#)

## Afghanistan

Foreign ministers will have an exchange of views on the situation in Afghanistan. They are expected to focus on the Presidential election of 28 September 2019 and on EU support to an inclusive and transparent peace process..

In a statement on 30 September 2019, the High Representative recognised the commitment of the Afghan people to furthering the democratic path of their country, but stated that the legitimacy of the final result of the Presidential election will be linked to the ability of the Afghan electoral management bodies to fulfil their mandate impartially, efficiently and transparently and in full respect of the constitution, electoral laws and procedures. The EU is committed to support the Afghan constitutional order and the electoral process as a way to ensure institutional continuity and legitimacy of Afghanistan's political institutions.

Following the suspension of US-Taliban peace talks and the intra Afghan-Dialogue, the High Representative reaffirmed in a phone call to President Ghani on 22 September 2019 the EU's view that direct peace talks between the Government and the Taliban remain the only way forward towards lasting peace.

The Council last adopted conclusions on Afghanistan on 8 April 2019, in which it reiterated its long-term commitment to support the people of Afghanistan on their path towards peace, security and prosperity. It also encouraged the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban to intensify their efforts towards a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the conflict and recommended that direct negotiations between Afghans, with the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban at their core begin as soon as possible.

Since 2002, the European Union has provided €3.66 billion in development and humanitarian aid, making it the fourth largest donor in support of the Afghan people. Afghanistan is also the largest beneficiary of EU development assistance. Together with its member states, the European Union contributes more than €1 billion in development assistance per year to Afghanistan. At the October 2016 Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, the European Union and its member states pledged €5 billion in support for Afghanistan in the period 2016-2020. In November 2018, the European Commission allocated €474 million to support state building and public sector reform, health, justice, and elections, as well as address migration and displacement challenges in Afghanistan.

## Ukraine

Foreign ministers will have an exchange of views ahead of the discussion with the new Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Vadym Prystaiko, which will follow over working lunch. They are expected to focus on the way ahead for EU-Ukraine relations. During the lunch discussion, EU foreign ministers will then have the opportunity to reiterate the EU's support to Ukraine, both to its territorial integrity and security and to its government's efforts on the reform process.

EU relations with Ukraine are based on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which promotes deeper political ties, stronger economic links and respect for common values. It entered into force in 2017 after being partly provisionally applied. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) is the economic aspect of the Association Agreement and it offers a framework for modernising Ukraine's economy and trade relations. The agreement has delivered positive results for EU-Ukraine trade and for the country's economy: bilateral trade has increased by 49% since January 2016.

The EU is firmly committed to Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. It continues to condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. The EU supports diplomatic efforts to find a lasting peaceful solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine through the complete implementation of the Minsk Agreements, and in particular in the context of the work of the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy format. The EU has put in place sanctions, including economic and sectoral sanctions and individual restrictive measures in response to actions against Ukraine territorial integrity, currently imposing an asset freeze and a travel ban on 170 people and 44 entities.

The Council last discussed Ukraine at its meeting of 18 February 2019. The 21st EU-Ukraine Summit took place in Kyiv on 8 July 2019. Leaders reaffirmed the strength of the political and economic ties between the EU and Ukraine and committed to step up its support to the Azov Sea region with new measures worth €10 million. They also recognised the substantial progress made by Ukraine in its reform process and condemned Russian measures entitling Ukrainian citizens of the areas currently not under the control of the government to apply for Russian citizenship in a simplified manner. The European Commission issued guidance on the handling of visa applications from residents of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions on 3 October 2019.

[EU-Ukraine summit, 08/07/2019](#)

[EU restrictive measures in response to the crisis in Ukraine](#)

[EU relations with Ukraine, factsheet](#)

[EU guidance on the handling of visa applications from residents of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions](#)

## Other items

The Council is expected to adopt a number of decisions and conclusions without debate.

### Council conclusions on Nicaragua

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Nicaragua as well as a framework for targeted restrictive measures. The Council will note that, since its previous conclusions of 21 January 2019, the overall situation of human rights and democratic governance in Nicaragua remains highly concerning. The conclusions are set to note that the continued refusal to resume the dialogue with the opposition conveys a negative signal on the willingness of the government to work towards a peaceful and democratic way out of the crisis.

As a consequence, and in addition to on-going political and diplomatic efforts to support justice and democracy, the Council is expected to adopt a framework for targeted restrictive measures. The framework will allow for a gradual and flexible approach regarding restrictive individual designations for a travel ban and assets freeze as appropriate. It will enable specific designations to be added at a later stage in case of a continued stalemate and further deterioration of human rights and rule of law or to be reversed in case of positive and decisive steps. The EU will underline that its restrictive measures are targeted and are designed not to harm the Nicaraguan population.

The Council is set to call upon the government of Nicaragua and all parties to constructively re-engage in a meaningful, results-oriented and comprehensive national dialogue, including on the adoption of electoral reforms according to international standards.

[Nicaragua: Council adopts conclusions, 21/01/2019](#)  
[How and when the EU adopts sanctions](#)

### Council conclusions on democracy

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on democracy, which will underline that in today's world, democracy is being challenged and called into question. The Council will note that while democracy remains strong in many countries, in others there is a growing trend towards authoritarianism. The challenges to democracy are multi-fold and need to be countered urgently and comprehensively.

Ten years after the last Council conclusions on democracy support in the EU's External Relations, the conclusions mark the EU's renewed commitment to democracy in a significantly changed global context. They will reaffirm that one of the aims of the EU's external action is to advance democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as set out in the Article 21 of the Treaty. As underpinned by the EU Global Strategy, strengthening democracy externally is also in the Union's strategic interest, contributing to core aspects of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (multilateralism, development, peace and security, migration)..

The Council is expected to agree on a common and practical EU response to promote positive trends and to address new and shared challenges to democracy.

[EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, 25/06/2012](#)  
[Council conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Relations, 17/11/2009](#)

## **Council conclusions on Thailand**

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Thailand. The conclusions are expected to take note of the political developments in Thailand following the March 2019 elections. In this context, the Council is expected to consider it appropriate for the EU to take steps towards broadening its engagement with Thailand, including on issues of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic pluralism, by preparing for the timely signature of the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA). The conclusions are also expected to stress the importance of taking steps towards the resumption of negotiations on an ambitious and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

[Delegation of the European Union to Thailand](#)

## **Council conclusions on Cameroon**

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Cameroon in view of the developments in the country. It is due to welcome the cessation of proceedings before the military courts against Maurice Kamto and supporters of his party, the Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun, as well as against persons arrested and detained in connection with the crisis in the north-west and south-west regions, as these decisions represent an important gesture for reducing tensions.

The Council will note that the recent national dialogue in Yaoundé offered a first opportunity to open up prospects for a sustainable way out of the crisis. In the conclusions, the EU is expected to call for the continuation of this process in order to find answers to the legitimate aspirations of the population, while strengthening its inclusiveness for all relevant actors both within the country and in the diaspora, including women, youth and civil society.

The conclusions will express that the EU remains concerned and firmly condemns the persisting violence and the level of insecurity in the north-west and south-west regions, in particular against civilian populations. The conclusions are expected to recall the primary responsibility of the Cameroonian authorities in the protection of populations and security. The Council will reaffirm the need for all Cameroonian actors to respect the rule of law and to resolve this crisis peacefully, in the framework of an inclusive dialogue.

[Statement by the Spokesperson on the latest developments in Cameroun, 7/10/2019](#)

[Delegation of the European Union to Cameroon](#)

## **Council conclusions on Bosnia and Herzegovina / Operation EUFOR Althea**

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Bosnia and Herzegovina / Operation EUFOR Althea, in which it is due to reiterate its unequivocal commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU perspective as a single, united and sovereign country. Since a year after general elections governments still have not been formed in Bosnia and Herzegovina on State and Federation levels, the Council is due to renew its call on Bosnia and Herzegovina to proceed with government formation and start work without any further delay, in the interest of all citizens.

The Council is also expected to welcome the continued presence of Operation Althea, which in the follow up of the strategic reviews in 2017 and 2019 has refocused on its core mandate, while retaining the collective training as a task of the Operation. In this context, as part of the overall EU strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Council is due to confirm the EU's readiness to continue at this stage the executive mandate of Operation Althea to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities to maintain the safe and secure environment, under a renewed UN mandate.

[EUFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina Operation Althea](#)