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3591st Council meeting

Foreign Affairs

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President **Federica Mogherini**
High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security
Policy

P R E S S

CONTENTS¹**ITEMS DEBATED**

Future relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific states.....	4
Libya	4
Middle East Peace Process.....	5
In the margins.....	5

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED*FOREIGN AFFAIRS*

– Council conclusions on Zimbabwe.....	6
– Council conclusions on Iraq	7
– Sanctions on Venezuela.....	7
– Sanctions on North Korea	8
– Council conclusions on the integrated approach to external conflict and crises.....	9
– EU priorities for cooperation with the Council of Europe.....	9
– Upgraded generic standards of behaviour for CSDP missions and operations.....	9
– Exercise specifications for MILEX 18	10
– Promotion of effective arms export controls	10

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

– EU policy cycle	11
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- 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

- EU-Ukraine association agreement 11
- Import of biodiesel from Argentina and Indonesia..... 11
- Modernisation of the EU-Chile association agreement 12

TRANSPORT

- EU Railway Agency – participation of Switzerland..... 12
- Aviation agreement with Morocco 12

HEALTH

- Use of bisphenol A in varnishes and coatings 13

APPOINTMENTS

- Court of Auditors..... 13

ITEMS DEBATED

Future relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific states

Foreign ministers had an initial exchange on the Commission's recommendation and draft negotiating directives of 12 December 2017 for a future agreement between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, as the current agreement framing the partnership, the Cotonou agreement, is due to expire on 29 February 2020.

Foreign ministers expressed broad support for the Commission's proposal to move towards an umbrella agreement at ACP level combined with three regional partnerships tailored to Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific respectively. They underlined the importance of building on the experience gained through cooperation under the existing Cotonou agreement, in particular on political dialogue and on migration.

Discussions on the negotiating mandate will continue within relevant Council preparatory bodies, with a view to adopting a decision authorising the opening of negotiations and establishing negotiating directives within the first semester of 2018.

[Cotonou Agreement \(background information\)](#)

Libya

The Council held a debate on Libya. The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative Ghassam Salamé gave an overview of the state of play of the political process, including progress towards the adoption of a new constitution and the forthcoming elections. He received the full support of foreign ministers in his efforts to bring about unity and reconciliation in the country.

Foreign ministers also discussed the importance of EU engagement in Libya as a way of supporting the UN in its efforts to bring about political stability, as well as those UN agencies working to address the situation of migrants in Libya. Ministers also highlighted the importance of continuing to work with countries of origin, in particular in the Sahel region.

Middle East Peace Process

The Council held discussions on the latest developments in the Middle East Peace Process. Ministers looked at how the EU can help ensure engagement by all relevant players in order to advance the peace process.

In the margins

The High Representative and the EU foreign ministers had an informal lunch with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the margins of the Council. The meeting was an opportunity for the European Union to reiterate its united and clear messages on the importance of preserving a two-state solution and on the status of Jerusalem as future capital of two states.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Council conclusions on Zimbabwe

On 22 January 2018, the Council adopted the following conclusions on Zimbabwe:

- "1. The ongoing political transition in Zimbabwe creates high expectations among all Zimbabweans. It can open the way to a full return to the Rule of Law, within a constitutional framework and under civilian rule, allowing for the preparation and implementation of much-needed political and economic reforms.
2. The EU reaffirms its availability to engage constructively with the new authorities including through a structured political dialogue, with political actors across the spectrum, and with civil society, on the basis of a mutual commitment to shared values focused on human rights, democratic principles and the Rule of Law. It will do so in coordination with African and international partners.
3. The upcoming electoral process will be an essential step. The EU welcomes the commitment of the authorities to hold elections in line with the constitution, and underlines the importance that the conditions are in place to allow those elections to be peaceful, inclusive, credible and transparent. The EU would consider favourably electoral observation, provided that the required conditions are fulfilled and that an invitation from the Government of Zimbabwe is received.
4. The EU welcomes the stated intention of the Zimbabwean authorities to deliver economic reforms in Zimbabwe, aiming at supporting job creation, growth and sustainable long-term development, and reaffirms its willingness to support the planning and implementation of much-needed structural changes and the promotion of good governance. In this context, the EU will support the authorities in establishing as soon as possible a constructive re-engagement with international financial institutions based on a clear and time-bound economic and political reform programme.
5. The EU stands ready to review the whole range of its policies towards Zimbabwe at any moment to take into account the progress achieved in the country."

Council conclusions on Iraq

The Council adopted conclusions establishing a new strategy on Iraq, following the joint communication by the High Representative and the Commission on elements for an EU strategy on Iraq adopted on 8 January 2018.

The Council endorses the joint communication and its proposals to address the many challenges the country faces following the territorial defeat of Da'esh. The Council agrees that in order to maintain the momentum towards building a better future for Iraq it is now essential to start working to implement the following EU strategic objectives in Iraq:

- a) preserving the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country as well as its ethnic and religious diversity
- b) strengthening the Iraqi political and judicial systems through enhanced accountability
- c) delivering humanitarian aid and support for early recovery, stabilisation, development and reconstruction while ensuring sustainable, knowledge-based and inclusive growth as well as nd jobs.
- d) fostering regional dialogue with neighbours and cooperation on migration with the EU

[Read the full text of the conclusions](#)

Sanctions on Venezuela

In view of the continuing deterioration of the situation in Venezuela, the Council decided to put 7 individuals holding official positions under restrictive measures, with immediate effect. These individuals are involved in the non-respect of democratic principles or the rule of law as well as in the violation of human rights. The measures include a travel ban and an asset freeze.

The decision was adopted as the political, social and economic situation in Venezuela continues to deteriorate, and as negotiations between the government and the opposition have not yet delivered concrete results. It is an expression of the Council's concern with this current state of affairs.

The restrictive measures aim to help foster democratic shared solutions that can bring political stability to the country and allow it to address the pressing needs of the population.

As indicated in Council conclusions of 13 November 2017, constructive dialogue and negotiation are the only sustainable way to address the current crisis and to respond to the pressing needs of the people of Venezuela. The Council indicated that the EU fully supports credible negotiations between all relevant actors that can lead to shared solutions to the multiple challenges in the country.

The conclusions also underlined that the restrictive measures can be reversed depending on the evolution of the situation in the country, in particular the holding of credible and meaningful negotiations, the respect for democratic institutions, the adoption of a full electoral calendar and the liberation of all political prisoners. The Council also recalled that these are targeted measures designed not to harm the Venezuelan population whose plight the EU wishes to alleviate.

On 13 November 2017, the Council adopted a ban on arms and equipment for internal repression and a framework decision on targeted restrictive measures without listing any individual or entity.

See the [Council decision](#)

Sanctions on North Korea

The Council added 17 individuals to its list of those subject to an asset freeze and travel restrictions. These listings come in addition to those drawn up by the United Nations, complementing and reinforcing the UN sanctions regime.

The sanctions have been adopted as a means of maintaining pressure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in view of its continued and accelerated development of nuclear and ballistic programmes in flagrant disregard of previous UN Security Council resolutions.

The 17 individuals have been identified due to their involvement in illegal trade activities and activities aimed at facilitating the evasion of sanctions imposed by the UN, including from abroad.

The decision brings the total number of individuals and entities autonomously designated by the EU under restrictive measures against the DPRK to 58 individuals and 10 entities. In addition, 79 individuals and 54 entities are listed by the UN.

See the [Council decision](#)

Council conclusions on the integrated approach to external conflict and crises

The Council adopted conclusions on the EU's integrated approach to external conflict and crises. The Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy identifies the integrated approach as the framework for more coherent and holistic engagement by the EU to external conflicts and crises. In promoting human security, the approach also increases the security of the EU and its citizens.

[Read the full text of the conclusions
An Integrated Approach to Conflicts](#)

EU priorities for cooperation with the Council of Europe

The Council adopted the EU priorities for cooperation with the Council of Europe. The conclusions set out the agreed priorities for cooperation in the areas of rule of law, human rights and democracy. It is the fourth time the EU has adopted priorities for a two-year period.

The EU will continue to focus on the interlinked and mutually reinforcing priorities of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. More attention will be paid to our cooperation in areas such as the death penalty, torture and ill-treatment, and freedom of expression, association and assembly.

The EU will continue its work on the rule of law, notably on the reform of judiciary and judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters. The EU has a strong interest in capitalising on the Council of Europe's expertise. More emphasis will be also placed on the EU's commitment to the convention system.

[Read the full text of the EU priorities for cooperation with the Council of Europe](#)

Upgraded generic standards of behaviour for CSDP missions and operations

The Council approved new, upgraded standards of behaviour for Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations.

The upgraded generic standards of behaviour for CSDP missions and operations set out the principles, based on common EU values, to be upheld and respected by all staff during CSDP missions and operations. The revised document is part of ongoing wider efforts by the EU to constantly improve our policies and procedures with regard to conduct and discipline during CSDP missions and operations and contributes to ensuring that all personnel involved in CSDP civilian and military missions and operations uphold the highest professional standards. It reaffirms the EU's commitment to a zero-tolerance policy on misconduct and abuse.

The upgraded standards are applicable to both civilian missions and military missions and operations. They are similar to those applicable to other EU actors; in particular, they are in line with the corresponding provisions in the Staff Regulations, with the European Commission's practical guide to staff ethics and conduct, and with the European Commission's policy on protecting the dignity of the person and preventing psychological harassment and sexual harassment.

Exercise specifications for MILEX 18

The Council approved the exercise specifications for the EU crisis management military exercises in 2018 (MILEX 18). This annual exercise will be conducted in 2018 from 14 to 23 March. It will be focused on the military planning process for the deployment of EU military forces.

[EU cooperation on security and defence](#)

Promotion of effective arms export controls

The Council adopted a decision on the promotion of effective arms export controls. With this decision, the EU intends to promote effective controls on arms exports by third countries. The decision funds a new phase of assistance over the next two years, with a budget of €1.3 million.

Since 2009, the EU has been providing technical assistance to 17 third countries in the EU's close neighbourhood to improve their controls on arms transfers. The rationale behind this EU assistance is to fight illicit arms trafficking, which is often fuelled by diversion and poorly regulated arms exports. The planned assistance activities aim to encourage countries to join and fully implement the Arms Trade Treaty. These assistance activities complement and work in synergy with EU assistance projects on export controls on dual-use goods and on supporting third countries' efforts at national and regional levels to make trade in conventional weapons more responsible and transparent.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

EU policy cycle

The Council authorised Europol to release to third countries and third parties the operational action plans which are part of the EU policy cycle for organised and serious international crime where there is an operational need to do so and the necessary conditions are met.

TRADE

EU-Ukraine association agreement

The Council adopted a decision on the position to be taken on behalf of the EU within the EU-Ukraine Association Council and within the trade committee configuration.

The position clarifies in particular the implementation of the modalities reduction to be applied to the base rate of customs duties according to the EU-Ukraine association agreement. ([15244/17](#))

Import of biodiesel from Argentina and Indonesia

The Council agreed to withdraw its appeals against 6 judgments by the European Court of Justice related to imports of biodiesel originating from Argentina and Indonesia.

The Court had initially annulled two articles in a Council implementing regulation imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty and collecting definitively the provisional duty imposed on imports of biodiesel originating in Argentina and Indonesia.

In November 2016, the Council lodged appeals against the Court's judgments. On 22 January, a simple majority in favour of the withdrawal of the appeals was reached.

Modernisation of the EU-Chile association agreement

The Council decided to [publish the mandate](#) given to the Commission on 13 November 2017 to modernise the existing association agreement with Chile.

This is the first time that the Council has decided to make public the entire mandate for an association agreement covering political and trade aspects. In so doing, it responds to calls for greater transparency and the need to better communicate the contents and the objectives of the negotiations.

Political and economic relations between the EU and Chile have so far been governed by an association agreement which was signed in 2002 and fully implemented in 2005. The aim of a modernised agreement is to deepen EU-Chile relations by enhancing existing cooperation on political, security and trade matters. Negotiations were launched on 16 November 2017 on the basis of the agreed mandate.

See the [press release](#)

TRANSPORT

EU Railway Agency – participation of Switzerland

The Council authorised the Commission to open negotiations with Switzerland to amend the agreement between the European Community and Switzerland on the carriage of goods and passengers by rail and road with a view to enabling the country's participation in the EU Agency for Railways.

Aviation agreement with Morocco

The Council adopted a decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the EU, of the Euro-Mediterranean Aviation Agreement between the European Community and its member states, of the one part, and Morocco, of the other part, so as to permit the conclusion of the agreement ([15653/16](#)).

HEALTH

Use of bisphenol A in varnishes and coatings

The Council decided not to object to Commission regulation (EU) .../... of XXX on the use of bisphenol A in varnishes and coatings intended to come into contact with food.

The new legal text amends regulation (EU) 10/2011 which establishes specific requirements for the manufacture and marketing of plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with food ([13852/17](#) + ADD 1).

APPOINTMENTS

Court of Auditors

The Council appointed the following persons as members of the European Court of Auditors for the period running from 1 March 2018 to 29 February 2024:

Ms Bettina Michelle JAKOBSEN,

- Mr Baudilio TOMÉ MUGURUZA,
- Mr Pietro RUSSO,
- Mr João FIGUEIREDO,
- Mr Hannu TAKKULA.

In addition, Ms Iliana IVANOVA was appointed as a member of the European Court of Auditors for the period running from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2024.

Mr Takkula is a new member of the Court of Auditors. The others have been reappointed.

In total, the term of office of 9 Court members expires in 2018. The Court members from Sweden, Ireland and Belgium still need to be appointed.

The Court of Auditors is made up of 28 members, one from each member state, appointed for a renewable term of six years. The members elect one of their number as president for a renewable term of three years.