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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**

Current affairs	3
Disinformation	3
EU-League of Arab States relations.....	4
EU-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) relations.....	4

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED*FOREIGN AFFAIRS*

– Council conclusions on Nicaragua	6
– Sanctions against the use and proliferation of chemical weapons	7
– Sanctions against the Syrian regime	8
– EU strategy against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction	9
– Sanctions on North Korea	9
– Sanctions in light of the situation in Ukraine	9
– European economic area.....	10

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

– eu-LISA: Schengen associated states	10
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TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

– Economic partnership agreement (EPA) with the Southern African Development Community EPA group.....	11
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TRANSPORT

– International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) state letter	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.

ITEMS DEBATED

Current affairs

The Foreign Affairs Council started with a discussion on current affairs. Foreign ministers briefly reviewed the main pressing issues on the international agenda, including the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Venezuela and Syria. The adoption of Council conclusions on the situation in Nicaragua was also mentioned, as well as the first designations under the new EU sanctions regime against the use and proliferation of chemical weapons. The High Representative and foreign ministers also referred to the bomb attack in Bogotá, Colombia on 17 January 2019, as well as to recent developments in Yemen.

Disinformation

The Council discussed the action plan against disinformation presented by the High Representative and European Commission on 5 December 2018. Foreign ministers expressed strong support for the joint action plan.

Ministers exchanged views on the implementation of the action plan, focusing on its external aspects. They underlined the need to build a common and holistic response to the security challenges posed by foreign interference, while respecting national approaches and protecting freedom of expression and of the media.

They highlighted the creation of an EU 'Rapid Alert System' for sharing expertise and best practices, and for promoting coordinated action, notably through awareness-raising campaigns. Ministers stressed the need to engage with civil society, including civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), business and academia, to tackle disinformation, and to work with international partners, in particular NATO and the G7, to address disinformation more efficiently. They also underlined the importance of contributing to strengthening the resilience of neighbouring countries.

The Council concluded that disinformation should be addressed in the broader context of foreign interference, hybrid threats and strategic communication, with strengthened operational capacities at EU level. This should include the reinforcement of the European External Action Service's three strategic communication task forces, which were set up in order to promote fact-based narratives about the EU in the Eastern neighbourhood, the Southern neighbourhood and the Western Balkans.

EU-League of Arab States relations

Foreign ministers had a preparatory discussion for the EU-League of Arab States (LAS) ministerial meeting to be held in Brussels on 4 February 2019, ahead of the first EU-LAS summit scheduled on 24 and 25 February 2019 in Sharm el-Sheik, Egypt.

The Council reaffirmed the importance of a strong EU-LAS partnership. Foreign ministers discussed the need to cooperate with the LAS in addressing a wide range of issues and common challenges such as multilateralism, trade and investment, the fight against terrorism, migration, and climate change, as well as regional issues.

[League of Arab States \(European External Action Service\)](#)

EU-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) relations

The Council discussed the 22nd EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting, which took place on the same day in Brussels. The Council adopted the following conclusions on EU-ASEAN relations:

- "1. The Council welcomes the outcome of the EU-ASEAN Leaders' Meeting in Brussels on 19 October 2018. The European Union has a genuine strategic interest in strengthening its relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Council is determined to deepen relations in 2019 and underlines its support for ASEAN regional integration.

2. The Council looks forward to the upgrading of EU-ASEAN relations to a strategic partnership when mutually agreed. The EU and ASEAN are bound together by common interests in strengthening the rules-based international order and in effective multilateralism. The Council underlines the importance of promoting closer trade and investment links with ASEAN. Recalling its commitment to enhanced security cooperation in and with Asia, it also reiterates its offer to contribute substantially to policy and security/defence related fora led by ASEAN, including the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus. It is determined to advance mutually beneficial cooperation on connectivity in line with the EU strategy on connecting Europe and Asia. Both the EU and ASEAN must work together to move the relationship to the strategic level with a view to promoting our strong common interests.

3. The Council therefore looks forward to a successful EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting today with an ambitious agenda, including the strengthening of our mutual relations, promoting EU-ASEAN connectivity, enhancing political and security cooperation, addressing climate change and the environment, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and a constructive discussion of key challenges facing Europe, South-east Asia and the world."

[EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting, 21/01/2019](#)

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****Council conclusions on Nicaragua**

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the situation in Nicaragua:

- "1. The European Union (EU) recalls the various EU declarations on Nicaragua and HRVP statements since April 2018 when demonstrations were brutally repressed by security forces and pro-government armed groups leading to clashes, several hundreds dead and injured and the arrest of hundreds of citizens, with widespread irregularities and arbitrariness in detention and judicial procedures.
2. Recent measures targeting civil society organisations and independent media constitute another blow to democracy, human rights and civic freedoms aggravating the political and social crisis.
3. The EU firmly condemns the repression of the press and civil society and the use of anti-terrorist laws to repress dissenting opinions in Nicaragua. The cancellation of legal registration of several civil society organisations and the illegal raids against independent media outlets, together with earlier measures that criminalise protest, create an environment where fundamental and constitutionally recognised rights such as freedom of expression and assembly, freedom of movement, Habeas Corpus, and the right to a fair trial are not being ensured.
4. Just as the EU supported regional efforts to ensure accountability for all the crimes committed since April 2018, whoever the perpetrators, the EU deplores the suspension of the Special Monitoring Mechanism (MESENI) and the termination of the mandate of the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GEIE) of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The EU calls on the government of Nicaragua to cooperate constructively with the IACHR, its bodies and the OAS working group, guarantee conditions for their proper operations, and to allow the return of the Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). There cannot be reconciliation without a transparent, inclusive and constructive national dialogue among all the parties involved and justice for all victims.

5. The EU believes that a genuine dialogue and negotiation including the adoption of electoral reforms to ensure credible elections responding to international democratic standards is the only way to address the current crisis and to respond to the pressing needs and aspirations of the people of Nicaragua. The EU regrets that electoral reforms promoted by the OAS have been paralysed. Therefore it urges the Nicaraguan government to re-engage in a process of meaningful and results oriented dialogue and stands ready to support a mediation acceptable to all stakeholders and electoral reforms.
6. The EU also calls on the authorities to cease the repression of public demonstration, independent media and journalists and civil society organisations; guarantee the physical security of their members and reinstate their legal status; release all those that were unlawfully imprisoned and ensure due process and fair treatment at all stages.
7. The EU will continue to monitor the situation closely and underlines its readiness to use all its policy instruments to contribute to a peaceful negotiated way out of the current crisis and react to further deterioration of human rights and rule of law."

[Delegation of the EU to Nicaragua](#)

Sanctions against the use and proliferation of chemical weapons

The Council imposed sanctions on nine persons and one entity under the new regime of restrictive measures to address the use and proliferation of chemical weapons, created on 15 October 2018.

These include four officials from the GRU (now the GU, the main directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces) directly involved in the attempted murder of Sergei Skripal in Salisbury on the weekend of 4 March 2018. Sanctions were also imposed on the Syrian entity responsible for the development and production of chemical weapons, the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC), as well as on five Syrians directly involved in the SSRC's activities. They are the first persons and entity listed under this new sanctions regime. The SSRC was already listed under the Syrian sanctions regime.

Sanctions consist of a travel ban to the EU and an asset freeze for persons, and an asset freeze for entities. In addition, EU persons and entities are forbidden from making funds available to those listed. This decision contributes to the EU's efforts to counter the proliferation and use of chemical weapons which pose a serious threat to international security.

[Council decision of 21 January, Official Journal of the EU](#)

[Chemical weapons: the Council adopts a new sanctions regime, 15 October 2018](#)

Sanctions against the Syrian regime

The Council added 11 prominent businessmen and five entities linked to those businessmen to the list of those subject to restrictive measures against the Syrian regime and its supporters. The businessmen and their companies participate in the regime-backed luxury development of Marota City and as such support and/or benefit from the Syrian regime.

The sanctions list now includes 270 persons and 72 entities targeted by a travel ban and an asset freeze. The persons and entities added were included for benefiting from and/or supporting the Syrian regime.

EU sanctions currently in place against Syria include an oil embargo, restrictions on certain investments, a freeze of the assets of the Syrian central bank held in the EU, and export restrictions on equipment and technology that might be used for internal repression as well as on equipment and technology for the monitoring or interception of internet or telephone communications. The sanctions on Syria were first put in place in 2011. They were last renewed on 28 May 2018, and apply until 1 June 2019.

The EU remains committed to finding a lasting and credible political solution to the conflict in Syria, as defined in UN Security Council resolution 2254 and in the 2012 Geneva Communiqué. As stated in the EU strategy on Syria adopted in April 2017, and reaffirmed in the Council conclusions of 16 April 2018, the EU believes that there can be no military solution to the conflict and strongly supports the work of the UN Special Envoy and the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva.

[Council decision of 21 January, Official Journal of the EU](#)

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

EU strategy against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

The Council adopted a decision in support of the biological and toxin weapons convention (BTWC) in the framework of the EU strategy against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

This decision creates an operational policy tool for providing essential follow-up and momentum to the activities undertaken throughout 2016-2018 in the framework of the 2016 Council decision in support of the BTWC. It aims at supporting the national implementation and universalisation of the BTWC, as well as enabling tools for outreach, education and engagement fostering biosecurity. The action will also support the preparations for the 9th review conference of the BTWC and enhance the preparedness of states for preventing and responding to attacks involving biological agents. The Council also agreed on a budget of €3 million for this action.

[EU strategy against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction](#)

Sanctions on North Korea

The Council removed two deceased persons from the list of those subject to restrictive measures against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

The EU restrictive measures against the DPRK were adopted as a means of maintaining pressure in view of its continued and accelerated development of nuclear and ballistic programmes in flagrant disregard of previous UN Security Council resolutions.

[EU restrictive measures on North Korea](#)

Sanctions in light of the situation in Ukraine

The Council removed one deceased person from the list of those subject to restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

The measures consist of a travel ban and an asset freeze, meaning that the persons listed cannot enter the territory of any EU member state, all of the assets in the EU belonging to them are frozen, and EU persons and entities cannot make any funds available to them. The decision brings the total number of persons listed by the EU to 163. In addition, the EU imposed an asset freeze on 44 entities under this sanctions regime.

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

European economic area

The Council adopted its position, on behalf of the EU, within the European economic area (EEA) joint committee regarding an amendment to annex IX (on financial services) to the EEA agreement. Annex IX is to be amended to incorporate regulation (EU) No 909/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council in the EEA agreement.

The EEA was set up in 1994 to extend the EU's provisions on its internal market to the European free trade area (EFTA) countries. Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein are parties to the EEA.

The decision is available in the EU Official Journal.

[The European economic area \(EEA\)](#)

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

eu-LISA: Schengen associated states

The Council forwarded to the European Parliament for its consent a Council decision (15832/18) on the conclusion of an arrangement between the EU and the Schengen associated states (Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein) on their participation in eu-LISA, the European agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice.

This arrangement allows the Schengen associated states to participate fully in the activities of eu-LISA related to the IT systems in which they take part. This includes voting rights in management board decisions, representation in advisory groups of the agency, budgetary contributions and staff.

TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

Economic partnership agreement (EPA) with the Southern African Development Community EPA group

The Council adopted two decisions on the positions to be taken on behalf of the European Union within the joint council under the economic partnership agreement (EPA) between the EU and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) EPA group. The positions relate to:

- the adoption of the rules of procedure for dispute avoidance and settlement and the code of conduct for arbitrators and mediators ([15617/18](#))
- the establishment of a list of arbitrators ([15619/18](#))

The EU signed the EPA with the SADC EPA group on 10 June 2016. The group comprises Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland. Angola may join the agreement in future.

The agreement became the first regional EPA in Africa to be fully operational after Mozambique joined the agreement in February 2018.

TRANSPORT

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) state letter

The Council approved an information note containing a recommended EU position on the reply to an ICAO state letter on the establishment of a technical advisory body and developments on the emissions unit criteria, so that the information note can be used as the basis for replies by the EU member states to the ICAO state letter.
