

COOPERATION
BETWEEN
THE EUROPEAN UNION
AND IRAQ

The Cooperation Council

Brussels, 15 October 2025
(OR. en)

UE-IQ 3753/25

MINUTES

Subject: Third meeting of the EU-Iraq Cooperation Council
19 March 2023
Brussels

SUMMARY

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2. EU-IRAQ BILATERAL RELATIONS
3. CLOSING REMARKS
4. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA OF THE 3RD EU-IRAQ COOPERATION COUNCIL
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7. AOB AND CONCLUSIONS

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The Cooperation Council between the EU and Iraq held its third session on 19 March 2023 in Brussels.

This third session was co-chaired by Mr. Josep BORRELL, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and by Mr. Fuad HUSSEIN, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq.

The European Commission was represented by Ms. Ylva JOHANSSON, European Commissioner for Home Affairs.

OPENING REMARKS

The High Representative Josep BORRELL opened the meeting by welcoming the Iraqi delegation to the plenary session of this 3rd meeting of the Cooperation Council and thanked Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fuad HUSSEIN, for the productive discussion in the restricted session. This was also a good opportunity to take stock of the EU-Iraq cooperation and to identify further areas of dialogue.

On trade and investment, the High Representative recalled the EU's support for Iraqi efforts to join the WTO and expressed a wish to see the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development expanding their operations to Iraq. The High Representative said the EU wants to send a positive message to investors that Iraq is open for business with many opportunities. On energy, the High Representative noted that Iraq is helping Europe to replace Russian oil. He recalled that Iraq has up to 50 to 60% of the world's gas reserves and suggested cooperation with European companies to help Iraq use gas its reserves productively. Regarding democracy and human rights, the High Representative reminded that the EU has supported Iraq's democratic process, including observing the 2021 elections, and underlined the EU stands ready to do more. The EU remains concerned about limitations to freedom of the press and safety of journalists, as well as gender violence. He also called for accountability for the killings during the 2019 protest movement.

Commissioner JOHANSSON warmly welcomed Minister HUSSEIN to the Cooperation Council, saying it was a good occasion to move forward on issues of common interest for the EU-Iraq partnership. She highlighted the need for Iraq to continue its reforms on bureaucracy, corruption, strengthening and diversification of the economy, and support to women's economic empowerment.

The Commissioner recalled the EU's willingness to support Iraq on its path of reforms and urged the Iraqi government to complete legal processes to allow the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to operate in Iraq. On migration, she underlined that many Iraqi citizens are resident in the EU and have EU citizenship. Similarly, 250,000 Iraqi citizens are legally staying in the EU, and they contribute to the EU's economy and culture. However, some 50,000 Iraqi citizens are staying illegally in the EU. The Commissioner called for swift progress on the return of these Iraqi citizens to Iraq.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Fuad HUSSEIN, said he was very pleased to resume regular meetings with the EU, and particularly this EU-Iraq Cooperation Council. He said it was a wonderful opportunity to discuss EU-Iraq relations for the first time since 2016, as well as opportunities and challenges facing both sides. He also said it was an opportunity to strengthen relations between Iraq and the EU. He highlighted the need to find effective solutions to various challenges, including banning Iraqi airways from operating in the EU by placing them on the EU Air Safety List as well as the issue of returns of Iraqi citizens to Iraq. The Minister recalled that Iraq has witnessed many economic developments and, despite challenges, was able to form a national government immediately following the 2021 elections.

The Minister briefed on the implementation of an integrated programme of priorities including legislative enactment, such as the Federal Budget Law and the Oil and Gas Law with the view of achieving economic growth and stability through economic reform. Other priorities include the fight against corruption, development of the financial and banking sector, job creation, infrastructure development and the elimination of ISIS and extremists. The Minister expressed his thanks to the EU and its Member states for the support extended to Iraq through the EU Advisory Mission in Iraq (EUAM Iraq) on civilian security sector reform, which continues to provide strategic advice to the Iraqi security forces in their efforts to combat terrorism.

The Minister said the meeting of the Cooperation Council constitutes real opportunity to discuss ways to enhance economic and commercial ties between Iraq and the European Union and affirmed Iraq's readiness to provide the necessary facilities for European companies to invest in various sectors. He also called for global cooperation and solidarity to confront climate change and water shortage. He stressed the importance of exchanging information and transferring technologies related to the supply of water.

The Minister concluded by reiterating his gratitude to the EU for its continuous support to Iraq.

EU-IRAQ BILATERAL RELATIONS

The High Representative gave the floor to Member States' representatives attending the session.

Mr. Tobias BILLSTRÖM, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, warmly welcomed the Iraqi Minister and to the EU-Iraq Cooperation Council. He acknowledged the Cooperation Council meeting as a further step towards a constructive and fruitful relationship between the EU and Iraq. He highlighted how the dialogue gives both partners the opportunity to further strengthen shared cooperation and to address common challenges in areas such as regional security, economic development, climate change and migration. He reaffirmed the EU's commitment to stability and security of Iraq. Sweden is pleased to contribute to the work of UNITAD and the global coalition against Daesh, as well as the NATO and EU missions. The Minister welcomed the announced priorities of the Government of Iraq, notably on fight against corruption. He recalled this is precondition to generate a healthy business environment, for increased investments and generating trade and economic cooperation between the EU and Iraq. Sweden supports increased EU-Iraq cooperation on climate, environment, and sustainable development, smart technology, green transition, water management and energy. The Minister recalled that the EU's migration system relies on compliance with international obligations, including the readmission of citizens. Non-compliance risks undermining the EU's asylum system, making it more difficult to assist people in need.

Mr. Nikos DENDIAS, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece welcomed the Iraqi Minister and his delegation to the Cooperation Council. He noted the long-standing people to people contacts between the EU and Iraq and recalled the High Representative's visits to Iraq in 2020 and 2021. He stressed that the EU-Iraq partnership is important the stability and prosperity of the wider region. He stressed that Iraq's security remains a major issue, and the EU supports the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and he condemned any actions by external actors in an attempt to undermine the stability of Iraq. The Minister recalled the important role played by Iraq leading to the normalisation of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The Minister underlined the EU's commitment through humanitarian assistance to Iraq. He noted that since 2003 the EU has invested more than 1 billion euro in assistance to Iraq, becoming one of the main international donors. The Minister emphasised the importance the EU attaches to the consolidation the rule of law, improving human rights standards and the need for the government of

Iraq to ensure Iraq's resilience. In this regard, the Minister commanded the Iraqi government for its determination to pursue the path of progress and prosperity for Iraq and its people.

Mr. Lars LØKKE RASMUSSEN, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, welcomed the 3rd session of the EU-Iraq Cooperation Council. He strongly supported the strengthening EU-Iraq relations recalling many shared interests, including security, stability, climate and migration. The Minister welcomed the Iraqi government's ambitious reform agenda, in particular the fight against corruption and the efforts to consolidate military forces under the control of the state. He recalled the EU's support to Iraq's territorial integrity and sovereignty, noting Iraq's stability is vital in the region. Finally, the Minister welcomes continued cooperation on migration including on return and readmission.

Mr. Jan LIPAVSKÝ, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czechia welcomed the Iraqi Minister and his delegation to the EU-Iraq cooperation Council, noting their full parliamentary mandate. The Minister expressed hope that the new Iraqi government will continue its efforts on consolidation of the rule of law, economic reforms and development for the benefit of all Iraqi citizens. The Minister expressed his appreciation for Iraqi diplomacy in their moderating and facilitating role in the region. He said the EU is encouraged by the new Iraqi government active engagement with the EU advisory mission in Iraq and hopes the cooperation will yield tangible results in security sector reforms.

Mr. Pekka HAAVISTO, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland welcomed participants to the 3rd EU-Iraq Cooperation Council. He underlined how the EU values Iraq's efforts to foster dialogue in the region and welcomed Iraq's participation in various fora in this regard, including the Baghdad conference. The Minister welcomed continued cooperation on migration, including on return and readmission, the environment, climate change and water diplomacy.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Fuad HUSSEIN thanked the High Representative, the Commissioner and the EU Ministers for their remarks. He stressed the challenges Iraq is facing in rebuilding a democratic system and following a democratic process. Despite the many challenges including on security, countering terrorism and sectarian violence, Iraq is continuing on its path of inclusive democratic representative governance with the Kurds, whose rights have been recognised according to the constitution, are actively taking part in government. Similarly, Shi'a, Sunni, Turkmens, Christians and the Yazidis are part of the political process. Women are playing an important role in Iraqi society including in the Iraqi parliament where they are part of the decision-

making process. On migration, the Minister informed on historical events affecting migration in Iraq and how it can be difficult to convince migrants to return. However, the Minister recalled that following discussions in Baghdad and Erbil, the Iraqi government stands ready to cooperate with the EU on returns.

Mr. Jassim ALMOHAMADI, Deputy Minister for Environment, outlined the Iraqi priorities in the field of the environment, water scarcity, draught, water degradation, desertification and the increased incidents of dust storms. He recalled Iraq's vulnerability to the effects of climate change, noting that 90% of Iraq's water resources are transboundary which has significant effects on the economy, health and even security. The Deputy Minister referred to Iraq's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) which outlines its commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions under the Paris Agreement. The NDC includes targets for emissions reductions, adaptation measures, and financing needs. Iraq's NDC focuses on key sectors like energy, waste, and agriculture, with a strong emphasis on methane emission reductions. He called for support to implement Iraq's national strategy including in the transfer of technology and in particular in the field of integrated water management and biodiversity.

Mr. Saleem SALEEM, Legal Advisor of the Head of Government in the Kurdish region outlined the ongoing work on return and readmission of migrants. He noted the burdensome challenges to effectively operate a returns system. He requested EU support to effectively detect falsified visas at Iraqi airports. Combatting organised crime gangs who facilitate human trafficking, and the counterfeiting of visas is vital to put an end to illegal migration and asked the EU for assistance through the exchange of information and intelligence in this regard.

CLOSING REMARKS

The High Representative concluded by thanking Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs HUSSEIN for the fruitful discussions which would allow to project a positive message and to facilitate further cooperation. He recalled Iraq's role as a regional power that will play an important role not only in the region but on the world equilibrium and in particular in the new geopolitical landscape and the new geoeconomic landscape.

Minister HUSSEIN concluded by thanking the High Representative and the EU for their continued support to Iraq. He said it is in everyone's interest that Iraq continues its works to build bridges in the region to ensure the safety and security of all.

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA OF THE 3RD EU-IRAQ COOPERATION COUNCIL

The agenda of the meeting, as set out in document UE-IQ 3751/23 was adopted.

2. ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2ND EU-IRAQ COOPERATION COUNCIL

The Cooperation Council adopted, without modifications, the minutes of the previous meeting, as set out in document UE-IQ 3753/23

3. DECISION OF THE EU-IRAQ COOPERATION COUNCIL ON THE SETTING UP OF A SPECIALISED SUB-COMMITTEE

The Decision of the EU-Iraq Cooperation Council on the setting up of a specialised Sub-Committee on Development Cooperation and of its terms of reference were adopted as set out in document UE-IQ 3755/23.

AOB AND CONCLUSIONS

The EU-Iraq Joint Declaration on sustainable development, green transition, governance, regional connectivity and sustainable finance was adopted at the 3rd EU-Iraq Cooperation Council.

The Cooperation Council considered the meeting to have been a useful opportunity to discuss the ongoing cooperation, providing a good basis for progress on matters of substance. Both sides looked forward to continuing their dialogue in the near future.

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AND IRAQ

The Cooperation Council

Brussels, 7 March 2023
(OR. en)

UE-IQ 3751/23

LIMITE

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	3rd EU-Iraq Cooperation Council - Agenda

1. Adoption of Agenda and formal adoption of minutes for the 2nd Cooperation Council in 2016.
2. Developments in Iraq and in the EU.
3. Regional affairs and security.
4. Follow up to the discussions on Migration, Democracy & Human Rights, Trade and Energy.
5. Decisions:
 - Establishment of a new subcommittee on development cooperation.
6. AOB.

OFFICIAL LIST OF EU PARTICIPANTS**EUROPEAN UNION**

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Ylva JOHANSSON	Commissioner for Home Affairs

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Helene LE GAL	EEAS Managing Director MENA
Ville VARJOLA	EU Ambassador to Iraq
Rafael DAERR	Member of Cabinet EEAS
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Kareem AL-NOORI	Deputy Minister for Immigration
Hazim AL-BDAIRI	Deputy Minister for Transportation
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Lukman ALFAILY	Ambassador of Iraq in Berlin Head Human Rights Sub-C
Saleem SALEEM	Councillor/ KRG Representative
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Riyadh AL-HASHIMI	Director General Ministry of Trade
Bareen AL-KHAFFAF	Director General Ministry of Finance
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Nawar ALMAHMOODI	Protocol Iraqi Mission
Haydar ALANI	Protocol Iraqi Mission
Mudher AL-KUBAISI	Photographer
