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

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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**Iran**

The Foreign Affairs Council held a debate on Iran, in particular the Iran nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), following the US withdrawal from the JCPOA as announced on 8 May. The debate followed up on the EU leaders' discussion in Sofia on 16 May, when they unanimously agreed that the EU will stay in the agreement as long as Iran remains fully committed to it, and gave the Commission the green light to be ready to act whenever European interests are affected.

Ministers underlined the importance of preserving the JCPOA, which is key for the security of the region, and in turn, for Europe and beyond. They also welcomed the steps already taken by the European Commission to protect European companies which have engaged with Iran following the lifting of nuclear-related sanctions. They commended all efforts, notably those of the High Representative and the E3 foreign ministers (France, Germany and the UK) to ensure that Iran continues implementing the agreement, whose goal is to prevent the country from developing a nuclear weapon.

Ministers also touched upon other issues outside the scope of the JCPOA, in particular the EU's concerns over Iran's ballistic missiles programme and the role of Iran in regional conflicts, not least in Syria and Yemen, as well as the human rights situation. These issues are being addressed outside the JCPOA. Most recently, the EU led an effort involving several member states to engage with Iran on Yemen, with a meeting taking place at diplomatic level in Rome on 3 May to discuss concrete steps to build confidence.

Foreign ministers also stressed the importance of the EU to the transatlantic relationship, and the need to continue engaging with the US, a long-standing partner and ally, on all issues, including Iran.

Venezuela

Foreign ministers exchanged views on Venezuela, following the presidential and regional elections on 20 May and the re-election of Nicolás Maduro for a second 6-year term. The Council adopted the following conclusions on Venezuela:

- "1. The EU recalls its previous statements on Venezuela, in particular the High Representative's declaration on behalf of the EU of 22 May.
2. The latest developments in Venezuela have pushed further away the possibility of a constitutional negotiated solution that ensures the respect of democracy, the rule of law and human rights.
3. In spite of the numerous calls by national political actors and the international community, including the European Union, for elections on the basis of an agreed electoral calendar and guarantees that can ensure inclusive and credible elections, early presidential elections together with regional elections were held on 20 May without an agreement on the date or on the conditions, and in circumstances which did not allow for the participation of all political parties in an equal manner.
4. The substantially reduced electoral calendar, bans and other major obstacles to the participation of opposition political parties and their leaders, as well as the non-respect of minimal democratic standards as indicated by numerous reported irregularities, notably the widespread abuse of state resources, voter coercion and unbalanced access to media, led to these elections being neither free nor fair.
5. Under these circumstances, the election and its outcome lacked any credibility as the electoral process did not ensure the necessary guarantees for inclusive and democratic elections. The absence of those guarantees also prevented the EU from planning any form of observation to monitor the electoral process according to internationally recognized standards. The EU thus reiterates the need for free and transparent elections respecting the Constitutional rules of Venezuela.

6. Against this background, the EU calls for the holding of fresh presidential elections in accordance with internationally recognised democratic standards and the Venezuelan constitutional order. In this context, the EU will act swiftly, according to established procedures, with the aim of imposing additional targeted and reversible restrictive measures, that do not harm the Venezuelan population, whose plight the EU wishes to alleviate.
7. The EU reiterates the need for the recognition and respect of the role and independence of all democratically elected institutions, notably the National Assembly, the release of all political prisoners, the upholding of rule of law and human rights and fundamental freedoms.
8. The EU wishes to remain engaged with all stakeholders in Venezuela and reiterates its friendship and support to its people. The EU is ready to help find a democratic way out of the current multidimensional crisis, through a meaningful and result-oriented negotiation conducted in good faith, that includes all relevant Venezuelan political actors. To that end, the EU will enhance its diplomatic outreach with all relevant national, regional and international actors, recognising especially efforts by Latin American and Caribbean partners that have offered their assistance and support to the process of overcoming the crisis in Venezuela.
9. The EU is deeply concerned about the pressing humanitarian needs of the population, including of many Europeans citizens residing in the country, which need to be addressed urgently. The worsening crisis is causing mass migration that creates challenges to host communities and to regional stability. The EU calls on the Venezuelan Government to take immediate action to alleviate the impact of the crisis.
10. The European Union will continue and step up its support to the population of Venezuela, also in neighbouring countries, supporting the socio-economic inclusion of Venezuelans and resilience of host communities."

Gaza

Over lunch, foreign ministers discussed the situation in Gaza following recent developments, including in relation to the US Embassy in Israel's move to Jerusalem. They agreed on the need to act immediately to avoid further loss of life, including by improving humanitarian access. They also stressed the importance of reviving a political process, and re-confirmed the united EU position on the need to find a two-state solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.

[Statement by the High Representative Federica Mogherini on violence in Gaza and latest developments, 14 May 2018 \(EEAS\)](#)

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Council discussed the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Foreign ministers stressed the importance of ensuring the electoral calendar, which schedules the general election for 23 December 2018, is adhered to through a credible, legitimate, consensual and inclusive process. Ministers also expressed their concern over the dire humanitarian situation, in the light of the recent Ebola outbreak.

[Democratic Republic of the Congo: Council adopts conclusions \(press release, 11/12/2017\)](#)

[The Democratic Republic of the Congo and the EU \(EEAS website\)](#)

Post-Cotonou agreement

Foreign ministers took stock of progress in the preparations for a Council decision authorising the Commission to open negotiations on the future partnership between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries (post-Cotonou agreement).

The Council asked EU ambassadors (Coreper) to continue, in the coming days, the work aimed at finalising and adopting the negotiating mandate under the leadership of the Bulgarian presidency.

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

[European Commission recommends draft negotiating directives for a modernised Partnership with countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, 12 December 2017](#)

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****Sanctions against Syria**

The Council extended EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime until 1 June 2019. Given the ongoing repression of the civilian population, the EU decided to maintain its restrictive measures against the Syrian regime and its supporters, in line with the EU strategy on Syria.

The Council also updated the information relating to certain persons and entities on the list and removed two deceased persons from the list. It now includes 259 persons and 67 entities targeted by a travel ban and an asset freeze. The persons added most recently were included for their role in the use of chemical weapons, as was the case for the four persons added to the sanctions list on 19 March 2018.

More broadly, 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, 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.

Council conclusions on enhanced EU security cooperation in and with Asia

The Council adopted conclusions on enhanced EU security cooperation in and with Asia. The Council noted that there are important possibilities to deepen EU security cooperation with its Asian strategic partners: China, India, Japan and the Republic of Korea, as well as with other partners, along with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its member states.

The Council identified key areas for deeper security engagement: maritime security, cybersecurity, counterterrorism, hybrid threats, conflict prevention, the proliferation of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons and the development of regional cooperative orders.

The EU underlined the need for security cooperation in and with Asian partners to become more operational. To bring increased visibility and impact, the Council called for tailor-made cooperation, grouping together EU security-related efforts with those of priority Asian partners.

[EU-ASEAN relations, factsheet](#)

[ASEM, factsheet and brochure](#)

Council conclusions on strengthening civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

The Council adopted conclusions on strengthening civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The Council reaffirmed that a strengthened civilian CSDP is an essential element of the EU's joined-up approach, working alongside other EU instruments in an integrated manner.

The Council identified a range of measures to make civilian CSDP more effective on the ground and ways in which civilian missions could contribute to tackling security challenges along the internal/external security nexus, in coordination with other EU instruments.

The EU currently has 10 civilian CSDP missions deployed. Civilian CSDP is an important instrument through which the EU plays its role as a global security provider.

EU annual report on human rights and democracy 2017

The Council adopted the EU's annual report on human rights and democracy in the world in 2017. In 2017, human rights remained at the heart of the European Union's external action, and the EU reaffirmed its role as a leading global proponent of the promotion and protection of human rights.

The EU continued to oppose firmly any unjustified restrictions of the **rights of freedom of association and peaceful assembly**, as 2017 saw a continued backlash against civil society. The EU strongly supported an enabling environment for non-governmental organisations and human rights defenders through bilateral dialogues including human rights dialogues, financial support and in multilateral fora.

2017 marked a milestone in the EU's global work on the rights of the child with the update of the guidelines on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, which date back to 2007.

The 2017 annual report sets out the efforts of the EU, including through its global network of delegations, to promote and protect the universality of human rights across the world. Unlike in previous years, this report does not include a geographic part with specific observations on all non-EU countries, but human rights updates for each country can be found on the European External Action Service's (EEAS) and delegations' webpages.

[Annual report on human rights and democracy in the world in 2017](#)

European Court of Auditors report on election observation missions

The Council adopted conclusions on Special Report No 22/2017 by the European Court of Auditors entitled "Election Observation Missions - Efforts made to follow up recommendations but better monitoring needed".

According to the report, the presentation of EU election observation missions' (EOM) recommendations has improved in recent years, and both political dialogue and electoral assistance were used to support implementation of EOMs' recommendations.

Opening of a European Union delegation to Panama

The Council agreed to the opening of a European Union delegation to Panama. The decision to upgrade the EU's diplomatic representation in Panama from an EU office to an EU delegation is linked to the increasing importance of Panama as an actor in Central America and the Caribbean.

The envisaged date for the opening of the delegation to Panama is, in principle, in September 2018.

EU position on combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW)

The Council adopted conclusions on an EU position on combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW), in light of the third conference to review the implementation of the UN programme of action on SALW (RevCon3), to take place in New York from 18 to 29 June 2018.

The Council is committed to preventing and curbing the illicit trade in SALW and their ammunition and to promoting accountability and responsibility with regard to their legal trade. On 3 April 2017, the Council adopted decision 2017/633/CFSP supporting actions towards a successful and relevant outcome of RevCon3 of the UN programme of action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects (PoA).
