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Foreign Affairs

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President **Josep Borrell**
High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security
Policy

P R E S S

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¹ • 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.

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ITEMS DEBATED

Current affairs

High Representative Borrell briefed ministers on Russia and the events around the detention of Alexey Navalny. The Council condemned the mass detentions and police brutality over the weekend and called on Russia to immediately release Mr Navalny and all those detained. In this context the High Representative informed the Council about his upcoming visit to Moscow.

Ministers were then informed the EU strategy for sharing COVID-19 vaccines with EU's partners.

The Council also touched on relations with the United States, and the work the EU intends to undergo with the new US administration on key global issues – from climate change to Iran and the JCPOA to cooperation in multilateral fora.

Ministers then discussed all aspects of the relations with Turkey as identified in the December Council Conclusions, including sanctions, and reaffirmed the importance of engaging with Turkey in order to advance in and consolidate paths of dialogue and cooperation.

The case of Giulio Regeni was also raised. The High Representative stressed that this was a serious matter for the entire EU, and continued to call on Egypt to fully cooperate with the Italian authorities, for accountability and for justice to be served.

The Council briefly discussed the situation of migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the situation in the Horn of Africa and the Tigray region.

Climate and energy diplomacy

The Council exchanged views on climate and energy diplomacy, with a focus on promoting the external dimension of the European Green Deal.

During the discussion ministers stressed the need to engage with Africa and key importance of 2021 on the way to a successful COP26, the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference. The High Representative emphasised that accelerating climate action and managing the energy transition is and will remain at the core of the EU foreign and security policy.

The Council adopted conclusions on this topic.

[Council adopts conclusions on climate and energy diplomacy, press release](#)

Other business

– ***Japan***

The Council held a discussion with the Foreign Minister of Japan, Toshimitsu Motegi. They discussed their approaches to the Indo-Pacific, and agreed that enhanced EU engagement in the region, as well as enhanced cooperation with Japan and other like-minded partners on issues of common interest and concern would be beneficial. In this context, Japan and the EU expressed their shared interest in advancing cooperation in areas such as connectivity, maritime security, environment and climate change, trade and investment, digital issues, and promoting multilateralism and upholding the international rules-based order. The High Representative Josep Borrell confirmed the EU's interest in developing its own approach to the Indo-Pacific region, expressing appreciation for Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy.

EU ministers and minister Motegi shared their serious concerns regarding the situation in Hong Kong and agreed to continue their close coordination in response to the imposition of the National Security Law by Beijing.

– ***UK***

During an informal lunch, ministers discussed EU-UK cooperation in matters of common foreign, security and defence policy. The High Representative stressed that the EU stands ready to engage with the UK on major global issues – be it climate change or by working together on the global response to the coronavirus pandemic.

– ***Conclusions***

The Council adopted conclusions on Venezuela and the pilot case for the Coordinated Maritime Presences concept in the Gulf of Guinea.

– [Venezuela: Council adopts conclusions on the outcome of the legislative elections](#)

– [Gulf of Guinea: Council conclusions launching the pilot case for the Coordinated Maritime Presences concept](#)

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Coordinated Maritime Presences

The Council today approved conclusions ([5387/21](#)) which give effect to the launching of a pilot project in the Gulf of Guinea as part of the EU Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) concept.

The purpose of the CMP is to foster European operational engagement while ensuring synergy with Member States' actions in maritime strategic areas. The pilot case in the Gulf of Guinea, due to be implemented until January 2022, would represent an opportunity to test the EU capacity of coordinating military action in strategic maritime environments.

For more details, see [press release](#)

Venezuela

The Council approved conclusions ([5582/21](#)) relating to the political situation in Venezuela, especially in light of the parliamentary elections of 6 December, which awarded Nicolas Maduro total control of the legislature.

For more details, see [press release](#)

Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy

The Council approved the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy following the Conference for the promotion of sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean region, on 2 February 2021.

Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Armenia

The Council approved the conclusion, on behalf of the Union, of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the other part.

HOME AFFAIRS

Europol - deputy executive director

The Council selected Jean-Philippe Lecouffe as a Deputy Executive Director of Europol.

According to the Europol regulation, before appointment, the candidate selected by the Council may be invited to appear before the competent committee of the European Parliament, who shall subsequently give a non-binding opinion. The General Secretariat of the Council will now inform the European Parliament that the competent committee can proceed to the hearing foreseen in the regulation.

ECONOMIC AND MONETARY AFFAIRS

2021 Alert Mechanism Report – Council conclusions

The Council approved conclusions on the 2021 Alert Mechanism Report ([5605/21](#)).

The report marks the starting point of the annual macroeconomic imbalances procedure. It identifies 12 member states for which in-depth reviews need to be prepared to identify and assess the severity of possible macroeconomic imbalances – Croatia, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden. These member states were already identified as having imbalances or excessive imbalances in February 2020. The new reviews will help to assess progress in correcting those imbalances.

Overall, the report concludes that the COVID-19 crisis aggravated a number of existing macroeconomic imbalances in member states and is posing new risks. This highlights the need to make the best use of available EU support measures.

Draft Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area – approval

The Council approved the draft Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area ([14356/20](#)).

In the context of the current crisis, the 2021 euro area recommendation focuses on short-term measures to support the recovery and ensure the proper functioning of the EMU. The recommendation places a strong emphasis on the use of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, providing policy guidance on priorities that member states should include in their Recovery and Resilience Plans. It calls on member states, including through their Recovery and Resilience Plans, to:

- ensure a policy stance which supports the recovery;
- further improve convergence, resilience and sustainable and inclusive growth;
- strengthen national institutional frameworks;
- ensure macro-financial stability; and
- complete the EMU and strengthening the international role of the euro.

The recommendation will now be transmitted to the European Council in March for endorsement, prior to formal adoption by the Council.

Delegated acts in the field of financial services – non-objection

The Council decided not to object to the following Commission regulations:

- Commission Delegated Regulation amending technical standards laid down in Delegated Regulation (EU) 2016/2251 as regards to the timing of when certain risk management procedures will start to apply for the purpose of the exchange of collateral ([14319/20](#))
- Commission Delegated Regulation amending regulatory technical standards laid down in Delegated Regulations (EU) 2015/2205, (EU) 2016/592 and (EU) 2016/1178 as regards the date at which the clearing obligation takes effect for certain types of contracts ([14320/20](#))

The regulations are delegated acts pursuant to article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. They can now be published and enter into force, unless the European Parliament objects.

ENERGY

Decommissioning nuclear facilities and radioactive waste

The Council adopted a Regulation establishing a dedicated financial programme for decommissioning of nuclear facilities and management of radioactive waste, and repealing Council Regulation (Euratom) No 1368/2013.

The Regulation establishes the dedicated financial programme for the decommissioning of nuclear facilities and management of radioactive waste for the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2027. It supports Bulgaria and Slovakia to safely decommission units of their nuclear reactors, and the implementation of the decommissioning process and management of radioactive waste of the Commission's nuclear installations at the Joint Research Centre (JRC) sites. The Regulation lays down the objectives of the Programme, its budget for the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2027, the methods of implementation and the forms of Union funding ([5161/21](#); [12566/20](#)).

Ignalina power plant (Lithuania)

The Council adopted a Council Regulation establishing the nuclear decommissioning assistance programme of the Ignalina nuclear power plant in Lithuania and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1369/2013.

The Regulation establishes the assistance programme for the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2027 and lays down the objectives of the Programme, its budget for the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2027, the methods of implementation and the forms of Union funding ([5162/21](#); [12569/20](#))

Ecodesign

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of Commission Regulation (EU) .../... of XXX amending Regulations (EU) 2019/424, (EU) 2019/1781, (EU) 2019/2019, (EU) 2019/2020, (EU) 2019/2021, (EU) 2019/2022, (EU) 2019/2023 and (EU) 2019/2024 with regard to ecodesign requirements for servers and data storage products, electric motors and variable speed drives, refrigerating appliances, light sources and separate control gears, electronic displays, household dishwashers, household washing machines and household washer-dryers and refrigerating appliances with a direct sales function.

The Commission Regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the regulation, unless the European Parliament objects ([5057/21](#); [13766/20](#) + [ADD 1](#)).

TRANSPORT

Rail passengers' rights

The Council adopted its position at first reading on a regulation on rail passengers' rights and obligations ([5206/21](#); [12262/20](#) + [ADD 1](#)).

For more details, see [press release](#)

Aviation safety

The Council adopted a decision on the conclusion of the agreement on civil aviation safety between the EU and Japan ([5037/21](#); [9292/20](#); [15260/19](#)).

Euro-Mediterranean aviation agreement

The Council adopted a decision on the EU position to be taken within the Joint Committee established by the Euro-Mediterranean aviation agreement between the EU and Morocco ([14026/20](#); [14008/20](#); [14010/20](#)).