

Video conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers: Main outcomes



The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, convened on Friday 14 August a video conference meeting with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the 27 EU Member States. The aim of the discussions was to address the pressing situations in the **Eastern Mediterranean** and in **Belarus** after the August 9 Presidential Elections. The Ministers also touched upon the situations in **Lebanon**, **Venezuela** and **Bolivia**.

The High Representative will remain in constant contact with the Ministers on these and other issues in the coming weeks, ahead of the informal Foreign Affairs Council ('Gymnich'), which will take place on 27-28 August in Berlin.

Eastern Mediterranean

The Ministers discussed the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, following a grave deterioration of the security situation in recent days.

Three words reflect the outcome of the discussion: solidarity, de-escalation, and dialogue.

Solidarity:

Ministers reaffirmed the EU's full solidarity with Greece and Cyprus. They reiterated that sovereign rights of EU Member States must be respected. They recalled EU common positions and the previous Council Conclusions of [22 March 2018](#) and [June, July, October, December 2019](#), in addition to the [Statement on the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean of 15 May 2020](#).

At the same time, Ministers stressed that the serious deterioration in the relationship with Turkey is having far-reaching strategic consequences for the entire EU, well beyond the Eastern Mediterranean.

De-escalation:

Ministers stressed in particular that recent naval mobilisations by Turkey do not contribute to finding any solutions. On the contrary, they will lead to greater antagonism and distrust. They create a heightened risk of dangerous incidents. Immediate de-escalation by Turkey was considered crucial.

Dialogue:

Ministers recalled the importance they attach to relations with Turkey. They underlined that issues related to delimitation of maritime boundaries and exploitation of resources therein can only be addressed through dialogue and negotiation, in good faith, in accordance with international law and in pursuit of the principle of good neighbourly relations, and not through unilateral actions and the mobilisation of naval forces.

Ministers recalled the outcome of the [Foreign Affairs Council of 13 July](#). They reiterated strong support for the High Representative's efforts to re-establish dialogue and facilitate re-engagement with Turkey. At the same time, the High Representative/Vice-President is to prepare options on further appropriate measures in case tensions do not abate.

A broader discussion about relations with Turkey will be held later in August, at the Gymnich.

Belarus

The EU Foreign Ministers addressed the Belarusian Presidential elections that took place on 9 August.

Ministers reiterated their repeated call to the Belarusian authorities to stop the disproportionate and unacceptable violence against peaceful protesters. The EU expects the authorities to release immediately all unlawfully detained persons. In light of shocking reports of inhumane treatment and detention conditions, the European Union expects a thorough and transparent investigation into all alleged abuses, in order to hold those responsible to account.

During their discussions, the Ministers sent a strong signal of the EU's support to the Belarusian population in their desire for democratic change. The Ministers noted the exceptional work of the domestic election observers, whose reporting, in the absence of international election observers, has been crucial in helping to reveal the true picture regarding last Sunday's elections. They discussed how to support this vital work.

The Ministers reiterated that the elections were neither free nor fair. The European Union considers the results to have been falsified and therefore does not accept the results of the election as presented by the Belarus Central Election Commission. The European Union will therefore put forward to the Belarusian authorities a proposal for EU support in establishing and facilitating a dialogue between the political authorities, opposition and broader society in view of resolving the current crisis. The High Representative/Vice-President and his services will begin work on this proposal immediately.

Ministers also agreed on the need to sanction those responsible for violence, repression and the falsification of election results. The work on additional listings within the existing sanctions framework for Belarus will start immediately.

The Ministers expressed appreciation for the work of journalists in the difficult conditions that they are facing and condemned attacks on and detentions of journalists, including EU citizens.

The Ministers agreed to revert to reviewing EU-Belarus relations at their upcoming informal meeting end of August. As part of this review, the European Union will look at how to increase its support to the Belarusian people, including through enhanced engagement with and financial support to civil society, additional support to independent media, and increasing opportunities for student and academic mobility.

Lebanon

Ministers took stock of the situation in Lebanon following the devastating explosion in Beirut port on 4 August. The High Representative/Vice-President and Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi updated Ministers about the rapid and substantial EU efforts to assist Lebanon and thanked France for organising, with the United Nations, the recent International Conference in support of the Lebanese people.

Ministers underlined the need for a robust monitoring of the aid to ensure that it is transferred directly to those in need. They also noted the ongoing work of the EU, together with the World Bank and the United Nations, to prepare a post-disaster needs assessment.

Following the recent political developments, Ministers reiterated the need to have a capable, representative and accountable Lebanese government that delivers on a credible reform agenda, including good governance, accountability and transparency.

Ministers reiterated the need for Lebanese authorities to urgently address the economic and social crisis and rebuild trust through an agreement with the International Monetary Fund. The Lebanese authorities also need to ensure an independent and credible investigation of the blast. The EU stands ready to provide further help.

Venezuela

Ministers discussed the situation in Venezuela, in particular the current deadlock on the upcoming legislative elections. High Representative/Vice-President Borrell [outlined his contacts over recent weeks](#) with the Maduro government and main opposition groups in this regard.

Ministers discussed the EU's willingness to assist all genuine Venezuelan efforts to find a political solution. This could include the deployment of an EU Electoral Observation Mission, if there were minimum conditions of credibility, transparency and inclusiveness, and the ability to observe the electoral process without interference.

Bolivia

Ministers discussed the situation in Bolivia, noting the need for peaceful dialogue and for all parties to set aside their differences and commit to a solution that addresses both coronavirus-related concerns and the right of the people to vote. The EU will continue to support dialogue and mediation efforts to support this goal.

The EU remains committed to deploy an Election Observation Mission in Bolivia if conditions, including health and security, permit.