



European Council
Council of the European Union

European Council

European Council, 21-22 March 2024

Main results



EU-EEA family photo

Over the course of a two-day summit, EU leaders adopted conclusions on **Ukraine, security and defence, the Middle East, enlargement, external relations, migration, preparedness and crisis response, agriculture** and the **European Semester**.

[European Council conclusions, 21-22 March 2024](#)

Remarks by President Charles Michel after the European Council meeting of 21 March 2024

They also had a lunch with **UN Secretary-General** António Guterres to discuss the geopolitical situation and key global challenges. They celebrated the 30th anniversary of the **European Economic Area (EEA) agreement** with the prime ministers of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, and took stock of preparations for the new **strategic agenda**.

A **Euro Summit** was held in the margins of the meeting.

[Euro Summit, 22 March 2024](#)



[EU solidarity with Ukraine \(infographic\)](#)



Support for Ukraine

Two years into Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and 10 years after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, EU leaders stated that they were ever **more steadfast in their support** for Ukraine and that Russia must not prevail.

Given the urgency of the situation, the EU is determined to continue to provide Ukraine and its people with all of the necessary political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support for as long as it takes and as intensely as needed.

[EU response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine \(background information\)](#)

Military assistance

As Ukraine exercises its inherent right to self-defence, it urgently needs **air defence systems, ammunition** and **missiles**.

In this context, the leaders stressed that the EU and its member states should accelerate and intensify the delivery of all of the necessary military assistance, including the procurement of **ammunition** for Ukraine, which will enable the provision of **one million rounds of artillery ammunition**. In this regard, they welcomed the initiative launched by **Czechia** to buy ammunition from non-EU countries.

The leaders also welcomed:

- the bilateral agreements on **security commitments**
- the adoption of the **Ukraine Assistance Fund**
- the increased capacity of the **EU military assistance mission**

The leaders further called on the Council to work on the 8th support package for Ukraine under the European Peace Facility. They also reviewed progress on the next steps towards channelling extraordinary **revenues from Russia's frozen assets** to benefit Ukraine, including the possibility of funding military support. They invited the Council to advance work on the recent proposal by the High Representative and the Commission.

[Support for the Ukrainian armed forces \(background information\)](#)

[European Peace Facility \(background information\)](#)



[The EU sanctions process explained \(infographic\)](#)



Sanctions and illicit trade

EU leaders welcomed the adoption of the 13th package of sanctions and stressed that their full and effective implementation is essential, as is closing all loopholes inside and outside the EU. In this regard, the leaders called on the

Council and the Commission to improve information exchanges and enhance action with third countries. This includes **preventing the circumvention** of the sanctions through third countries and ensuring their enforcement, including for subsidiaries of EU companies abroad.

Russia's access to **sensitive items** and **technologies with battlefield relevance** must continue to be restricted as far as possible, including by targeting entities in third countries that are enabling this illicit trade. In this regard, the leaders called on the High Representative and the Commission to prepare further sanctions against **Belarus, North Korea** and **Iran**. They also called on third parties to immediately cease providing material support for Russia's war and stated that reports on Iran's possible transfer of ballistic missiles and related technology to Russia, after having supplied the Russian regime with unmanned aerial vehicles, was very concerning.

[EU sanctions against Belarus \(background information\)](#)

[EU sanctions against North Korea \(background information\)](#)

[EU sanctions against Iran \(background information\)](#)

[G7 leaders' statement on Iran \(press release, 15 March 2024\)](#)

Accountability

EU leaders strongly condemned Russia's continuous human rights violations in the occupied Ukrainian territories. In this regard, they firmly **rejected the illegal so-called elections** organised by Russia in the regions of Crimea, Sevastopol, Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, the validity and results of which the EU will never recognise.

The leaders further stated that Russia and its leadership must be held accountable for waging the war against Ukraine and for other crimes under international law, as well as for the immense damage caused. In this context, the leaders expressed their support for ongoing efforts to establish a **prosecution tribunal** and a future **compensation mechanism**.

Recovery and reconstruction

With a view to Ukraine's **repair, recovery and reconstruction**, EU leaders welcomed the recent strengthening of the **EU advisory mission** to Ukraine, which will enable partners to scale up support to Ukrainian law enforcement agencies, and the **reforms** undertaken as part of Ukraine's EU accession process.

Moldova and Georgia

The EU will continue to provide all relevant support for Moldova to address the challenges stemming from Russia's war against Ukraine, and to strengthen Moldova's resilience, security and stability. In this context, EU leaders welcomed member states' bilateral commitments to support the **EU partnership mission in Moldova** to enhance the resilience of the security sector. The EU will also continue to support **Georgia** in strengthening its resilience and addressing the challenges it faces as a consequence of Russia's undermining of Georgia's territorial integrity and Russia's war against Ukraine.

[EU relations with Moldova \(background information\)](#)

[EU relations with Georgia \(background information\)](#)

Security and defence

EU defence industry

The EU is committed to increasing its overall **defence readiness** and **capabilities** to match its needs and ambition, with a strengthened technological and industrial base.

To increase the EU's defence readiness, EU leaders called for:

- a substantial increase in defence expenditure
- faster and better joint investments
- improved access to public and private finance,
- development and joint procurement to address critical EU capability gaps
- innovative defence products
- further integration of the European defence market and reduced red tape for small- and medium-sized companies
- support for initiatives to address labour and skills shortages

In this regard, they invited:

- the Council and the Commission to explore all options to **mobilise funding**, and report back in June
- the European Investment Bank to **adapt its lending policy** to the defence industry and its current definition of **dual-use goods**
- the Council, the High Representative and the Commission to swiftly implement the **European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS)**
- the Council to take forward work on the **European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP)**

[EU cooperation on security and defence \(background information\)](#)

[European defence industry procurement \(background information\)](#)



[A Strategic Compass for the EU \(infographic\)](#)



Strategic Compass

The leaders stressed the importance of accelerating implementation of the **Strategic Compass**. In this context, the EU rapid deployment capacity, military mobility, live exercises, enhancing space security, countering cyber and hybrid threats and addressing foreign information manipulation and interference are particularly important.

They also stressed that a stronger and more capable EU in the field of security and defence will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and act as a complement to NATO.

[EU-NATO cooperation \(background information\)](#)

Middle East

Humanitarian situation

EU leaders discussed the latest developments in the Middle East and underlined that they were appalled by the **unprecedented loss of civilian lives** and the critical humanitarian situation.

In this regard, the leaders expressed their deep concern at the **catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza** and its disproportionate effect on children, as well as the imminent risk of famine caused by the insufficient entry of aid.

“ Full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access into and throughout the Gaza Strip via all routes is essential to provide the civilian population with life-saving assistance and basic services at scale.

European Council conclusions, 21 March 2024

In this context, the leaders:

- called for an **immediate humanitarian pause** leading to a **sustainable ceasefire**
- called for the **unconditional release** of all hostages and the provision of humanitarian assistance
- welcomed the Amalthea initiative opening a **maritime route for emergency assistance** from Cyprus to Gaza
- called for immediate measures to **prevent further population displacement** and **provide safe shelter to the population**

- urged the Israeli government to **refrain from carrying out a ground operation in Rafah**, where over one million Palestinians are seeking safety

Recalling their previous conclusions, the leaders **condemned Hamas** in the strongest possible terms for its brutal and indiscriminate attacks against Israel on 7 October 2023, recognised **Israel's right to defend itself in line with international law** and **international humanitarian law**, and called for **the immediate release of all hostages** without any precondition. Their safety and well-being is of grave concern. The leaders called on the Council to accelerate work on adopting **further sanctions against Hamas**. They also underlined that Hamas and other armed groups must immediately grant humanitarian access to all remaining hostages.

[Video conference of the members of the European Council, 17 October 2023](#)

[European Council, 26-27 October 2023](#)

International law and accountability

EU leaders underlined that all parties must respect international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

In this context, they stressed the importance of respecting and implementing the **International Court of Justice's order of 26 January 2024**. The order is **legally binding** and refers to the rights of **Palestinians in the Gaza Strip**. Any violations of international law need to be thoroughly and independently investigated and accountability ensured, including for **sexual violence**. In this regard, the leaders took note of the reports by the UN Special Representative Pramila Patten with grave concern, stating that they were appalled by the sexual violence committed during the 7 October terrorist attack.

The leaders also called for **an immediate halt to violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem** and strongly condemned extremist settler violence, stating that

the perpetrators should be held accountable. In this context, they called on the Council to accelerate work on adopting **sanctions**.

UNRWA

EU leaders stressed that the services provided by the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Gaza and throughout the region were indispensable and welcomed the **recent financial support** provided by the EU. They also welcomed the swift action by the UN to conduct an internal investigation and an external review of the serious allegations against 12 UNRWA staff in connection with their alleged participation in the 7 October terrorist attacks. The leaders called for **further decisive action by the UN**, once the results of these investigations have been made known, to ensure accountability and strengthen control and oversight.

Regional stability

The EU will continue to work intensively with regional and international partners to **prevent further regional escalation**, in particular in Lebanon and the Red Sea. In this respect, EU leaders:

- ▀ called on all actors, notably Iran, to refrain from escalatory actions
- ▀ welcomed the launch of the EU's **ASPIDES** naval operation to safeguard freedom of navigation and seafarers' security in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the broader region

[Security and freedom of navigation in the Red Sea: Council launches EUNAVFOR ASPIDES \(press release, 19 February 2024\)](#)

Two-state solution

The EU is firmly committed to a lasting and sustainable peace based on the two-state solution.

“Palestinians and Israelis have an equal right to live in safety, dignity and peace.

European Council conclusions, 21 March 2024

In this regard, EU leaders:

- **condemned the Israeli government's** decisions to further expand **illegal settlements across** the occupied West Bank, and urged it to reverse these decisions
- called on all parties to **refrain from actions undermining** the principle of the two-state solution and the viability of a future Palestinian state
- recalled the significance of the EU police mission for the Palestinian territories (**EUPOL COPPS**) and the EU border assistance mission for the Rafah crossing point (**EUBAM Rafah**)

The EU is ready to work with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and regional and international parties on **reviving a political process** and to support the Palestinian Authority as it undertakes the necessary reforms.

[EUPOL COPPS \(EEAS\)](#)

[EUBAM Rafah \(EEAS\)](#)

Enlargement and reforms

Recalling the Granada Declaration, EU leaders took stock of preparations for enlargement and internal reforms, recalling that work on both tracks needs to advance in parallel. The leaders will address internal reforms at an upcoming meeting, with the aim of adopting conclusions on a roadmap for future work by summer 2024.

Following the progress made by **Bosnia and Herzegovina** on its reform path, and building on the recommendation by the Commission, EU leaders gave the green light to **open accession negotiations**. To this end, they invited the Commission to prepare the negotiating framework. Once Bosnia and Herzegovina has taken all relevant steps set out in the Commission's recommendation of 12 October 2022, they will invite the Council to adopt it.

The leaders welcomed the progress made by **Ukraine** and **Moldova** on their path to EU membership. Further to the submission of the draft negotiating frameworks, the leaders invited the Council to swiftly adopt them and to take work forward without delay.

They also took note of **Georgia**'s ongoing efforts and encouraged the country to make progress on the outstanding priority reforms.

[Enlargement: Bosnia and Herzegovina \(background information\)](#)

[Enlargement: Ukraine \(background information\)](#)

[Enlargement: Moldova \(background information\)](#)

[Enlargement: Georgia \(background information\)](#)

External relations

Comprehensive partnerships

EU leaders welcomed the EU-Egypt strategic and comprehensive partnership and the EU-Mauritania partnership. They underlined the importance of strengthening and developing similar strategic partnerships.

Haiti

EU leaders expressed their grave concern over the deteriorating situation in Haiti and the suffering inflicted on the population as a result of the new wave of violence that has been unleashed since the end of February. In this context, they:

- welcomed the recent release of **€20 million in humanitarian support** from the EU
- encouraged efforts to put in place a Haitian-led **political transition plan**
- called on all Haitian political forces to **agree on a way forward** in the best interests of the country and the population

They also welcomed UN Security Council resolution 2699 setting up a **multinational security support mission** and underlined the importance of its rapid deployment.

Russia

The European Council called for:

- the **immediate and unconditional release** of all political prisoners in Russia
- an end to the persecution of the political opposition
- an **independent and transparent international investigation** into the death of **Alexei Navalny**, stating that ultimate responsibility for his death lies with the Russian authorities
- a **new sanctions regime** to be taken forward

In this regard, the leaders welcomed the adoption of new sanctions against those responsible for serious human rights violations and abuse.

They also condemned Russia's politically motivated persecution of EU citizens. They invited the Commission and the High Representative to take the necessary

steps to prevent the execution by third countries of arrest warrants issued by Russia in such cases.

[Death of Alexei Navalny: EU sanctions 33 individuals and two entities under its Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime \(press release, 22 March 2024\)](#)

Belarus

The European Council:

- expressed its deep concern at the **deteriorating human rights situation** in Belarus
- called for the **immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners**
- reiterated the EU's solidarity with **Belarusian civil society** and **democratic forces**

EU leaders also stated that repression, human rights violations and restrictions on political participation and access to independent media had reached unprecedented levels in the build-up to **the parliamentary and local elections on 25 February**, which failed to meet basic democratic standards.

[EU relations with Belarus \(background information\)](#)

Migration

The European Council reviewed the latest developments regarding migration, following the Commission's assessment of **key achievements on migration and asylum** over the past four years.

In this regard, EU leaders reaffirmed their position from December 2023 and the importance of pursuing a **strategic approach to migration** that combines:

- increased external action
- partnerships with countries of origin and transit
- addressing root causes of migration
- opportunities for legal migration
- effective control of EU external borders
- resolutely fighting organised crime, human trafficking and smuggling
- stepping up returns

As over 90% of irregular migrants enter the EU with the assistance of smugglers, the leaders expressed their support to the Commission's resolve to strengthen all relevant tools to counter human trafficking and smuggling, while in parallel launching a global alliance to respond to the challenge.

[EU migration and asylum policy \(background information\)](#)

[How the EU manages migration flows \(background information\)](#)

[Commission takes stock of key achievements on migration and asylum \(European Commission\)](#)

Preparedness and crisis response

In view of the evolving threat landscape, EU leaders underlined the need for enhanced **military and civilian preparedness** and **crisis management**. In this regard, they invited the Council to take work forward, and the Commission and the High Representative to propose actions and develop a future preparedness strategy.

Agriculture

A strong and sustainable agricultural sector, with the common agricultural policy (CAP) at its centre, is key to **food security** and the EU's **strategic autonomy**.

Farmers need a stable and predictable framework to help them meet environmental and climate challenges.

In view of current challenges and concerns raised by farmers, EU leaders invited the Commission and the Council to continue to take forward work without delay on:

- ▀ all possible short- and medium-term measures and innovative solutions, including those to reduce the administrative burden for farmers
- ▀ strengthening farmers' position in the food supply chain
- ▀ easing farmers' financial strain by designing means of additional support
- ▀ ensuring a fair income for farmers and rules-based and fair competition
- ▀ addressing issues related to the autonomous trade measures for Ukraine in a fair and balanced way, while preparing a solution in the framework of association and trade agreements with Ukraine

The European Council will keep the situation under review.

[Common agricultural policy 2023-2027 \(background information\)](#)

European Semester

The European Semester is the EU's annual exercise to coordinate economic, fiscal, employment and social policies. As part of the 2024 process, EU leaders endorsed:

- ▀ the policy priorities of the annual sustainable growth survey

- the draft Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area

[The European Semester explained \(background information\)](#)

[Timeline: the 2024 exercise \(background information\)](#)

Meeting files

Preparatory documents

[Background brief](#)

[Provisional agenda](#)

Outcome documents

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Press releases

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Remarks by President Charles Michel following the European Council meeting of 22 March 2024

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European Council conclusions on Ukraine, security and defence, Middle East, enlargement and reforms, migration, preparedness and crisis response, and European Semester.

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Remarks by President Charles Michel after the European Council meeting of 21 March 2024

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Remarks by President Charles Michel before the European Council meeting on 21 March 2024

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Invitation letter by President Charles Michel to the members of the European Council


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Informal leaders' meeting

27 June 2024
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