

The 2018 G7 Summit: Issues to watch

On 8 and 9 June 2018, the leaders of the G7 will meet for the 44th G7 Summit in Charlevoix, Quebec, for the annual summit of the informal grouping of seven of the world's major advanced economies. The summit takes place amidst growing tensions between the US and other G7 countries over security and multilateralism.

Background

The [Group of Seven](#) (G7) is an international forum of the seven leading industrialised nations (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the European Union). Decisions within the G7 are made on the basis of consensus. The outcomes of summits are not legally binding, but compliance is high and their impact is substantial, as the G7 members represent a significant share of global gross domestic product (GDP) and global influence. The commitments from summits are implemented by means of measures carried out by the individual member countries, and through their respective relations with other countries and influence in multilateral organisations. [Compliance](#) within the G7 is particularly high in regard to agreements on international trade and energy. The summit communiqué is politically binding on all G7 members.

As the G7 does not have a permanent secretariat, the annual summit is organised by the G7 country which holds the rotating [presidency](#) for that year. The presidency is currently held by Canada, to be followed by France in 2019. Traditionally, the presidency country also determines the [agenda](#) of the summit, which includes a mix of fixed topics (discussed each time), such as the global economic climate, foreign and security policy, and current topics for which a coordinated G7 approach appears particularly appropriate or urgent. Preparatory and follow-up work, including the preparation of the final declarations which contain the key outcomes of each summit, is carried out by the governments' chief negotiators, known as [sherpas](#).

The G7 has developed a network of supporting [ministerial meetings](#), which allow ministers to meet regularly to continue and prepare the work set out at each summit. G7 ministers and officials also meet on an [ad hoc](#) basis to deal with pressing issues, such as terrorism. From time to time, the leaders also create task forces or working groups to focus on specific issues of concern. The 2018 Canadian Presidency has identified five themes, namely: investing in growth that works for everyone; preparing for jobs of the future; advancing gender equality and women's empowerment; working together on climate change, oceans and clean energy; and building a more peaceful and secure world.

The 2017 summit was held in Taormina, Italy, with [outcomes](#) in the areas of foreign policy, the global economy, trade, gender equality, human mobility, food security and nutrition, climate and energy, Africa and health as well as skills and labour. At the summit, the leaders also issued a [statement](#) on the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, which among other things called for closer cooperation among border control agencies, targeting terrorist financing as well as fighting terrorism on the internet.

Themes for the 2018 summit

The priorities set by the Canadian Presidency focus on five themes, namely:

- (1) **Investing in growth that works for everyone**, which includes the state of the economy, fiscal and monetary policy, tax, trade, investment and infrastructure.
- (2) **Preparing for jobs of the future**, which includes issues such as generating good jobs for all, including youth, and redesigning education to foster innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship in a digital age.
- (3) **Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment**, by '[ensuring](#) that gender equality and gender-based analysis are integrated across all themes, activities and outcomes of Canada's G7 Presidency'.

- (4) **Working together on climate change, oceans and clean energy**, which includes controlling climate change as a current compelling threat, protecting the natural environment, enhancing the environment and the economy together through clean technology and in other ways, and protecting the oceans from plastic and other pollutants.
- (5) **Building a more peaceful and secure world**, by addressing threats ranging from the use of chemical weapons in Europe and Syria, nuclear and missile proliferation in North Korea, regional security risks in Ukraine and the Baltic States, the Middle East and North Africa, Venezuela, and Asia, to terrorism, crime and corruption, and violations of democracy and human rights throughout the world, including via the internet.

Security and multilateralism at the centre: the G6 vs the US?

According to an [analysis](#) by the G7 Research Group, expectations regarding the success of the summit vary. However, most agree that, given the current global geopolitical climate, security will form a major part of the summit's concerns. Since the 2017 Taormina Summit, G7 leaders have issued key statements on [North Korea](#) and [Syria](#). Following the presidential elections in Venezuela in May 2018, the G7 issued a [statement](#) rejecting the electoral process and denouncing its result, namely the re-election of Nicolas Maduro. Yet, there are reasonable expectations that the withdrawal of the US from the [Iran Nuclear Agreement](#) (often referred to as JCPOA, for Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) will constitute a topic for disagreement. All of the other G7 members regret the US decision and support the implementation of the agreement. Apart from the EU, which has committed to [uphold](#) the deal in spite of the US withdrawal, both the [Japanese](#) and Canadian governments have expressed their support for the JCPOA as recently as early May 2018.

The G7 Summit also comes at a time of heightened [tension](#) between the USA and its G7 partners, following US President Donald Trump's decision to impose tariffs on imports of steel and aluminium from some of its closest partners, including the EU and Canada. Several analyses [posit](#) that the issue of tariffs, alongside disagreement over other multilateral deals such as the JCPOA and the Paris Climate Agreement, will see a rift between the US and the remaining G7 parties, jeopardising the chances of a productive summit with constructive conclusions. G7 members, including the EU and Canada, are already considering retaliatory tariffs; following the meeting of G7 finance ministers in early June, the Canadian Finance Minister issued a [statement](#) expressing the 'concern and disappointment' of the other six members of the G7 over the US trade actions.

The G7 was formed in 1975. Since then, the heads of state or government of the seven have convened [annual meetings](#) to discuss key global issues. There are no formal criteria for membership, but participants are all highly developed liberal democracies. Its members are all committed to the [shared values](#) of peace and security, freedom and human rights, democracy and the rule of law, prosperity and sustainable development. The group deals with such issues as global economic outlook and macroeconomic management, international trade, energy, climate change, and relations with developing countries. Recently, the summit agenda has broadened considerably to include a host of political-security issues. The original group (without Canada, which joined in 1976) held its first summit in Rambouillet, France, in November 1975. As of 1994, the G7 began to meet with Russia at each summit in an outfit referred to as the Political Eight (P8) and, in 1998, Russia joined the G7 to form the G8. In March 2014, the G7 called for the G8 format to be [suspended](#) in response to Russia's conduct vis-à-vis Ukraine, which was considered to be inconsistent with the group's 'shared beliefs and responsibilities'. In 2017, the G7 [represented](#) approximately 10.3 % of the global population and 32.2 % of the world's GDP, as well as providing close to 70 % of all official development assistance (ODA).

The EU in the G7

The European Community (later EU) became a [full participant](#) of the G7 in 1981. It takes part in discussions on all topics and sessions, but does not hold the presidency or host summits. The EU G7/G20 Sherpa (currently [Piotr Serafin](#)) informs the EU Member States about the state of preparation for summits, which are attended by the [Presidents](#) of the Commission and of the European Council.

The President of the European Parliament attends the G7 speakers' meeting, held annually by the G7 Presidency. In 2017, EP President Antonio Tajani [participated](#) in the 15th G7 speakers meeting, where he called for global responses to terrorism and to nuclear threats.

