

## Outcome of the meetings of EU leaders of 17-18 February 2022

On 17-18 February 2022, EU Heads of State or Government met for an informal European Council meeting, followed by a summit with African Union (AU) leaders. During their informal meeting, EU leaders focused on the Russia-Ukraine crisis – urging Russia to engage on a path of de-escalation, reaffirming their support for Ukraine, displaying unity and willingness to work together with partners, in particular NATO, and calling for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Meeting with their African counterparts, EU leaders looked to renew the EU-AU partnership and adopted a joint declaration announcing an Africa-Europe investment package of €150 billion, for health and education and support for 'a common agenda for manufacturing vaccines'.

### Background

On 17-18 February 2022, EU leaders met with their African counterparts for a long-planned summit, twice postponed because of the pandemic. The Russia-Ukraine crisis, the direct result of the progressive build-up of Russian troops (around [170 000 troops](#) at the time of writing) on the borders with Ukraine, led the President, Charles Michel, to call an informal European Council meeting, which preceded but, being brief, did not [overshadow](#), the EU-AU summit. Ukraine is currently a matter of utmost concern for the EU, the US and NATO, as Russia's assertiveness and recently [expressed](#) 'demands for security guarantees' have called the entire European security architecture into question. However, concerns regarding Russia's behaviour go beyond Ukraine. They encompass the [EU's neighbourhood](#) more broadly, and the [Sahel](#), where the Wagner Group has been and continues to be active. The EU has recently imposed [sanctions](#) on this 'Russia-based unincorporated private military entity'.

### The informal meeting of members of the European Council

#### Pre-summit developments

The informal European Council meeting was announced on [Twitter](#) one day in advance, and no invitation letter was circulated, given the short notice, as well as the sensitivity of the subject and the highly volatile situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border. However, preparations were well under way in the week preceding the summit. First, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, held a series of [calls](#) with various smaller groups of Heads of State or Government on the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and all Member States were kept fully [informed](#) of the diplomatic attempts to de-escalate the crisis. Second, following a call with President Michel, the Lithuanian President, Gitanas Nauseda, [tweeted](#) that he was 'ready to discuss' Russia 'next week' at the European Council. Third, [speaking](#) in the European Parliament's plenary debate on Russia, the day before the informal European Council, President Michel mentioned that EU leaders would have the 'opportunity to express Europe's firmness, unity and strength in upholding our values' as well as support for the people of Ukraine, on the margins of the EU-AU summit.

#### Main results of the informal European Council meeting

The informal meeting had four main objectives: to build unity; to express support for a diplomatic solution to the crisis; to reiterate the EU's unwavering support for Ukraine; and to prepare the EU's response in the event of a further escalation of the crisis, notably to discuss sanctions.

#### *Building unity*

President Michel [stressed](#) that the informal European Council meeting offered an opportunity for EU leaders to express their unity within the EU and with NATO. According to the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, [Mark Rutte](#), EU leaders reiterated their support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine and stressed that they were united, calling – jointly with the US, the UK, Canada and NATO – on Russia to de-escalate. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, [stressed](#) that the EU and NATO were coordinating their positions and responses. [Unity](#) in the European Council on the issue dates back to 2014,

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when Russia illegally annexed Crimea. The EU introduced sanctions, renewed regularly, for failure to implement the Minsk Agreements. Having spent much of the past decade operating in [crisis mode](#), the European Council is fully aware of the importance of unity and the price of non-coordination in times of [crisis](#).

### *Supporting a diplomatic solution to the crisis*

The French President, Emmanuel Macron, and the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, informed their fellow leaders of the status of the latest negotiations undertaken in the [Normandy Format](#), the main European negotiation channel with Russia and Ukraine, instituted back in 2014. Besides this, in an attempt to help defuse the crisis, both [France](#) and [Germany](#) have held bilateral talks with Russia and with Ukraine at head of state or government level. Diplomatic efforts undertaken in other multilateral forums, such as the [NATO-Russia Council](#) and the OSCE, have EU [support](#). In addition, the US has conducted bilateral talks with Russia, in close cooperation with its European allies and on the basis of the [principle](#) 'nothing about you, without you' formulated by US President Joe Biden during a call with the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The Prime Minister of Estonia, [Kaja Kallas](#), stressed the common line maintained by the transatlantic community as well as NATO's staunch commitment to its 'open-door policy'. The Prime Minister of Italy, Mario Draghi, [stressed](#) that all channels of dialogue, whether bilateral or multilateral, were being and should continue to be used in a coordinated manner and that, following a Ukrainian request, his country was ready to facilitate a meeting on its soil between the leaders of Ukraine and Russia, should both parties agree.

### *Supporting Ukraine*

In addition to diplomatic support for Ukraine, the EU has also increased its aid to Ukraine, [pledging](#) €1.2 billion in emergency [macro-financial assistance](#) to 'mitigate the effects' of the crisis with Russia.

### *Being prepared for further escalation*

The informal meeting was not about immediate decisions but about preparing, in a united and coordinated manner, joint decisions in the event of further escalation of the crisis. Several EU leaders pointed to the mixed signals coming from Russia, stressing that, at that moment, there was no evidence of troop withdrawal from the Ukrainian border, and that the Duma's [vote](#) in favour of 'the formal recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent republics' was not a sign of de-escalation. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen briefed EU leaders on the package of sanctions that the EU would be ready to put forward when appropriate. However, further clarification was needed with respect to the threshold set for triggering the EU's response. Nevertheless, EU leaders [stressed](#) that 'full scale invasion was not the threshold – lower-level aggression by Russia could also justify fresh sanctions'.

## The EU-AU summit

The EU-AU summit, initially scheduled for 2020, was 'very much awaited', as stressed by Estonia's Prime Minister, [Kaja Kallas](#). In [attendance](#) were the 27 EU leaders, over 40 African leaders, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde, and representatives of other international organisations. Several African countries – [Burkina Faso](#), [Guinea](#), [Mali](#) and [Sudan](#) – currently suspended from the African Union, were not represented at the summit.

The focus of the summit was on renewed [partnership](#) and prosperity, [summed](#) up in the motto: 'Africa and Europe: A joint vision for 2030'. The aim was to achieve 'concrete deliverables', represented by the chosen format of seven thematic [round tables](#) on: 1) financing growth; 2) health systems and vaccine production; 3) agriculture and sustainable development; 4) education, culture and vocational training, migration and mobility; 5) private-sector support and economic integration; 6) peace, security and governance; and 7) climate change and energy transition, digital and transport. The EU Member States' [refusal](#) to waive intellectual property rights for vaccine production [sparked](#) most sensitivities, [overshadowing](#) negotiations on the [joint declaration](#), for which common language was nonetheless agreed.

The security situation in the Sahel was considered at a separate summit convened by French President Emmanuel Macron the previous day. A [common declaration](#) was adopted stating that European states contributing to Operation Barkane and the Tauba Task Force would withdraw their forces from Mali, as the 'political, operational and legal' conditions for their engagement were no longer met.

*Message from the European Parliament President:* President Metsola [stressed](#) that the EU and AU were 'bound by common challenges, such as security, energy and reduction of poverty', and that the two continents needed to move from 'aid to partnership' and 'talk to each other as equals' about opportunities.

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