

## The 2015 G7 summit

### Seeking common ground on global issues

#### SUMMARY

The Group of Seven (G7) is an informal forum for international cooperation consisting of seven leading industrialised nations (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the USA). The heads of state or government of these countries have convened annual meetings since 1975 to discuss issues of global interest. The group has an informal nature and operates without a permanent secretariat. A rotating presidency is responsible for preparation of its annual summits. Since 1981, the EU has taken part in all G7 sessions.

The next Summit will be held under the German presidency on 7 and 8 June 2015 in Schloss Elmau, Bavaria. The main points on the agenda will be the global economy, foreign and security policies, development, and climate issues. The leaders will also be discussing the UN conferences taking place later in 2015, the post-2015 agenda and many other specific issues such as resource efficiency, the marine environment and energy security.

Preparations for the Summit included engagement with representatives of civil society (such as non-governmental organisations, the science and research community, and business associations) and three ministerial meetings (with the participation of foreign, energy, and finance ministers respectively) which helped to set the Summit agenda. The programme will however only be finalised at the last minute, dependent on the most pressing recent developments.



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## A brief history

The [Group of Seven](#) (G7) is an international forum of seven leading industrialised nations (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the USA). Their heads of state or government have convened annual meetings since 1975 to discuss issues of global interest. There are no formal criteria for membership, but participants are all highly developed liberal democracies. The aggregate GDP of G7 countries is almost half of the global economy. The main [values](#) shared by the members are peace and security, freedom and human rights, democracy and the rule of law, prosperity and sustainable development. The first G7 Summit took place in [1975](#), on the initiative of the then French President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt. At the summit the heads of state and government of the six aforementioned nations (less Canada, which joined the group a year later) [discussed](#) the oil and financial crises and the course of action required to end the recession. They also agreed to meet annually under a rotating presidency. Since then the G7 has gradually increased the scope of discussions beyond global economic and financial governance to include other issues of global interest, such as security and development policy.

From 1997 to 2014, the G7 formally became the G8 with Russia joining. After its annexation of Crimea, the heads of state and government decided not to attend the planned G8 summit in Sochi under [Russia's rotating presidency](#) and instead held the 2014 summit in the G7 format in [Brussels](#). G8 summits will not reconvene until Russia changes its political course.

## How the G7 works

The group has an informal nature and operates without a legal basis, permanent staff or secretariat. The country holding the [rotating presidency](#) hosts the annual summit and is responsible for coordination of the Group's work, organisation of its meetings, and elaboration of its agenda. The preparatory work is mainly carried out at the level of relevant [ministers](#) and with the involvement of '[Sherpas](#)', who are personal representatives of each head of government. The Sherpas prepare each summit. Each summit agrees a communiqué which is [politically binding](#) on all members.

Some academics argue that the informality of the group, its limited number of members and their agreement on shared values contribute to the openness and flexibility of debates, and facilitate the ability to reach [consensus](#). It is indeed often easier to reach a common position in the G7 than in the G20 group.

## The EU's role

The EEC and the G7 started direct talks in 1977. The role of the Community gradually increased, from participating only in those areas in which it had exclusive competences, to participating in discussions on all topics on the agenda and in all summit working sessions (since 1981). Only the President of the Commission represented the EU at first, but the President of the European Council now also takes parts in summits. According to [EPRS](#), 'Although the EU was granted full participation, its membership is [distinct](#): it cannot hold the presidency and host a summit and as such, its influence on the agenda setting is minimal, but it is fully [responsible](#) for applying the summit's conclusions'. Nevertheless many consider the role and influence of the EU in the group to be increasingly [important](#).

There is an argument that the role of the EU in context of the G7/G8 is largely [under-researched](#). There are experts who argue that the EU [provides](#) valuable knowledge and

financial resources (e.g. for development and biodiversity protection initiatives) to the group, while also offering outreach to the remaining EU Member States. Nevertheless, some researchers share the view that the involvement of those EU states which are not G7 members in its proceedings [is slight](#) and depends on the area discussed.

### The 41st summit in Germany

The next Summit will be held under the German presidency on 7 and 8 June 2015 at Schloss Elmau, Bavaria. Three ministerial meetings took place in the run-up to the Summit (convening foreign, energy, and finance ministers as well as central bank governors). In addition, science and health ministers will meet in October 2015.

Furthermore, discussing items on the agenda with international civil society is part of preparing for the summit and the German presidency of the G7. Chancellor Angela Merkel has wanted to be personally involved in the [dialogue](#) with different actors, meeting representatives of trade unions, non-governmental organisations, the science and research community, business associations and youth in a series of forums organised before the summit. The Schloss Elmau meeting will also launch preparations for the post-2015 programme (the next G7 presidency will be held by Japan).

### Agenda overview

Some of the main points on the [agenda](#) of the meeting in Bavaria will be the global economy, and foreign and security policies as well as development, environment and climate issues. The heads of state or government will also discuss the forthcoming UN conferences and the post-2015 agenda. However, according to the German Government's G7 [website](#), 'the programme has not yet been finalised'.

### Global economy

The Federal Ministry of Finance has highlighted the [key areas](#) of the discussions. The first deals with undertaking structural reforms and creating better conditions for investment and jobs in the context of dynamic and sustainable growth. The G7 will commit itself to improving the environment for private investment. The Group will also discuss closing gaps in financial market regulation, namely the implementation of the rules agreed within the framework of the G20 in response to the financial crisis and with particular focus on shadow banking. Furthermore, measures to combat tax evasion and tax avoidance will be raised.

The preparatory meeting of Finance Ministers in Dresden, rather [unusually](#), did not conclude with a communiqué. The Ministers reportedly focused mainly on measures tackling international terrorist financing. This they intend to address by further expanding cross-border coordination, freezing assets and closing existing loopholes (e.g. regarding virtual currency transactions). The Ministers [acknowledged](#) the fact that the economic recovery is under way but underlined the existence of vulnerability coming from low investment levels and non-optimal economic policies.

Wolfgang Schäuble, Germany's Finance Minister, said in April 2015 that discussing fiscal and monetary [stimulus packages](#) was not planned. Business associations urged the G7 to address [barriers and bottlenecks](#) which hamper higher public and private investment, and review the current framework for research, development and innovation.

**Foreign and security issues***International security and crises*

During the preparatory [meeting](#) in Lübeck, Foreign Ministers focused mainly on security issues such as the crisis in Ukraine, negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme and conflicts in the Middle East. An important goal of the negotiation with Iran is to ensure that it does not acquire nuclear weapons. The Ministers also discussed the situation in countries such as Afghanistan and North Korea, as well as efforts to [prevent](#) the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and stopping their means of delivery.

Notably, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier [said](#) that 'the chance to implement the [Minsk Protocol](#) had to be maintained in the fragile situation in Ukraine'. He also stressed that this 'was the key to Russia's return to the Group. It is by no means the intention of the G7 to isolate Russia'.

*Human rights and health systems in Africa*

The G7 Ministers also discussed human rights issues, emphasising the need to eradicate [discrimination](#), with particular focus on violence against women and girls. Furthermore, the G7 Ministers pledged to help African states in establishing effective health systems. The first steps would be to create regional expert groups and establish an early warning system for epidemics such as [Ebola](#).

The topics discussed in Lübeck, together with any major new developments, especially international conflicts and crises, are due to be on the Summit's agenda.

**Climate change**

The presidency has been working towards a global climate agreement at the [Paris UN conference on climate](#) later this year. It has already indicated some environmental items will be included on the agenda: [cleaning plastic from ocean waters](#) and [providing aid to poor countries](#) to help them mitigate the effects of climate change and encourage them to support reaching an agreement in Paris. Germany advocates better protection of the poorest in developing countries through [insurance against the impact of climate change](#). The German Government [announced](#) that it would make available €150 million under the G7 initiative to increase the number of people from developing countries insured against climate risks.

At the preparatory meeting in Lübeck, the Foreign Ministers also expressed a strong commitment to reaching an ambitious outcome from the UN summit, saying that [prospects](#) of a successful agreement are continually improving. Some observers agreed that the G7 summit was an [opportunity](#) for Germany to 'add momentum in the decisive phase of the international climate negotiations'. The business community [supported](#) reaching an ambitious global agreement in Paris and called on the G7 to work towards its achievement.

The communiqué of the Lübeck meeting also stated that profound cuts in greenhouse emissions are still necessary. The document emphasised the 'urgency of a consequent energy transition to further decouple economic growth from carbon emissions'. The outcome of the meeting was however criticised by [Oxfam](#), which stated that it lacked a 'clear commitment from the big industrial nations to completely abandon fossil fuels, especially environmentally hazardous coal'. Nevertheless, Canada, which has for a long time been considered a climate-change laggard, announced measures to cut its gas emissions in a move which some commentators [consider](#) as intended to fend off further criticism during the Summit. The Foreign Ministers also [pledged](#) a stronger collective

commitment to address climate-related risks in 'states experiencing situations of fragility'. An independent consultancy prepared a [report](#) for the meeting, identifying seven climate-related risks to peace, and advocating that G7 governments develop and implement coherent and integrated approaches to climate diplomacy in fragile and conflict-affected states.

### **Development policy**

Development policy will be one of the main topics discussed during the German Summit. The G7 countries are responsible for almost two thirds of global development funding. Development is especially important from the EU perspective, as 2015 was designated the [European Year for Development](#).

#### *UN summit on post-2015 development agenda and dialogue with Africa*

Importantly, the meeting of the leaders in Germany will take place before the September 2015 New York UN [summit](#) on development. The summit aims to agree on a new global development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (as the Millennium Development Goals expire in 2015). The agenda, which seeks to strike a balance between economic progress, social equity and ecological concerns, is currently being negotiated at international level. These negotiations will also feature prominently on the agenda of the G7 Summit. Germany is [committed](#) to achieving an ambitious outcome to the negotiations. In this context, the leaders of the G7 decided to [step up](#) regional cooperation with Africa by appointing personal representatives to the continent, and inviting several African heads of state or government to attend the second day of the Summit.

#### *Retail and supply chain standards*

The presidency aims to reach an [agreement](#) in the G7 framework on sustainable retail and supply chains, which would enable foreign workers to defend their rights. In its [vision paper](#), the German Government outlines its intentions to involve governments, businesses, consumers, trade unions and NGOs in creating better working conditions worldwide, to avoid disasters like [Rana Plaza](#) from occurring in the future.

The international G7 conference which took place in March 2015 in Berlin called for enhanced cooperation from industrialised nations in this matter and proposed the following measures: jointly advising producer countries; establishing a 'Zero Vision Fund' aimed at reducing the number of people harmed (by e.g. investing in safety measures); giving support to G7 SMEs so that they can take on social responsibilities along global supply chains; improving complaint mechanisms and arbitration processes for workers in producer countries; and increasing transparency for consumers to support sustainable production. Germany [committed](#) to put the proposals on the summit agenda with a view to their possible implementation by the end of the year.

Trade unions supported the initiatives to tackle abusive practices and strengthen respect for workers' rights, and [proposed](#) a series of priorities to that end. The business community expressed a commitment to advocate [compliance](#) with the OECD standards for corporate social responsibility worldwide. It also [argued](#) that the initiative of the G7 should be based on the three-pillar 'Protect-Respect-Remedy' approach of the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#).

#### *Health issues*

Important concerns of the G7 in the field of health are fighting infectious diseases, improving child and maternal health, and strengthening healthcare systems.

Participants at the conference on a Global Vaccine Alliance [discussed](#) ways of establishing basic healthcare in poor countries. The conference identified three global health priorities for the G7: neglected tropical diseases, pandemics, and antimicrobial resistance.

G7 Foreign Ministers meeting in Lübeck developed an agenda on [Ebola](#) and other epidemics that may occur in the future which envisages capacity-building and exchange of best practices. In Ebola-affected countries, the biggest [challenge](#) currently is to switch from humanitarian emergency aid to reconstruction and long-term stabilisation.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed a Global Action Plan on [Antimicrobial Resistance](#) (increasing resistance to antibiotics), which was endorsed at the World Health Assembly in May 2015. The main elements of the plan are the development of national strategies on increasing antibiotic resistance and combating neglected and poverty-related diseases. Scientists and NGOs have been [consulted](#) on both issues and the matter is on the Summit agenda.

Some commentators argue that, over the past 15 years, G7 commitments in the global health area have been satisfactorily [acted on](#), which suggests improved performance of the group. These commentators advocate placing health prominently and permanently on its agenda to make further gains. The business community has also called on the G7 to demonstrate [global leadership](#) in developing healthcare solutions.

#### *Empowering self-employed women and women in vocational training*

One presidency initiative aims to promote vocational training for women in developing countries and to improve both their employment and self-employment opportunities. In this context, the G7 presidency calls for businesses to sign the [Women's Empowerment Principles](#), seven guidelines launched by [UN Women](#) and [UN Global Compact](#) (a platform bringing together companies and the UN) in 2010. Furthermore 'Germany [seeks](#) a commitment by the G7 nations to raise the number of women and girls with vocational skills in developing countries by one third until 2030'.

G7/G20 Parliamentarians [called](#) on the G7 in April 2015 to intensify their commitment to women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment in all settings, if necessary by enacting, adopting and implementing laws. Furthermore, the World Health Organization encouraged the leaders to take into account its renewed [Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health](#) in their Summit deliberations.

#### *Food security*

In order to tackle chronic hunger and malnutrition, the presidency proposes that the G7 Summit adopts a major long-term [goal](#), currently under discussion. The goal could be reached by taking a comprehensive rural-development approach, fostering more sustainable agriculture and giving tailor-made assistance to malnourished hungry people in warzones and conflict areas.

Germany also seeks G7 agreement on a 'Broad Food Security and Nutrition Development Approach', going beyond increasing production and promoting investment in agriculture, in order to take a more comprehensive approach to food security.

### G7 accountability

Since 2009, progress on implementation of G7 commitments in the field of development has been measured on an annual basis. It is summarised in Accountability Reports published every three years. The latest report ([Lough Erne Accountability Report](#)), prepared in 2013 under the UK presidency, evaluated progress on the implementation of 61 commitments. Good progress has been recorded in six domains (economic development, health, water and sanitation, food security, governance, peace and security) and satisfactory in the remaining three (aid, education, environment and energy). Furthermore, in the context of the 2015 summit the G7 published a [report](#) on its commitment to slow the loss of biodiversity, noting that the group has intensified its efforts particularly in financial contributions and promoting global measures.

### Resource efficiency

The German Government made resource efficiency (namely of metals and minerals) one of the [priorities](#) of its presidency. The G7 High-Level Session on Resource Efficiency which took place in March 2015 saw the Government proposing to its G7 partners the establishment of an [alliance for resource efficiency](#). This is intended to be a forum for exchanging experiences, making contacts, pooling knowledge and facilitating coordination between policy-makers and industry. The alliance has been [supported](#) by the United Nations Environment Programme which underlined that the current growing use of resources is likely to exceed their availability and accessibility; as such, it is unsustainable and puts increasing burden on environment and climate. Germany has also [called](#) on the G7 to reduce the use of natural resources to protect the environment.

Furthermore, German Environment Minister, Barbara Hendricks has also indicated that more ideas on resource efficiency may be developed during the Summit. The [business community](#) called on the G7 to step up assistance to SMEs regarding efficient use of materials in industrial production and to support business in efforts to develop innovative products and processes. It also asked the leaders to tackle practices that distort resource trade such as subsidising raw material exports, prohibitive export tariffs and strict export quotas.

### Energy security

A preparatory meeting of the G7 Energy Ministers took place in Hamburg in May 2015. During their previous meeting, held in May 2014, the ministers launched the [G7 Energy Initiative for Energy Security](#) seeking to create an improved and more ecological and diversified energy system by promoting the use of safe and sustainable technologies. The [communiqué](#) of the Hamburg meeting welcomed the progress achieved so far and committed members to further implementation of the initiative.

Furthermore, the Ministers mentioned diversification and sustainability as core elements of the G7 energy-security strategy, and expressed their concern over the Ukrainian crisis which poses a broad energy threat to the region.

The proposed actions for the G7 include working together towards transparent and competitive energy markets, and the diversification of supply countries and transport routes (the liquid gas market was considered crucial for energy security). Ministers also stressed the need to enhance security of electricity systems and cybersecurity in the energy sector. They declared support for the most vulnerable countries including Ukraine and an increasing focus on innovative energy technologies. During the meeting, the EU [underlined](#) its commitment to sustainable energy security, emphasising that renewable energy, energy-efficiency measures and innovative technologies can provide a stable and predictable policy framework which is much needed.

Some observers argue that focusing on the importance of [liquid gas](#) may mean that there is growing consideration of its use in Europe, so as to become less energy-dependent on Russia in the medium term. The business community called on the G7 to [remove regulatory barriers](#) that limit the diffusion of energy-efficient technologies and to promote these technologies through financial support.

### **Protection of the marine environment, marine governance**

Many agree that pollution and over-exploitation of the oceans pose increasing [threats](#) to wealth, sustainable development and ecosystems, as well as exacerbating climate change. Marine issues are high on the agenda of the G7 Summit. In a preparatory meeting with scientists, the German Chancellor [declared](#) that the presidency aims to achieve a G7 action plan to tackle waste pollution of oceans. Furthermore, she proposed to introduce mandatory international standards regulating ocean mining. In a [statement](#), G7 scientists highlighted current problems such as acidification, the warming of the oceans due to climate change, pollution and overfishing; these pressing problems need to be tackled through enhanced international scientific cooperation and research-based management.

Importantly, the United Nations General Assembly will decide in September 2015 on the negotiation of an agreement to protect marine areas beyond national jurisdiction, establishing rules for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity. This agreement is likely to be discussed by the leaders. Several important states, including G7 members such as the United States and Japan, reportedly remain sceptical of the proposal. Some commentators [argue](#) that the German presidency should make efforts to convince them to support the agreement. In a [position paper](#), a marine NGO 'Seas at risk' also urged the G7 unanimously to support inclusion of the agreement in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (a sort of global constitution for oceans). Furthermore, they called on the G7 to include ambitious targets in relation to ocean preservation in the post-2015 UN sustainable development goals to be agreed this year, and asked for increased efforts to reduce marine litter and regulate deep-sea mining.

### **Main references**

[The 41st G7 Summit](#), Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, 2015.

German Federal Government's [G7 website](#), 2015.

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