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## **EU FOREIGN MINISTERS DISCUSS TAKING BACK 'IS' FIGHTERS, VENEZUELA AND YEMEN**

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Foreign ministers from EU member states addressed Trump's call for European countries to repatriate foreign "Islamic State" fighters captured in Syria. They also discussed the situation in Venezuela and in Yemen.

Foreign ministers from the European Union's member states gathered in Brussels on Monday to discuss a wide range of issues.

The most prominent topic was US President Donald Trump's call on Twitter that European countries take back and prosecute their citizens captured in Syria after fighting for the so-called "Islamic State" (IS).

### **European IS fighters**

EU foreign ministers, including Germany's Heiko Maas, pushed back on Trump's Twitter appeal.

"It certainly is not as easy as people in America imagine," Maas said on Monday. His Austrian counterpart, Karin Kneissl, said she couldn't comprehend the call, saying it would be in "nobody's interest" to release foreign fighters who had been captured by the international coalition and Kurdish fighters.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto dismissed the Uidea, saying: "Our major endeavor now should be not to allow them to come back to Europe."

Jean Asselborn, Luxembourg's foreign minister, criticized Trump for raising the issue on Twitter. "If we want to find a sensible solution, then we have to discuss this and not send tweets back and forth. That does not make sense."

### **The Shammar tribe**

The Shammar tribe's militia, the Al-Sanadid forces, control swathes of land in north-eastern Syria, close to the Iraqi border. Until recently, they were part of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and at present the Shammar belong to the Kurdish-led civilian leadership in northern Syria.

## **Venezuela**

Several EU members reiterated their calls for new elections in Venezuela.

The South American country is experiencing a political crisis since opposition politician Juan Guaido declared himself acting president in an effort to oust President Nicolas Maduro. More than 40 countries have recognized the move, as has the European Parliament.

Multiple foreign ministers, including France's Jean-Yves Le Drian and Romania's Teodor Melescanu, said that new elections were the only way out of the political impasse.

On Sunday, the Venezuelan government blocked five members of the European Parliament from entering the country. The European parliamentarians had been invited by Guaido, who said on Twitter that the group was "deported by an isolated and increasingly irrational regime."

## **Yemen**

The assembled ministers welcomed a ceasefire agreement between the Yemeni government and Houthi rebels, which the two parties reached in Stockholm, Sweden in December.

"The EU reaffirms that only a negotiated and inclusive political solution can end the conflict in Yemen," a statement from European Council read.

The council also said that "peace can only be achieved through negotiations involving the meaningful participation of all parties concerned."

Earlier this month, the Yemeni government and Houthi rebels reached a preliminary agreement to move fighters from the port city of Hodeidah, which serves as an entry point for the majority of imports into the country.

dv/msh (AP, dpa, epd, KNA)

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