

# BIG STORY

## big story

# All eyes on Sharm el-Sheikh

His Majesty King Hamad heads to Egypt for first Arab-EU summit

● More than 40 heads of state and government

● 25 European heads of state and government will attend

● Summit will discuss the growing threats of cross-border terrorism

● The summit seen as a chance by EU diplomats to boost cooperation

TDT | Manama

**H**is Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa will lead Bahrain's delegation to the first Arab-EU Summit, which kick-offs tomorrow in the presence of European and Arab leaders at Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

The Royal Court, in a statement, said that Bahrain's attendance at the two-day summit follows an invitation by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

The summit, seen as a chance by EU diplomats to boost cooperation across the Mediterranean region, will discuss topics like security, trade, development and migration.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi will open the summit which also has on its agenda wars and conflicts in places such as Syria and Libya.

### Cross-border terrorism

The meeting will be co-chaired by Egyptian President and European Council President, Donald Tusk, who will represent the EU alongside European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker.

The summit will discuss the growing threats of cross-border terrorism and the efforts of the global coalition to counter the terrorist organisation ISIS.

On February 18, Sisi announced that the upcoming Arab-European summit will be a good platform to hold more discussions on the illegal migration file.

European leaders first mentioned the summit in Austria in September amid efforts to agree on ways to curb the illegal migration that has sharply divided the 28-nation bloc.

But checking migration is just part of Europe's broader strategy to forge a new alliance with its southern neighbours.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini insists that the gathering in Egypt of more than 40 heads of state and government is about much more than migration.

"We will have frank, open discussions, not only on migration, definitely not," Mogherini told



Sharm el Sheikh city hosts the first Arab-EU Summit



His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa



Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission



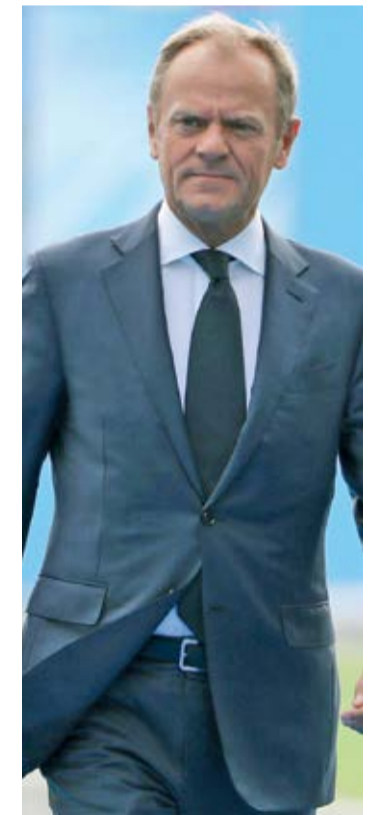
Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi



British Prime Minister Theresa May



EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini



Donald Tusk, president of the European Council

journalists in Brussels on Monday.

"We will have first of all discussions on our economic cooperation, on our common region," she said.

"That is a troubled region but also full of opportunities."

Attending will be Donald Tusk, president of the European Council of EU member countries, and Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission, the EU's executive arm.

### 25 European heads

EU officials said 25 European heads of state and government will attend.

These include German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister Theresa May, Czech Republic Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who could also discuss the stalemate over Brexit on the sidelines.

Not attending are French President Emmanuel Macron and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, along with the leaders of Lithuania and Latvia, EU sources added.

Apart from Sisi, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri will attend from the 22-member Arab League, which is based in Cairo. It is not yet clear who else will be present.

A UN official warned that Europe's failure to bridge divisions on migration "risks blocking all the other discussions" at the summit.

"How do you discuss an issue if you can't even mention it!" the official said on condition of anonymity.

The EU has struck aid-for-cooperation agreements with Turkey and Libya's UN-backed government in Tripoli, which has sharply cut the flow of migrants since a 2015 peak.

Britain's Philip Hammond

said May would have an "opportunity" in Egypt to discuss Brexit with her EU counterparts who have balked at her requests for concessions to sell the divorce to her parliament.

But officials in Brussels and London have played down the prospect of a Brexit "deal in the desert" to try to ensure an orderly departure.

A senior British government official insisted May would not attempt to talk Brexit with fellow European leaders, more than 20 of whom are expected to attend.

"There are important shared challenges to discuss with the League of Arab States like security cooperation," the official told reporters.

Mogherini said Monday: "It has always looked strange to me that the European Union had summits with Latin America, with Africa, with Asia, and not with the Arab world that is our

first neighbour."

The most recent ministerial meeting, which brought to-

gether 10 EU and 15 Arab League foreign ministers, took place in Brussels on 4 February 2019.

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