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President **Federica Mogherini**
High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security
Policy

P R E S S

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

ITEMS DEBATED

Iran

The Council discussed relations with Iran and possible areas of re-engagement following the adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and the lifting of all nuclear-related EU sanctions.

The High Representative briefed ministers on her planned trip to Tehran on 16 April 2016, where , accompanied by a delegation of Commissioners, she will explore different areas of cooperation with Iran. These include trade and investment, energy, transport, environment, migration, human rights, the fight against drugs, as well as education, research and science.

On 16 January 2016, the Council lifted all nuclear-related economic and financial EU sanctions against Iran. This followed verification by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that Iran had implemented agreed nuclear-related measures as set out in a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The implementation by Iran of the nuclear agreement remains the EU's first priority. The High Representative informed ministers that the IAEA had recently confirmed that Iran was implementing its commitments.

Russia

The Council took stock of EU-Russia relations.

It reaffirmed the EU's unity based on existing policies and principles. The High Representative recalled five principles guiding the EU's policy towards Russia:

- Implementation of the Minsk agreement as the key condition for any substantial change in the EU's stance towards Russia.
- Strengthened relations with the EU's eastern partners and other neighbours, including in Central Asia
- Strengthening the resilience of the EU (for example, energy security, hybrid threats, or strategic communication)
- The possibility of selective engagement with Russia on issues of interest to the EU
- Need to engage in people-to-people contacts and support Russian civil society

Ministers unanimously supported the guiding principles.

Middle East peace process

The Council discussed the latest developments in the region, as well as an initiative led by France to convene an international conference in Paris by summer 2016 with the aim of relaunching the peace process in the Middle East. Ministers expressed their support for the French-led initiative.

The High Representative also updated ministers on plans by the Middle East Quartet to prepare a report with recommendations for de-escalating the violence and promoting a two-state solution.

The conference in Paris will bring together both Israeli and Palestinian parties on the ground, as well as partners in the region and key international actors such as the United States, the EU, the United Nations, Russia (the Middle East Quartet), members of the United Nations Security Council and the main Arab stakeholders.

The EU is united in its commitment to achieving a two-state solution – based on parameters set out in the Council conclusions of July 2014 – that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967, and resolves all permanent status issues in order to end the conflict.

In the margins of the Council:

– *Lunch*

Over lunch, ministers held an exchange of views with the United Nations Secretary- General's Special Representative for Libya, Martin Kobler, on recent developments in Libya.

– *EU-Republic of Moldova second Association Council*

The European Union and the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter "Moldova") today held the second meeting of the Association Council under the Association Agreement. The EU and Moldova reaffirmed their joint determination to implement their commitment to strengthen Moldova's political association and economic integration with the EU.

For details, see the [press release](#).

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****Central African Republic**

The Council approved the following conclusions:

- "1. The Central African Republic (CAR) has just taken a further critical step. The peaceful holding of the elections in the CAR with a significant Central African voter turnout is a real success for the political transition process and the democratic aspirations of the country's population as a whole.
2. The European Union (EU) commends the Central African authorities, under the authority of Ms Catherine Samba-Panza, and all stakeholders, in particular the National Electoral Authority (ANE), for their efforts, which have enhanced the credibility and transparency of the combined elections on 14 February 2016. The EU takes note of the announcement of the final results of the presidential elections and of the first round of the parliamentary elections in the CAR. It congratulates Mr Faustin-Archange Touadéra on his election as President of the Republic. It welcomes the responsible attitude shown by Mr Anicet Dologuélé in recognising the results. The EU calls on all stakeholders to recognise the legitimacy of the authorities emerging from the elections. The important thing now is to round off the electoral cycle. In this regard, the fact that the second round of the parliamentary elections was organised within the deadlines set is a decisive step for the completion of the country's transition.
3. On taking office, the new authorities emerging from the elections will be faced with many challenges on the path towards national reconciliation and the country's reconstruction: disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of elements of armed groups, state-building and the reform of the security sector, the fight against impunity and the establishment of transitional justice, the restoration of the rule of law and social cohesion, the provision of basic social services, the restarting of the economy and the creation of employment opportunities, together with the responsible and sustainable exploitation of natural resources. These tasks must be carried out in compliance with the principles of good democratic and economic governance, following a constructive approach to dialogue in the spirit of the Bangui Forum. The return of refugees and displaced persons to their home communities is an essential objective, for which the conditions must be put in place. Implementation of all these measures will contribute to the long-term stabilisation of the country and encourage the international community to maintain its commitment to working alongside the CAR. The EU, which has provided swift, substantial and multifaceted support for the transition process, is aware of the scale of the challenges that remain and is ready to assist the elected authorities in the action they will take to address them.

4. The EU welcomes the commitment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the support provided by Operation Sangaris which have contributed substantially to ensuring that the electoral process passed off peacefully. MINUSCA has played a vital role, particularly in supporting the Central African authorities with the implementation of the DDR process, in coordinating international assistance in the field of security and in helping the authorities to design and implement security sector reform, including through the provision of strategic advice and vetting. The EU will continue coordination with the UN and other international partners in this context. The EU also stresses the essential role of the regional actors in the CAR's stabilisation and reconciliation process and calls on them to continue these efforts.
5. To contribute to the reform of the CAR armed forces (FACA) as part of the EU's overall approach in the country, the Council approved a Crisis Management Concept for a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) military training mission (EUTM CAR) for an initial duration of two years, based in Bangui as follow-up mission to EUMAM RCA. This CSDP mission will contribute to providing the CAR Government with expert advice, guidance and operational training, in the general context of security sector reform in the CAR, for the purpose of turning the FACA into a professional army, democratically accountable and representative of the entire nation. The Council calls on the European External Action Service to continue its operational planning to enable the mission to be set up and deployed, subject to Council decisions, before the end of the EUFOR RCA mandate. In order to enable the mission to act effectively to strengthen the capacities of the authorities and forces of the CAR, in the context of the European initiative for Capacity Building in support of Security and Development (CBSD), financing solutions will have to be found to meet equipment needs arising from the training provided. Lastly, the Council emphasises the importance of close coordination with the partners involved, in particular the Central African authorities and the UN, to ensure good cooperation and complementarity in the efforts underway to restore stability in the CAR.

The Council also underlines the importance of ensuring balanced and sufficient resources for all CSDP missions.

6. While taking note of the more relaxed security situation in the country, the EU remains concerned about the humanitarian situation in the CAR, in particular as regards displaced and/or enclaved communities. The EU stresses the need for the international community to continue to respond to the humanitarian emergency at this crucial time for the country and stresses its ongoing commitment and its neutral and impartial humanitarian effort. It calls on all parties to guarantee humanitarian agencies and their staff safe, timely and unhindered access to all areas, in full compliance with the UN's guiding principles on humanitarian assistance and international humanitarian law, in order to enable them to perform their tasks of protecting civilians and delivering aid.

7. The EU calls for additional support from the international community, including for the most vulnerable groups, in particular in order to strengthen their resilience and give an immediate boost to the major development projects on which the future of the country depends. In this respect, the mobilisation of independent economic resources and continued international and European budgetary support are essential. It is particularly important to support the State in order to increase, throughout its territory, the capacity of the public sector not only to deliver basic social services to the population, but also to engage in the stabilisation of the country and the reconstruction of the State and its capacity to meet its obligations to protect civilians. The Council welcomes the success of the Békou Fund for the reconstruction of the CAR and calls for continued mobilisation.
8. The EU notes the need to maintain the international mobilisation after the elections to consolidate the country's recovery from the crisis. The EU stands ready to play an active role in this effort by supporting the organisation of an international conference, which could be held in Brussels."

Al-Qaida: EU amends restrictive measures in line with UNSC resolution

On 14 March 2016, the Council adopted a decision amending restrictive measures against members of the Al-Qaida organisation and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with them.

For details, see the [press release](#).

DEVELOPMENT

Burundi: EU closes consultations under Article 96 of the Cotonou agreement

On 14 March 2016, the Council concluded consultations with Burundi under article 96 of the EU-ACP partnership agreement (Cotonou agreement). Commitments proposed by the Burundian government are insufficient to address the EU's concerns. The EU has suspended direct financial support to the Burundian administration, including budget support, but is fully maintaining both its financial support to the population and its humanitarian assistance

In its decision, the Council also set out specific measures to be taken by the Burundian government that could lead to the resumption of full cooperation.

For details, see the [press release](#).

European Court of Auditors' Special report No 15/2015: "ACP-EU Energy facility support for renewable energy in east Africa"

The Council approved the following conclusions:

1. The Council welcomes the Court of Auditors' special report No 15/2015: "ACP-EU Energy Facility support for renewable energy in east Africa".
2. The Council notes that the Court, amongst its main findings, concluded that the Commission was mostly successful but could have done better in using the ACP-EU Energy Facility (EF) funds to increase access to renewable energy for the poor in East Africa.
3. In addition, the Council further notes the Court's findings that the Commission has used the EF effectively and that most of the examined projects have been successful and have had good sustainability prospects.
4. The Council also notes that the Court's report mentions that the Commission prioritised the projects well and applied proper selection criteria for calls for proposal.
5. However, the Council is concerned with the Court's findings of certain inconsistencies in the outcome of the selection procedures. Furthermore the Court stated that for only 5 of the 16 projects examined, the reporting was timely and of the expected quality. Of the 16 projects examined, 12 were successful: 5 had exceeded or were likely to exceed their initial targets, two had met or were likely to meet their targets and five were not likely to reach their targets but results were still reasonable.

6. In this respect the Council aligns with the recommendations to the Commission, concerning selection, monitoring and sustainability of projects, aimed at maximising the effectiveness and benefits of EU development support and ensuring sustainability of all funded projects.
7. The Council acknowledges the fact that the Commission accepts the Court's conclusions and has pointed to a number of initiatives that it has already taken to strengthen monitoring and to increase the sustainability of projects; notably the improvements introduced in the latter call for proposals, the reinforcement of the permanent monitoring function and the application of the innovations introduced for the implementation of the Sustainable Energy Programme under the Global Public Goods and Challenges (GPGC).
8. The Council recognises that access to reliable, affordable and sustainable energy services is essential for progress towards achieving development objectives. Future energy initiatives can further contribute to this objective with well selected, well monitored and sustainable projects.
9. In view of this, and the observations of the Court of Auditors, the Council invites the Commission:
 - a) to take into account, in its future actions, lessons learned from the operation of the EF, including a well-considered balance between adaptation and mitigation. In particular, future evaluations and interventions should seek to integrate the perspectives of people living in poverty and ensure that access to renewable energy has been achieved for this particular group. Furthermore, future actions should strengthen a gender perspective and ensure that gender issues are integrated and monitored throughout the project cycle, including in evaluation efforts;
 - b) to reinforce the assessment of the risks related to the design of the projects as well as the partners' capacity with regard to the projects' implementation. This is especially important in order to assure the sustainability of the projects;
 - c) to improve monitoring of compliance with the provisions of the grant contracts. The monitoring and reporting should be used to assess the state of realisation of the projects and, where necessary, appropriate actions should be taken towards contractors;
 - d) when possible, the sustainability of the projects being of utmost importance and in line with the rules governing the implementation modality, to put in place a system to assess the need for continued technical assistance for operators."

COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

Central African Republic - military training mission

The Council approved a Crisis Management Concept (CMC) for a possible EU military training mission in the Central African Republic. The CMC outlines a process transforming the military advisory mission in the Central African Republic (EUMAM RCA) into a mission that provides strategic advice and operational training.

Common military list

The Council adopted the updated version of the common military list of the EU, which acts as a reference point for member states' national military technology and equipment lists. The updated list will be published in the "C" Series of the EU Official Journal.

Control of exports of military technology and equipment - annual report

The Council took note of the Seventeenth Annual Report which lays down common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment.

The endorsed report, based on contributions from all member states, will be published in the "C" series of the Official Journal.

