



046737/EU XXIV.GP
Eingelangt am 01/03/11

**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



5888/1/11 REV 1

PRESSE 16
PR CO 4

PRESS RELEASE

3065th Council meeting

Foreign Affairs

Brussels, 31 January 2011

President

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High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy

P R E S S

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Main results of the Council

*The Council discussed **Egypt** and adopted conclusions recognising the legitimate democratic aspirations of the Egyptian people and urging the Egyptian authorities to embark on an orderly transition to a process of genuine democratic reform that will pave the way for free and fair elections.*

*The Council also discussed events in **Tunisia** and adopted conclusions stating the EU's readiness to support the democratic transition, in particular the preparation of elections. It also adopted restrictive measures freezing the assets of people who have embezzled Tunisian public funds.*

*The Council exchanged views on **Belarus** and adopted conclusions deploring the flawed presidential election in December 2010 and the subsequent violent crackdown and calling for the release of all detainees. It imposed a visa ban and an assets freeze on those responsible, including President Lukashenko.*

*The Council had a short discussion on **Côte d'Ivoire** and adopted conclusions confirming the EU's support for President Ouattara and referring to the targeted sanctions imposed by the EU on former President Gbagbo and his supporters, which were extended today.*

*The Council agreed to open consultations with **Guinea-Bissau** under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement in the light of recent events.*

*The Council also adopted conclusions on **Sudan**, the **Sahel** and **Lebanon**.*

*Over dinner, the High Representative led a discussion on the EU's relations with its strategic partners and its objectives for **Russia**. Ministers also examined the situation in the **Middle East** ahead of the Quartet meeting on 5 February and discussed **Lebanon**. The High Representative briefed ministers on the recent meeting in Istanbul with the **Iranian** nuclear negotiator.*

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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.

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Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

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Member

Mr Štefan FÜLE

Member

ITEMS DEBATED**Egypt – Conclusions**

The Council discussed the situation in Egypt and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council recognizes the legitimate democratic aspirations and grievances of the Egyptian population. These should be listened to carefully and addressed through urgent, concrete and decisive measures.
2. The Council deeply regrets the considerable loss of life during demonstrations in Egypt over the last few days. It also notes with deep concern the high number of people injured and arrested as well as the use of violence. The Council calls on all parties to show restraint and avoid further violence. It urges the Egyptian authorities to immediately release all peaceful demonstrators who have been detained. The Council also calls upon the Egyptian authorities to restore all communication networks without delay and to guarantee unhindered access to all media, including the Internet.
3. The Council urges the Egyptian authorities to respect and protect human rights including freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. It urges them to take appropriate measures to assure the security of all citizens and their property and to protect the cultural heritage. It calls for an immediate end to looting.
4. The Council urges the authorities to seek a peaceful and constructive way forward based on a serious and open dialogue with all political forces ready to abide by democratic norms and with civil society.
5. The Council urges the Egyptian authorities to embark on an orderly transition through a broad-based government leading to a genuine process of substantial democratic reform with full respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, paving the way for free and fair elections.
6. The Council reiterates its support for a democratic, pluralist and stable Egypt as a key partner of the EU, mindful of its important regional role, and sharing the goal of building stability, peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean and Middle East region. The EU is committed to accompanying, through a partnership, the Egyptian transformation process by mobilising, reviewing and adapting existing instruments to support political, economic and social reforms. The EU stands ready to assist the Egyptian people in this transformation process, taking into account future developments."

Tunisia – Conclusions

The Council discussed the situation in Tunisia and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council pays tribute to the courage and determination of the Tunisian people and their peaceful struggle to assert their rights and democratic aspirations. It regrets the violence, repression and loss of life during the recent disturbances. It reaffirms its total solidarity and its support for Tunisia and Tunisians in their efforts to put in place a stable democracy, the rule of law and democratic pluralism with full regard for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
2. Today, thanks to the process of democratic transition, the partnership between Tunisia and the European Union is set to be strengthened to lend support to the affirmation of democracy and to economic and social reform.
3. The Council welcomes the commitments given by the transitional government and urges it to proceed with implementation of measures for the release of political prisoners, the legalisation of democratic political parties and associations and the widening of the role of civil society and the media, which are the first necessary steps towards democratisation and stabilisation of the country.
4. The Council welcomes the decision to hold democratic, free and transparent presidential and legislative elections as soon as possible. The European Union is ready, at Tunisia's request, to lend its political support and its legal, technical and material assistance in preparing and organising the electoral process, inter alia by sending a preparatory mission and by observing the elections.
5. In the context of greater regard for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the Council also welcomes the creation of the High Commission for Political Reform and the national commissions set up to investigate the violence which took place during the demonstrations, as well as corruption. It stresses the importance of the integrity and independence of these commissions and is ready to offer them its assistance if required.
6. In consultation with the Tunisian authorities, the Council has adopted restrictive measures against individuals responsible for misappropriation of State funds.

7. The European Union is also ready to mobilise every instrument at its disposal to help ease the passage of political, economic and social reform in Tunisia, to strengthen its democratic institutions and to give greater support to civil society in the country. At the same time, the European Union intends, under the European neighbourhood policy, to update its strategy and assistance for Tunisia to reflect the new context and the aspirations of the Tunisian people, inter alia by bringing the talks on advanced status to a conclusion with the government that emerges from the forthcoming democratic elections, since such status constitutes a fundamental instrument for fully enhancing political, socio-economic and sectoral cooperation between the EU and Tunisia."

The Council adopted a Decision on restrictive measures directed against certain persons and entities in view of the situation in Tunisia, with the aim of preventing the diversion of public funds.

Belarus – Conclusions

The Council discussed Belarus and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. Recalling its previous conclusions on Belarus and in particular its Conclusions of October 2010 and the Statement by High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton on 20 December, as well as other EU statements regarding the Presidential elections of 19 December 2010 and its violent aftermath, the Council deeply regrets that, according to OSCE/ODIHR, the Presidential elections demonstrated that Belarus still has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments. In particular the electoral process deteriorated significantly during the vote count, undermining the steps taken to improve the conduct of the elections.
2. The Council particularly deplores that the election night was marred by violence by the Belarusian authorities. It strongly condemns the arrest of many presidential candidates, hundreds of activists, journalists and civil society representatives, as well as the ensuing detention and harassment of the opposition, independent media and civil society on political grounds.
3. The Council reiterates its demands for the immediate release of those detained on political grounds following the elections on 19 December, and their rehabilitation. The Council urges Belarus to respect the rights of detainees and their families, paying particular attention to detainees' children, and the right to legal representation. Furthermore, it underlines the need to ensure the access of family members to the detainees. The Council calls on the Belarusian authorities to end the persecution of democratic forces, independent media and representatives of civil society, and students, and to end any penalisation or discrimination against those exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, including the leaders of the opposition parties.
4. The EU regrets the decision of the Belarusian authorities not to renew the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk. The EU strongly believes that the mandate of the OSCE Office has not yet been fulfilled and calls for an urgent reversal of this decision by the Belarusian authorities.

5. In view of these recent events and developments, the Council has decided to impose travel restrictions and an asset freeze against persons responsible for the fraudulent Presidential elections of 19 December 2010 and the subsequent violent crackdown on democratic opposition, civil society and representatives of independent mass media. The Council has also decided to reinstate the travel restrictions imposed on certain persons in Belarus in relation to the elections in 2004 and 2006 and the crackdown on civil society and democratic opposition, which had been suspended since 13 October 2008 in order to encourage progress. These restrictive measures and the list of persons targeted will be kept open and under constant review. The Council underlines that the release and rehabilitation of all people detained on political grounds would be an essential element in this regard. This, along with progress towards further reforms of the Electoral Code, the freedom of expression and of the media, the freedom of assembly and association, would pave the way for the lifting of the restrictive measures.
6. The European Union remains strongly committed to strengthening its engagement with the Belarusian people and civil society. The EU is therefore working on measures to provide urgent support to those repressed and detained on political grounds and their families, as well as support to civil society. It will also review its assistance to Belarus which is aimed at addressing the needs of the population, in order to further strengthen support to civil society, targeting in particular NGOs and students, including through the International Donors' Conference in Warsaw on 2 February.
7. The Council recalls the importance it attaches to facilitating people-to-people contacts with Belarus to the benefit of the Belarusian population at large. It looks forward to the start of negotiations for visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Belarus, once the negotiating directives have been adopted. Pending the conclusion of such agreements, the EU will encourage the optimal use of the existing flexibilities offered by the Visa Code, in particular the possibilities for Member States to waive and reduce visa fees for certain categories of citizens.
8. The EU remains committed to its policy of critical engagement, including through dialogue and the Eastern Partnership, and recalls that the EU has consistently offered to deepen its relationship with Belarus. The Council reiterates that such a deepening is conditional on progress towards respect by the Belarusian authorities for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The Union remains open to developing bilateral relations with Belarus, provided the Belarusian authorities prove their willingness to respect these principles. The Council will regularly re-examine the situation in Belarus and stands ready to consider further targeted measures in all areas of cooperation as appropriate."

The Council adopted a decision concerning restrictive measures against certain officials of Belarus and a Regulation concerning restrictive measures against President Lukashenko and certain officials of Belarus.

The restrictive measures consist of a visa ban and an assets freeze targeting those responsible for the fraudulent presidential elections and subsequent violent crackdown last December and in connection with the 2004 and 2006 elections and subsequent crackdowns. The restrictions on movement that were suspended in 2008 have been reinstated. In total almost 160 individuals are now subject to restrictive measures.

Freedom of religion and belief

The Council held an exchange of views on freedom of religion and belief and agreed to return to the subject at a later date.

Côte d'Ivoire – Conclusions

The Council held a short exchange of views on Côte d'Ivoire and adopted the following conclusions:

- " 1 Recalling the European Council Conclusions of 17 December 2010 and the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of 13 December 2010, the EU reaffirms its commitment to peace and democracy in Côte d'Ivoire and to respect the sovereign will of the Ivorian people expressed by its decision to elect Alassane Ouattara as President, an outcome subsequently certified by the UN. The EU calls on all civilian and military actors to recognise the authority of the democratically elected President and his Government and reiterates that it will only consider legitimate those institutions and bodies who place themselves under his authority.
2. The EU strongly condemns the violence against the civilian population, including violations of human rights, and recalls that those who perpetrate such violations will be held responsible for their acts.
3. The EU commends and supports the firm and united stance of its African partners, ECOWAS, WAEMU and the AU, in their efforts to support a peaceful hand over of power to President, Alassane Ouattara, and his government. In this respect, the EU welcomes the unequivocal stand adopted by Heads of State and Government of these organisations.
4. The EU reaffirms its full support to the UN in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), in particular its peace keeping mission and its mandate to protect civilians, President Ouattara and his Government. The EU calls for the immediate lifting of the blockade of the Hôtel du Golf. The EU welcomes the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1967 reinforcing UNOCI. The EU strongly condemns attacks against UNOCI, demands an immediate stop to the broadcasting of messages inciting violence and calls on the full respect of the UNOCI mandate.
5. Since December 2010, the Council has adopted a number of decisions imposing and broadening the application of targeted restrictive measures, comprising a visa ban and asset freeze. These measures are targeted against persons and entities who specifically oppose the legitimate President's authority, obstruct the hand over of power, and finance former president Gbagbo. The EU will regularly examine the restrictive measures so as to ensure their effectiveness and leverage, including the possible increase of their scope. The EU promotes the adoption of similar measures by other major international partners including multilateral and regional organizations.

6. The EU will continue to provide support and humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable people of Côte d'Ivoire, in particular to internally displaced people and refugees that have fled to neighbouring countries.
7. The EU reaffirms its commitment to promote respect for democracy and rule of law in Côte d'Ivoire and stands ready to enhance its support to the people of Côte d'Ivoire and its legitimate authorities."

The Council adopted a Decision and an Implementing Regulation extending the targeted restrictive measures imposed on former President Gbagbo and his supporters.

Sudan – Conclusions

The Council had a short discussion on Sudan and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council welcomes the timely, peaceful and credible conduct of the Southern Sudan Referendum as a crucial step in implementing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). It congratulates the people of Southern Sudan on their determination in turning out to vote in such large numbers which significantly surpassed the 60% threshold. The Council commends the parties to the CPA as well as the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission and the South Sudan Referendum Bureau for their leadership in this process and recalls how instrumental the support and assistance provided by the United Nations has been, including the leadership shown by UNMIS.
2. The Council commends the ongoing work of the EU election observation mission to monitor the referendum process. It notes the preliminary statement issued by the EU EOM on 17 January 2011 welcoming the peaceful and credible process and overwhelming turnout.
3. The Council welcomes the announcement of the preliminary results of the Referendum on South Sudan. These show an overwhelming vote in favour of secession. Pending the announcement of the final results, the Council reiterates the EU's commitment to respect the wishes of the people of Southern Sudan and welcomes the commitment of the Government of Sudan to do so, as reaffirmed at the High Level Meeting on Sudan in Addis Ababa today. It urges both parties to the CPA to continue to ensure the safety and security of all peoples in Sudan.
4. The Council stresses the EU's continued engagement with both North and South, regardless of the outcome of the Referendum.
5. The Council urges all parties to quickly resolve all outstanding CPA and post-Referendum issues, including Abyei, citizenship arrangements and the holding of Popular Consultations in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan. It welcomes the launching of Popular Consultations in Blue Nile.
6. The Council remains particularly concerned about the delay in resolving the issue of Abyei. It welcomes the recent accord between local tribal leaders and the subsequent agreement on migration and security arrangements as an encouraging step. It urges the parties to the CPA to resolve the future status of Abyei through peaceful dialogue ensuring an equitable and sustainable solution.

7. The EU continues to support the efforts of the AU High-Level Implementation Panel on Sudan to facilitate negotiations between the parties to the CPA and stands ready to provide any further assistance that is required.
8. The Council remains deeply concerned about the increasing violence in Darfur which has resulted in 43 000 newly displaced persons. It deplores the kidnappings of aid workers, which have impacted severely on the provision of any kind of assistance to vulnerable populations. The Council urges all parties to cease hostilities and ensure full and unhindered access for UNAMID and humanitarian workers.
9. The Council stresses the need for genuine engagement by all parties, including the armed movements, in the Doha peace process leading to a comprehensive and inclusive peace settlement on Darfur. It hopes that the Doha peace process will lead to a positive outcome in the near future.
10. The Council recalls the obligation of the Government of Sudan to cooperate with the International Criminal Court pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1593.
11. The Council will continue to follow the situation in Sudan closely."

Sahel – Conclusions

The Council had a short discussion on the Sahel and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council recalls its Conclusions of 25 October 2010 and commitment to developing a holistic and integrated EU strategy on security and development in the Sahel. The Council expresses its deep concern at the deterioration of the security situation in certain countries of the Sahel region.
2. The kidnapping and assassination of European citizens by terrorists in Niamey underline the growing threat in the region from organised crime and terrorist networks, in particular Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). These threats directly affect the local populations and States of the region, particularly Mauritania, Mali and Niger. They also have an impact on the security of European nationals. They weaken the State structures, hamper economic and social development of the countries concerned and jeopardise European and international development cooperation activities meant to benefit the populations.
3. Fully aware of the multiple challenges facing the region, the Council looks forward to the urgent presentation of a comprehensive EU strategy on the Sahel in the coming weeks, with a view to its discussion and adoption at the earliest possible opportunity. The Council also recalls the need for increased cooperation between the EU and its Member States, States of the region, AU, UN and other international partners in the implementation of the strategy."

Lebanon – Conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1 The Council continues to closely follow developments in Lebanon.
2. It takes note of the designation of Mr Mikati as Prime Minister by President Sleiman. It calls upon the Lebanese authorities to seek the broadest possible consensus and to preserve unity, in full respect with the principles enshrined in the Lebanese Constitution, the Taif accord and with all Lebanon's international obligations.
3. The Council stresses the importance it attaches to the independent and democratic functioning of Lebanese institutions, free from any interference including from the outside. The Council calls on all parties to cooperate in a spirit of dialogue and consensus and to refrain from violence or intimidation.
4. The Council expresses its appreciation for the work carried out by the National Unity Government led by PM Hariri after the democratic elections of 2009.
5. The Council reaffirms its continuing commitment towards the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) as an independent court, created by UNSC Resolution 1757 and following the highest judicial standards. The STL must continue its work without impediment and with the cooperation of the Lebanese government. Funding must be preserved. In this regard, the Council notes that the EU and individual Member States stand ready to provide further funding. At the same time the EU encourages others to contribute.
6. The Council remains determined to reinforce Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, unity and stability. The Council recalls its commitment to the full implementation of all relevant UNSC Resolutions, including 1559, 1680, 1701 and 1757.
7. The Council supports and commends the crucial role of UNIFIL, whose activities alongside the Lebanese Armed Forces continue to be essential for peace in the region."

The High Representative led a discussion over dinner on the situation in Lebanon.

Iran

The High Representative briefed ministers over dinner on the talks with Iran that she conducted on behalf of the E3 +3 countries (France, Germany, UK, China, Russia and the US) in Istanbul on 21 and 22 January.

Middle East

Over dinner, the High Representative reported on her recent trip to the Middle East, ahead of the Quartet meeting to be held on 5 February.

Strategic partners - Russia

Over dinner, the High Representative and ministers discussed how to take forward work on the EU's strategic partners and looked at the EU's objectives for Russia.

OTHER BUSINESS**Albania**

The Slovenian delegation raised the question of how to engage further with Albania in the light of recent events. The High Representative and Commissioner Füle reported on Managing Director Miroslaw Lajcak's recent visit to Tirana.

Haiti

The Spanish delegation raised the question of the political deadlock in Haiti following the first round of the presidential election. The Council stressed the importance of holding a second round and the High Representative expressed the EU's readiness to provide support for election observation.

Iran - execution of Zahra Bahrami

The Dutch delegation raised the issue of the execution of Dutch-Iranian national Zahra Bahrami in Tehran on 29 January and suggested follow-up measures to be taken at EU level.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

Guinea-Bissau - Opening of consultations

The Council invited the authorities of Guinea-Bissau to hold consultations under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, the framework for the EU's relations with ACP countries. This decision reflects the EU's concern about the situation in Guinea-Bissau after the mutiny of 1 April 2010 and the overall governance situation in the country.

For more information see press release [5750/11](#).

Report on EU action in Pakistan

The Council took note of the second implementation report on the Plan for strengthening EU action in Pakistan.

The Plan for strengthening EU action in Afghanistan and Pakistan was approved by the Council on 27 October 2009¹. In April 2010, High Representative Ashton presented the first six-monthly implementation report on Pakistan to the Council.

Review of the EU list of persons, groups and entities involved in terrorist acts

The Council reviewed the EU lists of persons, groups and entities to which Articles 2, 3 and 4 of Common Position 2001/931/CFSP and to which Article 2(3) of Regulation (EC) No 2580/2001 apply. After reviewing all new relevant information, the Council decided to confirm all those persons, groups and entities on the lists as established in July 2010 (Decision 2010/386/CFSP and Regulation (EU) No 610/2010)

As usual, letters of notification will be addressed to the persons, groups and entities concerned (where an address is available) and that a notice will be published in the Official Journal ("C" series).

Already in December 2010, the Council reviewed the EU list of persons, groups and entities to which only Article 4 of Common Position 2001/931/CFSP apply. After reviewing all new relevant information, the Council confirmed the list as set out in the annex to Common Position 2009/468/CFSP of 15 June 2009.

¹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/110789.pdf

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

CSDP – Conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions on Common Security and Defence Policy:

"The Council welcomes the Weimar letter of 6 December 2010 signed by France, Germany and Poland as an important contribution to stimulating the agenda for the development of Common Security and Defence Policy, including with a view to strengthening military and civilian capabilities in Europe, building on the efforts and achievements undertaken during recent Presidencies.

The Council invites the High Representative to take work forward on the important set of issues raised in the letter, cooperating closely with Member States through the Political and Security Committee, the EU Military Committee and the European Defence Agency, and in consultation with relevant stakeholders, looking forward to the proposals of the High Representative as tasked by the European Council Conclusions of September 2010 referring to EU-NATO cooperation in crisis management.

In this context, the Council invites the High Representative to present a report on ongoing work on these issues for discussion at a Foreign Affairs Council by mid 2011, with a view to achieving concrete results by the end of the year as far as possible."

TRADE POLICY

Uzbekistan - Textiles

The Council authorised the signing of a protocol to the EU/ Uzbekistan partnership and cooperation agreement with a view to extending the provisions of the agreement to trade in textiles ([16382/10](#)).

The text of the protocol ([16388/10](#)) will be forwarded to the European Parliament for its consent.

EDUCATION

Participation of Switzerland in EU programmes

The Council approved the conclusion of an agreement with Switzerland on the conditions for its participation in the 'Youth in Action' programme and in the action programme in the field of lifelong learning 2007-2013 ([12818/10](#)).