



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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PRESS RELEASE

3149th Council meeting

Foreign Affairs

Brussels, 27 February 2012

President

Catherine Ashton

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy

P R E S S

Main results of the Council

*The Council once again condemned the ruthless campaign of repression against the civilian population in **Syria** and expressed its particular concern about the reports of brutal attacks by the Syrian armed forces in Homs. It called on President Assad to immediately end the killing of civilians, withdraw the Syrian army from besieged towns and step aside in order to make room for a peaceful transition for the sake of the country. Given the continued use of violence against civilians, the Council further reinforced EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime.*

*The Council welcomed the conduct of elections in **Egypt** and supported Egypt's transition towards a democratic, pluralist and stable country. At the same time, the Council reiterated the EU's deep concern with regard to restrictions on civil society organisation in Egypt and recalled the agenda of EU assistance available to Egypt, including financial support, further integration of markets and the launching of a dialogue on migration, mobility and security.*

*The Council agreed to extend **EUNAVFOR Atalanta**, the EU operation fighting piracy off the Somali coast, until December 2014. A draft act giving legal effect to this political decision is currently being prepared for adoption at a later stage.*

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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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PARTICIPANTS

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High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

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Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, External Trade and European Affairs

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Minister for Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Karel SCHWARZENBERG

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark:

Mr Villy SØVNDAL

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

Ms Emily HABER

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Urmas PAET

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ireland:

Mr Eamon GILMORE

Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Greece:

Mr Stavros DIMAS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr José Antonio GARCIA-MARGALLO

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

France:

Mr Alain JUPPÉ

Ministre d'État, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

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Netherlands:

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Mr Michael SPINDELEGGER

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Mr Paulo PORTAS

Ministro de Estado, Minister for Foreign Affairs

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Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Milan JEŽOVICA

State Secretary at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Erkki TUOMIOJA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Sweden:

Mr Carl BILDT

Minister for Foreign Affairs

United Kingdom:

Mr William HAGUE

First Secretary of State, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Commission:

Mr Stefan Füle

Member

Mr Andris Piebalgs

Member

Ms Kristalina Georgieva

Member

The government of the acceding state was represented as follows:

Croatia:

Ms Vesna PUSIĆ

Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

ITEMS DEBATED**Syria**

The Council debated the latest developments in Syria and the outcome of the "Friends of Syria" conference held on 24 February in Tunis.

Given the Syrian regime's continued use of violence against civilians, the Council reinforced restrictive measures against the Syrian regime. It also partially suspended the application of the Cooperation Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Syrian Arab Republic. For details, see press release [6815/12](#).

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The European Union is increasingly appalled by the unfolding situation in Syria, where the regime continues its ruthless campaign of repression against the civilian population and its systematic and widespread violation of human rights. The EU is particularly concerned by the reports of the brutal attacks by the Syrian armed forces in Homs and deplores the numerous civilian fatalities. The EU underlines that those responsible for the violence across Syria will be held accountable for their actions. The EU reiterates once more its call for an immediate end to violence. We call on President Assad to end immediately the killing of civilians, withdraw the Syrian army from besieged towns and cities and step aside in order to make room for a peaceful transition for the sake of the country.
2. The EU condemns all killings of unarmed civilians, including three journalists in the city of Homs. It reiterates that the Syrian authorities have a responsibility to guarantee the safety of journalists in their country. The press must be allowed unimpeded access to carry out its vital role of providing independent information on the events in Syria without fear of violence or repression.

3. The EU reiterates its strong concerns for the deteriorating living conditions of the civilian Syrian people in the areas affected by the unrest. The Syrian authorities must immediately alleviate the suffering of the population, respect and protect the wounded and sick, guarantee unhindered access to the medical care without any discrimination or reprisal and refrain from intimidation of those providing medical assistance. The EU calls on the Syrian Government and all parties to fully respect the impartiality and independence of humanitarian organisations and workers. The EU strongly condemns the illegal attacks against medical staff and installations carrying the symbols of the Red Crescent. The Syrian authorities must immediately cease all violence. They must also allow full and unimpeded access of relief personnel from humanitarian organisations for the timely delivery of humanitarian aid to people in need of assistance. The EU welcomes the efforts made by neighbouring countries to host Syrian refugees who fled violence in Syria. The European Union will continue to assist in providing them with dignified living conditions. The EU welcomes the intention of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, to visit Syria to engage with all parties to allow impartial access for humanitarian assistance and the creation of the Syrian Humanitarian Forum.

4. The EU welcomes the holding of the first meeting of the Group of Friends of the Syrian people which took place in Tunis on 24 February and the outcome as reflected in the Chair's conclusions, which aimed at reinforcing an international consensus on Syria and putting forward urgent proposals to stop the violence, alleviate the suffering of the Syrian population, seek a peaceful outcome to the current crisis and promote a new era of democratic change in Syria and affirmed its goal of a political solution to the crisis that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people for dignity, freedom, peace, reform, democracy, prosperity and stability.

The EU will remain in close contact with the League of Arab States, the United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Gulf Cooperation Council and other regional organisations with the aim of providing a forum for coordinating their action on Syria in support of the League of Arab States' initiatives with regard to the Syrian crisis. The EU welcomes the appointment of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, as the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and League of Arab States on the Syrian crisis. The EU will support his efforts to bring an end to all violence and human rights violations and promoting a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis.

5. The EU supports the Syrian opposition in its struggle for freedom, dignity and democracy. The EU stands ready to step up its engagement with all representative members of Syrian opposition which adhere to non violence, inclusiveness and democratic values as they make progress to form a broad and inclusive platform. The EU recognises the Syrian National Council as a legitimate representative of Syrians seeking peaceful democratic change. The EU urges the Syrian opposition to set up a representative coordination mechanism under the auspices of the Arab League and to agree on a set of shared principles for working towards an orderly and peaceful transition to a Syria that is democratic, stable and guarantees minority rights, and where all citizens enjoy equal rights regardless of their affiliations, ethnicities or beliefs.
6. The European Union deeply regrets that the United Nations Security Council was unable to support the call of the League of Arab States for an inclusive, Syrian-led political process conducted in an environment free from fear and violence. The EU calls once more on all members of the UNSC to assume their responsibilities. The time has come for the international community to speak with one voice and demand an end to the bloodshed and speak out for a democratic future for Syria.
7. The European Union welcomes the resolution on Syria adopted by an overwhelming majority in the UN General Assembly on 16 February and co-sponsored by all EU Member States, which condemns the Syrian regime's activities and violations of human rights and calls for an immediate end of violence. The EU looks forward to the next debate of the UN Human Rights Council on Syria on 12 March 2012 as well as to discussions in the high level segment of the UNHRC session on the week of the 27 February. The EU is appalled by the main findings of the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria which states that crimes against humanity and other gross violations of human rights have been committed in the country. The EU reaffirms that there should be no impunity for the perpetrators of such alleged crimes.
8. The EU welcomes the important decisions taken by the League of Arab States on 12 February to increase the international pressure on the Syrian regime as well as the strong commitment and leadership that the League of Arab States is taking to resolve the crisis in Syria. The EU recalls its support to the League of Arab States' efforts to end the cycle of violence in Syria and is ready to provide further support.

9. Given the Syrian regime's continued use of violence against civilians, the EU approved today further sanctions against the Syrian regime, imposing an asset freeze on the Syrian Central Bank, banning transactions of gold and other precious metals, banning cargo flights operated by Syrian carriers and designating seven Ministers of the Syrian government to be subject to restrictive measures. The EU will continue its policy of imposing additional measures targeting the regime, not the civilian population, as long as repression continues. The EU calls on the international community to join its efforts to target those responsible for or associated with the violent repression and those who support or benefit from the regime. The EU welcomes the decision of the League of Arab States to increase economic pressure on the Syrian regime and stands ready to support the League of Arab States in the area of sanctions and restrictive measures. The EU welcomes the commitment of the participants of the Friends of Syria Group to take steps to apply and enforce restrictive measures and sanctions on the Syrian regime and its supporters.

10. The EU reaffirms its support to the Syrian people and their aspirations for a democratic Syria which is open, pluralistic and respectful of the rights of all its communities. As soon as a genuine democratic transition begins, the EU is ready to develop a new and ambitious partnership with Syria across all areas of mutual interest, including by mobilizing assistance, strengthening trade and economic relations and supporting transitional justice and the political transition."

Egypt

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

- "1. The EU welcomes the conduct of elections to both the People's Assembly and the Shura Council in Egypt and congratulates the candidates and parties that took part in the democratic process. The EU supports Egypt's transition towards a democratic, pluralist and stable country. The holding of free and fair elections is a first and crucial step in this regard.
2. The EU welcomes the inauguration of a new Parliament by the end of February. The newly elected Parliament will face many serious challenges, including in meeting the need for progress in democratic reform, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, inter alia freedom of expression and assembly. The EU encourages an inclusive and constructive approach in tackling them.
3. The EU looks forward to the appointment of the Constitutional Committee responsible for the drafting of a new Constitution reflecting a democratic Egypt, protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the important role of women. The EU emphasises the importance of an inclusive and transparent drafting process, representative of all elements of Egyptian society, including persons belonging to minorities.
4. The EU underlines the importance of transfer of power to civilian rule as soon as possible and encourages the authorities to establish a definitive timetable for the holding of Presidential elections. The EU reiterates its offer of electoral support. In the meantime, the interim authorities should ensure the protection of civilians in full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms and ensure early completion of investigations into recent violence, including against religious communities, as well as adequate follow-up of the recommendations following from these investigations.

5. The EU reiterates its deep concern with regard to restrictions on civil society organisations in Egypt. While fully respecting the independence of the judicial system in Egypt, the EU intends to monitor closely the ongoing legal proceedings against NGO staff and underlines expectations regarding due process. Egyptian civil society has played and continues to play a crucial role in the transition. An active and independent NGO community is fundamental in any democratic society. EU's support to civil society is a key component of the revised European Neighbourhood Policy, which is based on mutual accountability and a shared commitment to the universal values of human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. Therefore, the EU calls upon the Egyptian authorities to do everything possible to resolve the current situation in a timely and constructive manner. The EU underlines the importance of the adoption of a new law that would be consistent with Egypt's international obligations.
6. The EU expresses its deep concern regarding the deterioration of the economic situation in Egypt and conveys its continued support, including in the framework of the Deauville Partnership and of the revised European Neighbourhood Policy. It underlines the importance for Egypt to engage in the necessary social and economic reforms and to allow the effective use of available international assistance.
7. Recalling the principles and objectives set out in the Council Conclusions of 20 June 2011, and its commitment to supporting democratic reform in its neighbourhood, the EU has outlined an agenda of available assistance to Egypt, including financial support, further integration of markets and launching of a dialogue on migration, mobility and security. The EU remains committed to working with the new Egypt, its new democratic institutions and eventual government in this regard. Egypt remains a key partner in the region sharing the goal of building stability, peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean and Middle East region."

Serbia / Kosovo

The High Representative briefed ministers about the outcome of the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina on 22 and 23 February. For more information, see press release [5455/12](#). The Council exchanged views, in view of the debate on Serbia's candidate status at the General Affairs Council on 28 February.

Belarus

The Council agreed on the need to reinforce restrictive measures against the Belarusian regime, targeting persons responsible for the repression of civil society and the democratic opposition. Further work on restrictive measures concerning those benefiting from or supporting the regime will be undertaken with a view to the Foreign Affairs Council in March.

South Caucasus

The Council discussed the situation in South Caucasus and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The EU welcomes the significant progress made in the framework of the Eastern Partnership to strengthen the European Union's relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In this regard, the EU underlines the importance of the Eastern Partnership as a specific Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy.
2. Recalling its core interests in the region, notably related to security and stability, democratic reforms, energy and economic investments, the EU remains committed to promoting prosperity, security, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, good governance, sustainable development and regional cooperation throughout the South Caucasus, and is ready to enhance efforts to support confidence building and peaceful settlements to the conflicts in the region, in close cooperation with all relevant parties.
3. The EU emphasises the importance of the continued implementation of the commitments made in the Joint Declaration of the Warsaw Eastern Partnership Summit, Warsaw 29-30 September 2011, and reiterates that the pace of reforms will determine the intensity of the cooperation, and that partners most engaged in reforms will benefit more from their relationship with the European Union, including closer political association, deeper gradual economic integration in the EU Internal Market, enhancing mobility of citizens in a secure and well managed environment and increased EU support.

For the full text, see [6932/12](#).

Middle East Peace Process

During lunch, ministers debated the latest events in the Middle East, in particular the "Doha declaration" on Palestinian reconciliation.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

EU common military list

The Council updated the EU's common military list referred to in the relevant EU legislation on export controls of military equipment (common position 2008/944/CFSP). This list defines the items subject to export controls by member states as a minimum. It also constitutes a reference point for EU restrictive measures when they prohibit exports of arms and related material.

Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

The Council approved the six-monthly progress report on the implementation of the EU strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, covering activities during the second semester of 2011.

Small arms and light weapons

The Council endorsed the twelfth progress report on the implementation of the EU strategy to combat illicit accumulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition, covering activities during the second half of 2011.

EU-Africa-China dialogue and cooperation on conventional arms exports

In the framework of the EU strategy to combat the illicit accumulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons, the Council approved a cooperation project between civil society, industry and government representatives of the EU, China and the African states concerning conventional arms exports. A joint expert working group on conventional arms and a joint research centre on conventional arms will be established. The objective of this project, with a budget of EUR 830 000, is to identify opportunities for EU-China cooperation to support African states in preventing the illegal trade in and excessive accumulation of small arms and light weapons. Increased awareness and engagement on these issues will contribute to the successful negotiation and implementation of a robust arms trade treaty.

Relations with Yemen

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The EU welcomes the presidential elections in Yemen on 21 February 2012 and subsequent inauguration of President Hadi which mark key moments in Yemen's transition leading to further and comprehensive elections in 2014. The EU congratulates the Yemeni people for their courage and perseverance in bringing the country to this pivotal moment and rejecting attempts to disrupt the election by turning out in significant numbers. The EU also deplores the 25 February attack on the Presidential compound in Mukalla.
2. The election of President Hadi has triggered the second phase of the GCC initiative and the EU calls on all actors to engage in good faith in the upcoming national dialogue and process of constitutional reform, and to renounce the use of violence. The EU will continue to work closely with the transitional institutions and give its full support to the transition process and the aspirations of the Yemeni people for an inclusive, democratic and civil state that guarantees respect for human rights and rule of law.
3. The EU is therefore ready to offer assistance in areas relevant for the transition including a fully inclusive national dialogue, security, governance, institution building and economic development. The EU also stands ready to continue its support to help meeting the humanitarian needs of the Yemeni people and improving the delivery of basic services. The EU looks forward to continued engagement with the Government of Yemen, the international community and the Yemeni people in addressing these challenges."

EU priorities at the UN Human Rights Council

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. Ahead of the 19th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the EU reaffirms its strong support to the Human Rights Council and welcomes the progress made in performing its mandate over the last year.
2. The EU appreciates in particular the readiness of the Human Rights Council to address urgent cases of human rights violations which require immediate attention by the international community. In this respect, the EU welcomes and supports the leading role of the Human Rights Council in addressing over the last year developments and human rights concerns in North Africa and the Middle East, in particular Libya, Syria and Iran, but also in the case of Belarus.
3. The EU recognizes the important contribution of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay, and her Office in monitoring these and other developments, and reaffirms its strong support for her work and that of her staff, while underlining the full independence and integrity of the mandate of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
4. The EU is determined to continue contributing strongly to the important work of the Human Rights Council, in cooperation with all other stakeholders. The EU welcomes the efforts and initiatives of many countries aimed at making the HRC an efficient and effective body that contributes genuinely to the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. The EU stands ready to engage and cooperate with countries from all regions to work together to this end.
5. The EU will actively participate in the sessions of the HRC in 2012 through statements and interventions in the debates under the various agenda items, as well as by introducing thematic and country-specific initiatives targeting key human rights concerns and promoting accountability for human rights violations.
6. In light of the continued brutal crackdown on its citizens by the Syrian Government, the human rights situation in Syria must stay high on the HRC agenda and the HRC should preserve a strong, effective capacity to monitor the situation.

7. The EU expects the Human Rights Council to continue to closely follow the different human rights situations in the world. The EU expects the HRC to extend the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran in order to maintain international attention on the worrying human rights situation in the country. Elsewhere in the region, of special concern are also the situations of Yemen and Bahrain. The situation in Libya should also remain on the agenda of the HRC.
8. The EU will work closely with Japan in order to secure the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to address the continued critical human rights situation in the country.
9. The EU will present a resolution on the situation of human rights in Burma/Myanmar, which will fully reflect the important recent developments in the country and also recognize that serious human rights concerns, particularly in ethnic areas, remain. The resolution will seek to encourage further reforms and seek the extension of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur to this end.
10. The EU will support efforts aimed at keeping the issue of accountability in Sri Lanka on the agenda of the HRC. The EU will encourage the Government of Sri Lanka to fully implement the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission as a first step.
11. Regarding thematic issues, in the light of recent attacks on members of religious minorities and as a follow-up to the Conclusions of the Council on this issue of February 2011, the EU will present a resolution on freedom of religion or belief. Together with Latin American and Caribbean countries, the EU will promote an omnibus resolution on the rights of the child with a specific focus on children and administration of justice. The EU will also work with others, in particular South Africa, to ensure an appropriate follow-up to the landmark resolution adopted last year on discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, and to deliver an adequate response to the High Commissioner's study on the matter. The EU will also support efforts for the promotion and protection of the right of persons with disabilities.
12. The EU underlines the need for the Human Rights Council to maintain its focus on freedom of association and assembly, as well as freedom of expression, including on the internet, and to provide concrete support to human rights activists and civil society organizations whose role is essential for the strengthening of democracy.

13. In preparation of the next meeting of the Working Group of the Human Rights Council on private military and security companies, the Council stresses the importance of effective regulation to prevent or remedy human rights violations which have a connection to the activities of private military and security companies. In this context, the Council endorses the initiative of the High Representative to express the EU's support for the Montreux Document on "*pertinent international legal obligations and good practices for States related to operations of private military and security companies during armed conflict*", as a contribution to the stronger international regulation and control of the activities of private military and security companies.
14. The EU continues to attach great importance to Special Procedures; their access to countries and the free and unhindered contact and cooperation with individuals and civil society are indispensable. The EU also reaffirms the importance of the work of Human Rights Treaty Bodies and therefore welcomes the consultation process initiated by the High Commissioner on how to make them more effective.
15. The EU renews its interest in discussing with partner countries ways and means to implement relevant recommendations stemming from the Universal Periodic Review, as well as recommendations formulated by Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures, including through technical assistance.
16. The Council stresses the importance of raising the priorities for HRC in meetings and contacts with third countries at all levels, with a view to seek their support, as well as to listen to their views and ideas."

Union for the Mediterranean

The Council and the representatives of the governments of the member states, meeting within the Council, adopted conclusions - see [6981/12](#).

Zimbabwe - Restrictive measures

The Council approved a technical amendment to the revised list of persons and entities subject to EU restrictive measures against Zimbabwe, which the Council adopted on 17 February 2012.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY**Operation Atalanta**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council commends the significant contribution of the EU naval operation EUNAVFOR Atalanta to countering piracy. Since its launch in December 2008, ATALANTA has been successfully escorting the World Food Program (WFP) and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) shipments to Somalia, protecting the most vulnerable shipping and deterring, preventing and repressing acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast, thus contributing to the security and economic activity of the countries in the region and of the international community as a whole.
2. The EU's counter-piracy operation is conducted within the comprehensive approach as set out in the EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa and as part of the overall international effort for Somalia and the wider region as most recently outlined during the London conference on Somalia.
3. Recalling its Conclusions of 1st December 2011 and subject to a Council Decision to be adopted as soon as possible, the Council agreed to extend the mandate of EUNAVFOR Atalanta until December 2014."

EU Crisis Management Exercise

The Council approved the exercise specifications for EU crisis management exercise Multi Layer 2012 – ML 12. The exercise will be conducted between 1 and 26 October 2012.
