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Subject: Sahel
- Council conclusions

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the Sahel, as adopted by the Council at its 3477th meeting held on 20 June 2016.

Council conclusions on the Sahel

1. One year ago, the signature of the Mali Peace and Reconciliation Agreement represented a key milestone for peace and stability in the Sahel. At present, the situation in Mali and in the Sahel reflects progress. However, important national, regional and transnational challenges remain. Today, the EU reaffirms its commitment to support the region as outlined in the Sahel Regional Action Plan 2015-2020 adopted on 20 April 2015, and to the implementation of the Mali Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, alongside the other members of the Mediation and the international community.
2. The EU commends the political leadership of the five G5 Sahel countries: Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, as well as the African Union, ECOWAS and the UN in confronting the immense security, migration, governance and development challenges facing the region, and reaffirms its commitment to support country-led and regional initiatives such as the G5 Sahel. In this context, the Council welcomes the second ministerial meeting convened by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR), which took place on 17 June in Brussels, with the Foreign Affairs Ministers, as well as the President and Permanent Secretary of the G5 Sahel. The Council invites the HR, the EU Special Representative for the Sahel, the European Commission and Member States to pursue efforts to further strengthen the G5 Sahel - EU partnership. The Council also welcomes the trilateral meeting with the Foreign Ministers of Libya, Niger and Chad on border management which took place in the margin of the G5 meeting, where the HR highlighted the need for concrete cooperation.

3. The EU stresses the importance of maintaining active engagement in the Sahel region, including in relation to neighbouring countries of the Maghreb region and Libya. The EU plays an important role in the region, applying its full range of instruments in the field of diplomacy, long-term development cooperation, support for human rights, stabilisation efforts, resilience building, humanitarian assistance, and security, including CSDP missions. The Council commends the progress made in implementing a comprehensive approach in the Sahel. It highlights the need to ensure that instruments available are used strategically and in a coordinated way to seek efficiencies and synergies, and tackle the root causes of instability and irregular migration.
4. The EU welcomes the return of constitutional order in Burkina Faso, to which the EU has been a dedicated partner, and the holding of elections in Niger and Chad. It also reiterates its commitment to support inclusive and transparent democratic processes, in particular political dialogue, key democratic institutions and actors, and sustainable development which benefit all the population and are profoundly linked to the improvement of the security situation, as stated in the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel.
5. The EU strongly condemns all terrorist attacks perpetrated by AQIM, Da'esh, Ansar Dine, and Boko Haram and their affiliated groups against civilians, national and international forces in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, as well as against the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). It pays tribute to the civilian victims of terrorist violence and the sacrifices made by the troops of countries committed to supporting the stabilisation of the Sahel. It underlines the importance of bringing the perpetrators to justice and welcomes the continued engagement of France through Operation Barkhane, which remains pivotal to combatting terrorism in the Sahel. In this respect, the EU underlines that all parties must ensure the protection of civilians, including UN personnel and humanitarian aid workers, as well as respect Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law.

6. The EU remains concerned about the pace of progress and modest implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali to date. The EU calls on all signatory parties to do their utmost to swiftly implement the Agreement and to deliver on commitments made in this respect, including the processes of decentralisation and reconciliation, the implementation of the Development Strategy for northern Mali and the acceleration of Security Sector Reform (SSR) and the process of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). The EU welcomes progress made by the signatory parties on agreeing the principles and timetables for interim power-sharing arrangements in the north at the Follow-Up Committee on 13 and 14 June. The EU especially urges all parties to implement the agreed-upon transitional administrations, as well as to submit comprehensive and pre-decided lists for the cantonment of former rebel fighters. Spoilers of the peace process will be held responsible for the consequences of their acts. Durable and inclusive peace building, particularly with the active involvement of women and vulnerable groups, remains of utmost significance. The EU commends the pivotal role of Algeria in the Malian peace process. The EU strongly supports the work of MINUSMA and its close cooperation, including with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General. The EU will continue to support SSR and DDR, in close coordination with MINUSMA and CSDP missions. The Council also welcomes the participation by EU Member States in MINUSMA, EUTM Mali, and EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger.
7. The EU is alarmed by the increase in smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings, drugs and arms in the Sahel region. Such illegal activities have a negative impact on the region's stability and security. They also form a source of income for terrorist groups and other threats to stability in the Sahel. The EU is also concerned over the risk of criminal networks undermining the rule of law, state authority and the proper functioning of the security and justice systems of countries in the region. The EU is ready to work with the countries in the region to put in place effective measures to disrupt the operations of criminal networks and related illegal business models. The support to capacity-building in the field of security for the Sahel countries is a key priority, and the EU and Member States are committed to using all appropriate instruments to reach this objective.

8. The EU considers it both urgent and essential to tackle the rise in numbers of irregular migrants leaving West Africa through the Sahel with the aim of reaching the EU, in particular their transit through Niger to Libya, often risking their lives in the process. Building on the Valletta Action Plan and with reference to Council Conclusions on External Aspects of Migration of 23 May 2016, the EU recalls that the migration crisis as it stands requires both immediate and long-term responses through a broader, balanced, approach based on the principle of mutual responsibility and dialogue as well as an effective tackling of the root causes. Cooperation on all migration-related issues, including on return and readmission in the countries of origin, remains key. It is important to address the root causes of irregular migration in the Sahel region, including through efforts to increase human development and security. The strengthening of integrated management of cross-border issues is a crucial element for the stability and security of the Sahel region and neighbouring countries. The EU reiterates its commitment to support migration management and integrated border management in the Sahel region and around Lake Chad, through actions in the fields of resilience building, governance, development and security and as part of an overall comprehensive approach.

9. In this context, the Council takes note of the proposal by the European Commission on the establishment of new Partnership Frameworks to better manage migration starting with priority third countries of origin and transit.

10. The EU welcomes the contribution of the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) as an important additional tool to be used strategically to reinforce the comprehensive approach for stability, security and resilience in the Sahel. The EU will continue stepping up engagement with the Sahel countries based on the principle of mutual responsibility. In this context, EUTF projects, aimed at addressing assessed needs and achieving measurable impact in both the immediate and long term, in a sustainable manner, will continue to be essential as part of the long-standing EU cooperation efforts in the region. The EU welcomes projects adopted, at the request of our G5 Sahel partners, among others security and border management projects to ensure more effective territorial control and to tackle more effectively illicit flows and trafficking. The EU emphasises the need for close coordination amongst the various initiatives, and a longer-term SSR agenda.

11. The EU stresses the importance of a comprehensive approach to tackle the multiple challenges of demographic growth, and reaffirms youth as a key priority in the Sahel. Offering an inclusive basic education, professional training as well as better employment opportunities, job creation and economic prospects to young people is essential in order to consolidate progress in terms of development, to combat violent extremism and radicalisation, and to avoid increased migration pressures. The EU calls for inclusive and gender-based initiatives aimed at strengthening the essential role of women in Sahelian societies. Addressing demographic growth will also require better progress on women's empowerment and equal education opportunities for girls in order to ensure sustainable development, growth and prosperity in the region.

12. The EU highlights the continued and evolving contribution to stability in the Sahel region through its CSDP missions in Mali and Niger, namely EUCAP Sahel Mali, EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger, in close cooperation with their host governments. The EU underlines the importance of enhanced engagement with the region, including by building on CSDP efforts like the provision of training and capacity building and support to the G5 Sahel regional cooperation. This enhanced engagement should go along with strengthened coordination between the CSDP missions in Sahel, other EU and MS instruments and programmes in the region, including the EUTF, and also within the framework of the initiative on Capacity Building in support of Security and Development (CBSD). While retaining the focus on the core mandates, the Council invites the EEAS, in close consultation with Member States and in liaison with Commission services, to further examine the possibilities for the regionalisation of the CSDP missions as early as possible.
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