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Foreign Affairs

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President

Catherine Ashton

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy

P R E S S

Main results of the Council

Ukraine

The Council discussed recent events in Ukraine. The EU is following the situation in Ukraine and the continuing political crisis with deep concern and remains ready to respond quickly to any deterioration on the ground. The Council welcomed the recent steps, in particular the decision to revoke the laws which unduly restricted the exercise of fundamental freedoms. Further efforts are necessary to find a lasting solution to the current political crisis.

The EU remains committed to supporting Ukraine's reform course. The Council also reiterated its commitment to signing the Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, as soon as Ukraine is ready, convinced that this Agreement does not constitute the final goal in EU-Ukraine cooperation.

Cuba

The Council adopted negotiating directives for a political dialogue and co-operation agreement with the Republic of Cuba. Welcoming the decision, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton said: "I am confident these negotiations will help consolidate our engagement with Cuba. This is not a policy change from the past. Just as we want to support reform and modernisation in Cuba, we have consistently raised human rights concerns which will remain at the core of this relationship."

Central African Republic

The Council established the EU military operation in the Central African Republic, which is to contribute to a safe and secure environment in the Bangui area for up to six months, with a view to handing over to African partners. EUFOR RCA is to deploy as soon as possible.

At the same time, the Council remains deeply concerned at the security and humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic, and condemned the escalating cycle of violence and retaliation. It welcomed the new transitional authorities in the Central African Republic and reiterated the EU's commitment to support them in their efforts to implement the transition agreement, restore public order and meet the needs of the population.

CONTENTS¹**PARTICIPANTS..... 5****ITEMS DEBATED**

Eastern Partnership	7
Syrian conflict	8
Southern neighbourhood	10
- Egypt.....	10
- Libya	13
- Tunisia	13
Yemen	14
Central African Republic	17

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED*FOREIGN AFFAIRS*

– EU human rights policy	19
– Euro-Mediterranean industrial cooperation	24
– Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement with Cuba.....	24
– EU strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction	24
– Restrictive measures - Syria	24
– Relations with Lebanon.....	24
– Restrictive measures with a view to combating terrorism	24

¹

- 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.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

- EU military operation in the Central African Republic 25
- EU training mission in Mali 25
- European Defence Agency budget for 2014..... 25
- EU Institute for Security Studies 25

WRITTEN PROCEDURE

- Foreign direct investment - investor-state arbitration..... 25

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ITEMS DEBATED

Eastern Partnership

During lunch, ministers took stock of the development of the EU's Eastern Partnership and on relations with the Republic of Moldova and Georgia. Following a debrief by the EU High Representative on her recent visit to Kiev, ministers exchanged views on the latest events in **Ukraine**.

The Council adopted the following conclusions on Ukraine:

- "1. The EU follows with deep concern the situation and the continuing political crisis in Ukraine and remains ready to respond quickly to any deterioration on the ground. The Council is alarmed by the human rights situation, including violence, cases of missing persons, torture and intimidation and deplores the deaths and injuries sustained on all sides. The Council calls on all actors to refrain from violence and dissociate themselves from radical actions. The authorities should undertake all necessary measures to respect and protect the Ukrainian citizens' fundamental rights. Any demonstrations should be pursued by peaceful means. The continuous cases of deliberate targeting of organisers and participants of peaceful protests as well as of journalists must immediately be stopped. The Council continues to urge the authorities to duly investigate all acts of violence in a transparent and impartial manner and bring the perpetrators to justice. The current atmosphere of impunity which allows for such acts to take place must be addressed. The EU also encourages the Government of Ukraine to appoint its member of the Council of Europe Investigation Advisory Panel without delay.

2. The Council welcomes the recent steps, in particular the decision of the Verkhovna Rada on 28 January to revoke the laws which unduly restricted the exercise of fundamental freedoms. Further efforts are necessary to find a durable solution to the current political crisis. The EU urges all sides to seek, through an inclusive dialogue, a democratic solution that would meet the aspirations of the Ukrainian people. The EU invites Ukraine to reach out for international mechanisms for crisis resolution. A new and inclusive government, constitutional reform bringing back more balance of powers, and preparations for free and fair presidential elections would contribute to bringing Ukraine back on a sustainable path of reforms. The EU stands ready to provide expert support in all areas judged useful and encourages Ukraine also to draw on the expertise of international organisations such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the United Nations. The EU appreciates the effort of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and its offer of support.

3. The EU remains committed to supporting Ukraine's reform course. On the basis of a new Ukrainian Government pursuing economic and political reforms, the EU is ready to further pursue its efforts with the international community and international financial institutions to assist Ukraine, in line with well-established conditions, to find a sustainable way out of its difficult economic situation. The Council invites the High Representative and the Commission to continue efforts to this end.
4. The Council commends the High Representative's and the Commission's tireless efforts to facilitate dialogue between actors in Ukraine. The EU will remain actively engaged with Ukraine and maintain its high level presence, in order to assist the stakeholders in their efforts to stabilise the situation and to bring Ukraine out of the current crisis.
5. Recalling its conclusions of 10 December 2012 and of the European Council of 19-20 December 2013, the Council reiterates its commitment to signing the Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, as soon as Ukraine is ready. The Council emphasizes the right of all sovereign states to make their own foreign policy decisions without undue external pressure. The Council expresses its conviction that this Agreement does not constitute the final goal in EU-Ukraine cooperation."

Syrian conflict

The Council debated recent developments concerning the Syrian conflict, in particular the "Geneva II" peace talks that started on 22 January. It also exchanged views about the regional implications of the crisis in Syria and adopted the following conclusions on **Iraq**:

- "1. The EU reaffirms its commitment to assist Iraq in its transition to democracy, recalling that the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq are essential elements in building a secure and prosperous state for all its citizens and in bringing stability to the whole region. The EU is deeply concerned by the deteriorating security situation in Iraq, the increased terrorist threat facing the country and the marked increase in violence that have resulted in casualty figures not seen since 2008. The EU condemns in the strongest terms the latest series of bomb attacks in Iraq, including on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and expressed its condolences and sympathy to the families of the numerous victims.
2. The EU considers that internal political divisions and sectarian tensions have significantly contributed to the deterioration of the security situation inside Iraq, to which a security response alone cannot be sufficient. The EU renews its call on all of Iraq's political and religious leaders to engage in dialogue and to speak out against sectarianism and violence. It encourages the Government of Iraq to reinforce the rule of law and take decisive measures to promote inclusiveness and advance reconciliation, as Iraq's long term security and stability depend on an inclusive political process.

3. The EU is closely following the developments in Anbar province, including in the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, and encourages the Government of Iraq to strengthen cooperation between its security forces and local Anbar tribes. The EU is deeply concerned by the large numbers of Internally Displaced Persons fleeing the conflict zones and emphasises the importance of protecting civilians. The EU also encourages efforts by the Government of Iraq to ensure the provision of essential services as well as access by humanitarian agencies to areas affected by the fighting.
4. The EU expresses its support to the Iraqi authorities in the fight against terrorism and is ready to cooperate with Iraq on a comprehensive response to this global threat that is compliant with human rights and international humanitarian law.
5. The EU recognises the negative repercussions of the Syrian conflict on security in Iraq, and reiterates its commitment to continue working with the Government of Iraq, which has a constructive role to play, and with others towards finding a political solution to the crisis. The EU commends Iraq for receiving civilians fleeing the violence in Syria and recalls the importance of maintaining an open borders policy. The EU offers its continuing support in bringing urgent humanitarian aid to the affected populations.
6. The EU welcomes the passing of amendments to Iraq's electoral law in November, which has paved the way for general elections due to take place on 30 April. The EU underlines the utmost importance of these elections for Iraq's continued democratic transition and calls on all actors to ensure that they are inclusive, transparent, credible and held on time. The EU welcomes Iraq's request for support to elections and is evaluating all possible options with a view to assisting Iraq.
7. The EU welcomes the good progress in the implementation of the EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, including the successful holding of several expert-level meetings in October and November 2013 and of the first EU-Iraq Cooperation Council on 20 January 2014. The EU will continue to strengthen relations with Iraq and to advance cooperation in all fields of mutual interest, providing targeted assistance in jointly agreed areas. The EU will also continue to assist Iraq in promoting democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law, including by building on the experiences and achievements of the EUJUST LEX-Iraq mission.
8. The EU expresses its concern at the alarming rate of executions, reiterates its firm stance against the death penalty, and calls on the Iraqi authorities to introduce a moratorium.

9. The EU supports the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and those of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to assist the Government of Iraq in strengthening its democratic institutions and processes, promoting the rule of law, facilitating regional dialogue, improving the provision of basic services and ensuring the protection of human rights."

Southern neighbourhood

The Council debated events in the EU's southern neighbourhood.

- Egypt

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. Three years have passed since Egyptians from all walks of life rose against a repressive regime calling for freedom, human dignity, social justice and a better economy. The EU regards Egypt as an important neighbour and partner and has been standing by the Egyptian people throughout the transition period and remains committed in its support to them.
2. The EU reaffirms the importance of its relationship with Egypt and the continued support it gives to the Egyptian people in their desire to establish a democratic and prosperous society that enshrines dignity, the rule of law and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights.
3. The EU takes positive note of the adoption of the new Constitution by referendum on 14 and 15 January. An important step of the road map has been achieved. However, the EU deplores the absence of a fully inclusive process, the lack of attempts to overcome the polarization of society and the closing of political space for dissenting opinion before and during the referendum. It is now important that the remaining steps of the road map are implemented, in particular by finalizing the electoral cycle, the media code of ethics, empowering youth in the political process and the establishment of a higher commission for national reconciliation.

4. The EU welcomes that the new Constitution enshrines human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, assembly and women's rights. Existing and future national legislation has to be in full compliance and implemented in line with the Constitution and international standards. The EU encourages the Egyptian interim authorities to cooperate with the Office the High Commissioner for Human Rights and looks forward to the opening of the regional office in Egypt. The Constitution should be applied in a way that ensures full civilian control over all branches of government, and civilians should be tried in civilian courts at all times.
5. The EU condemns in the clearest possible terms all acts of violence. It is therefore with great concern that the EU followed the recent violent events and it deplores the loss of life during the constitutional referendum, and on the occasion of the third anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, including from the disproportionate use of force and of live ammunition. In this context, the EU takes note that the killing of protesters and security forces during violent events since 30 June 2013 have not been investigated, and calls on the Egyptian interim government to act on its promise and complete a transparent and independent investigation.
6. The EU condemns in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attacks in the Sinai and other parts of Egypt, in which a number of civilians and security personnel have been killed or injured. No cause can justify terrorist violence. The EU reaffirms its commitment to support the stability and security in Egypt.
7. The EU reiterates its calls on all Egyptians to halt the cycle of violence and cease all actions that incite further violence, such as provocations, hate speech - including against Christian and other religious communities - and political statements that only serve to increase polarisation. It is only then that lasting stability and economic recovery can be achieved.
8. The EU welcomes the announcement of elections and reiterates that only an inclusive political process will lead to a democratically elected government and a fair representation of different political views in the future parliament. The EU also reiterates its readiness to observe the upcoming elections, if conditions are met, and calls on the Egyptian interim authorities to ensure an environment conducive to inclusive, transparent and credible elections, including a level playing field for the election campaigns. In view of the recent developments, the Council recalls that no political groups should be excluded or banned as long as they renounce violence and respect democratic principles. It also recalls that decisions on the legality of parties must be based on clear evidence and due process of law.

9. The building of a deep and sustainable democracy will only succeed with the establishment of democratic, transparent and accountable institutions that protect all people of Egypt and their fundamental rights. The EU is concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation, including the indiscriminate detention of political opposition and activists. Freedoms of expression, assembly and peaceful protest must be safeguarded. The EU reiterates its support to and recalls the important role of an active and independent civil society - including NGOs - as well as the role of the youth, as key components of any democratic society.
10. The EU deplores the deteriorating climate for the press. It calls upon the Egyptian interim authorities and state media to ensure a safe working environment for all journalists and to end politicized arrests as well as intimidation of and incitement against domestic and foreign journalists.
11. The EU continues to be concerned about selective justice against the political opposition. The EU calls on the Egyptian interim authorities, in line with international standards, to ensure the defendants' rights to a fair and timely trial based on clear charges and proper and independent investigations, as well as the right of access and contact to lawyers and family members.
12. The EU reiterates its growing concern over the economic situation of the country and the negative impact on the most vulnerable groups of society. The EU recalls the crucial importance for Egypt to undertake necessary, fundamental economic reforms to ensure stability, investment, improved business environment, progress towards social justice, including better access to education. The EU will continue its support towards improving the social and economic conditions of the people, especially the poor, and stands ready to assist Egypt in carrying out these reform measures.
13. The EU stresses the importance of Egypt's continued engagement in the region in order to enhance stability, peace and prosperity for Egypt and its neighbours. To this end, The EU is committed to work with Egypt as a key partner in the region.
14. The EU reiterates its readiness to assist the people of Egypt in their quest for a stable, inclusive, democratic and prosperous Egypt, and the Council welcomes the High Representative's sustained engagement, including her regular visits to the region. The EU also reiterates its willingness to maintain dialogue with all political forces that reject violence and support credible initiatives for dialogue and reconciliation through the good offices of the High Representative and the EU Special Representatives.
15. It reconfirms the Council Conclusions of 21 August 2013."

- Libya

The Council took stock of the political and security situation in Libya.

- Tunisia

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The EU congratulates Tunisia on its adoption of its new democratic constitution guaranteeing fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary. The constitution is an important step forward in Tunisia's democratic transition process. In a regional context beset with problems, it brings hope and sets an example for people struggling peacefully for their fundamental rights and freedoms to be recognised. On this occasion, the European Union would like to express its heartfelt congratulations on this remarkable result and wishes the Tunisian people every success in realising the democratic aspirations born of the 2011 revolution, which set off a transition process that extends beyond its own borders. The EU salutes the National Constituent Assembly and thereby the Tunisian people for this achievement.
2. Thanks to the joint efforts and the spirit of responsibility and compromise of the authorities, politicians and civil society, in particular through the action of the "Quartet", 26 January 2014 will remain a founding date for Tunisian democracy.
3. The stakeholders of Tunisian society have managed to react positively to internal political challenges and to take the initiative to implement a national dialogue tailored to its particular circumstances. They did so despite the tragic political assassinations and the acts of terrorism which caused such grief in the country in 2013 and whose perpetrators should be pursued and punished. This process has enabled it to maintain civil peace, preserve the stability of the State and make progress in the constitutional debate. The conclusion of these proceedings lays the foundations for major institutional reforms, including reforms addressing social and economic and security challenges and the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular as regards equality between women and men and freedom of opinion, expression, information, religion and belief.

4. The European Union offers the new government led by Mr Mehdi Jomaa its best wishes for success and encourages it to pursue the democratic transition in a climate of calm, in particular by means of an ongoing dialogue with all parties involved in the process, including civil society, with a view to organising free, inclusive, transparent and credible elections in a safe environment and as quickly as possible. The EU reiterates its support for the transition process and its commitment to accompany Tunisia in preparing for its upcoming elections, which must allow the Tunisian people to choose their leaders freely.
5. Recalling its conclusions of 18 November 2013, the European Union invites the new government, in consultation with all social partners, to press ahead with the measures necessary to promote economic recovery and employment. The EU confirms its willingness to support the Tunisian authorities in their efforts to face all the social, economic and security challenges facing the country so as to meet the expectations and needs of the populace, especially the young.
6. The European Union stands by the people of Tunisia in these important times for the future of their nation, and reiterates its support for the ongoing transition process. To that end, the EU, which has doubled its support since 2011, will increase its technical and financial assistance, and is ready to speed up various aspects of negotiations that will make it possible to improve Tunisia's economic growth prospects. Following the positive developments in Tunisia and in line with the spirit and the principles of the new European Neighbourhood Policy, the EU undertakes to strengthen its privileged partnership with Tunisia and its support for the social, economic and political reforms, in the service of the democratic aspirations of Tunisians."

Yemen

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

- "1. The European Union salutes the positive conclusion of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) and commends the work and collaborative spirit of its delegates and the role played by President Hadi. The National Dialogue has set an example in the region of an inclusive consultation process open to all and aimed at responding to the aspirations of the people. This has closed an essential phase in Yemen's transition, implemented on the basis of the 2011 Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative.

2. The country now has to focus on the subsequent steps of the constituent phase, which includes drafting a new constitution which preserves the unity, sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Yemen, implementing the NDC outcomes, timely organisation of a Constitutional referendum and general elections conducted in a transparent and credible way. Political stability will be crucial to tackle the numerous urgent challenges with which Yemen is confronted. This will require a Yemeni led process driven by determination, engagement and cooperation from all actors. The EU reaffirms its commitment to accompany and support Yemen in this endeavour and condemns any acts aimed at undermining state institutions and the transition process.
3. The EU reiterates its growing concern about the deteriorating security situation and condemns in the strongest terms the recent wave of violence and terrorist attacks, including the attack in Sana'a on 5 December during which 52 people, among those two German development aid workers, were killed and other targeted killings of civilians. The EU calls on the Yemeni government to thoroughly investigate these incidents. The EU continues to be concerned about the increasing number of kidnappings and attempted kidnappings in Yemen, including to elicit ransom payments to strengthen terrorist groups. The EU reiterates the need for compliance with international law when combating terrorism.
4. The EU considers security an essential prerequisite for the success of the transition period and the socio-economic development of Yemen. It is therefore crucial to progress urgently with the thorough-going reform of the security sector, following international best practices in full respect of human rights and the rule of law. The reform should include increased presence of state security forces in the regions and enhanced cooperation with local communities.
5. The EU recalls its concern about the slow pace of economic recovery and urges the Government of Yemen, with the assistance of the international community, to undertake much needed reforms. Improvement of public finance management, fight against corruption and reform of the public administration, are all essential measures to allow economic recovery and to improve the living conditions of the Yemeni people. Urgent action on fuel subsidy reform particularly, is required to improve fiscal sustainability and increase spending on growth, social protection, and basic services. The EU calls on the Government of Yemen to conclude swiftly an agreement with the International Monetary Fund and to advance the implementation of internationally pledged support.

6. The EU remains deeply concerned that more than half of the population of Yemen is affected by the humanitarian crises and in need of some form of assistance. Joint efforts are necessary to battle acute malnutrition which affects 1 million children under the age of five. The situation has recently deteriorated in northern and southern regions affected by clashes between armed groups and hosting an internally displaced vulnerable population. The EU urges all parties to cooperate to protect civilians to allow immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access. The EU, as one of the main providers of humanitarian assistance to Yemen, welcomes the new Strategic Response Plan of the UN and partners in Yemen to respond to the widespread humanitarian needs and urges donors to fund projects in line with the priorities therein.
7. The EU calls on Yemen to implement the NDC recommendations on rights and freedoms including protecting the rights of women and children in particular reinstating legislation setting a minimum age for marriage and to end the use and recruitment of children by Yemeni Government forces by signing and implementing an action plan to this effect.
8. The EU reaffirms its readiness to increase its support to the government and the population of Yemen. It looks forward to continued engagement with the authorities and the civil society, alongside the international community, in order to address the humanitarian, development and security needs of all the Yemeni people."

Central African Republic

The Council was briefed about preparations for the deployment of the EU military operation in the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA). It adopted the decision establishing the operation (see below under "other items approved"). In addition, it adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. Recalling the Council conclusions of 20 January 2014, the European Union (EU) remains deeply concerned by the security and humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic. It strongly condemns the continued acts of violence and retaliation, which have tragic consequences for civilians and serious implications for the Central African region. In this context, it applauds the joint efforts of the African MISCA force and the French Sangaris operation, which have enabled the country's collapse to be averted.
2. The EU is pleased that new transitional authorities have been established in the Central African Republic on the basis of extensive consultations and compliance with the rules of the Constitutional Charter. It welcomes the election of the new Head of State of the Transition, Ms Catherine Samba-Panza, and the appointment of a new transitional government under the leadership of Mr André Nzapayeke, who should enable the relaunch of the transition process. The EU also invites them to work together to tackle the security situation, which remains alarming, and to meet the complex challenges faced by the country. In this context, it reiterates in particular that the primary responsibility of the national transitional authorities is to protect civilians. The EU calls on all stakeholders to contribute constructively and peacefully to the transition process with a view to holding elections in February 2015 at the latest.
3. The EU urges all parties to immediately cease violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. It points to the fact that the perpetrators of such violations will be held accountable for their crimes in court. In that respect, the EU welcomes the appointment of the members of the International Commission of Inquiry on violations of international humanitarian law and human rights in the Central African Republic since 1 January 2013, and the commitment of the new transition president to tackling impunity. The EU encourages religious leaders to continue their initiatives aiming at reconciliation and religious coexistence.
4. The EU reiterates its commitment to supporting the new authorities in their efforts to implement the transition agreement, restore public order, work towards national reconciliation and respond to the needs of the population. It commends the mediation work of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and invites it to continue its facilitation of the political transition alongside the African Union (AU).

5. The EU welcomes the decisive action of the United Nations, including that of the Special Representative of the United Nations' Secretary-General, and the unanimous adoption by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) of Resolution 2134(2014), which extends and reinforces the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA). The resolution also authorises the deployment of a European military operation in the Central African Republic. The EU welcomes the UNSC's decision to impose restrictive measures of the sanctions regime on individuals who undermine the peace, stability or security of the Central African Republic, or are involved in human rights violations or a violation of the arms embargo, in accordance with the above resolution.
6. Following the adoption of the UNSC resolution, and convinced of the need to support African efforts in the CAR and to reinforce European involvement there within the framework of its comprehensive approach by means of active EU contribution to the stabilisation of the CAR as part of the CSDP, the Council has decided to establish a CSDP-EUFOR CAR military operation. In accordance with the decision establishing it, the military bridging operation will provide temporary support for a period of up to six months in order to help create a secure environment in the Bangui area, with a view to handing over to the African Union mission, MISCA. This objective takes full account of the Security Council resolutions, and in particular of the possibility of MISCA being transformed into a UN peacekeeping operation. The EUFOR CAR military force would thereby contribute, within its area of operations, to international and regional efforts to protect the populations most at risk and would contribute to the free movement of civilians. All these efforts will create the conditions that are required in order to provide humanitarian aid for those who need it.
7. The Council has assigned the EU OHQ in Larissa and approved the appointment of Major-General Philippe Pontières as commander of the EUFOR CAR operation; he has been invited to continue operational planning on an accelerated basis in order to enable the operation to be deployed as soon as possible.
8. Lastly, the Council emphasises the importance of close coordination with the partners involved, in particular the Central African authorities, the AU, the UN and France, to ensure good cooperation and complementarity in the efforts under way to restore stability in the CAR. In this context, the EU welcomes the statements made at the donors' conference in support of MISCA organised by the African Union on 1 February 2014."

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****EU human rights policy**

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the EU's priorities in the UN human rights fora:

- "1. Ahead of the 25th regular session of UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and following the conclusion of the Third Committee of the 68th UN General Assembly, the EU reaffirms its strong commitment to and support for the HRC and other United Nations bodies tasked with the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.
2. The EU is, and will remain, a vocal advocate of human rights, and lends its full support to the multilateral human rights system, which plays a critical role in the promotion and protection of universal human rights norms and standards and in the monitoring of compliance. This commitment, affirmed in the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy, guides EU action in this area.
3. The EU pays tribute, at the end of her tenure, to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay and her staff for their dedicated work, including in raising awareness for the plight of victims of human rights violations worldwide, and mainstreaming human rights across the United Nations system. The EU supports and defends the independence and integrity of the mandate of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which, over the 20 years of its existence, has greatly contributed to advancing the realization of all human rights for all.
4. Through close cooperation with all countries, institutions and stakeholders, the EU will be an active and determined participant in the UN Human Rights Council and the General Assembly sessions of 2014. The EU is committed to working at the UN to promote and protect the universality of human rights, to prevent and respond to serious human rights violations, and to express its concerns and positions, contributing to debates and pursuing thematic and country-specific initiatives.
5. The EU will continue to promote full cooperation with and support to the UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures, upholding the independence of the mandate holders and supporting their free and unhindered contact and cooperation with individuals and civil society. The EU also reaffirms its commitment to the Universal Period Review and calls upon all countries to effectively cooperate with this mechanism.

6. The EU reaffirms its unwavering support for the UN Human Rights Treaty Body system. Maintaining their independence remains a key objective for the EU, and the EU will seek to improve their capacity to fulfil their mandate effectively and efficiently, while ensuring their independence. The EU will encourage steps by all stakeholders in this regard.
7. The situation in Syria remains one of the most acute and dire human rights and humanitarian crises of recent history, which continues to require the urgent and undivided attention of the UN human rights bodies. At the upcoming HRC session the EU will once again urge all parties, especially the regime, to end all violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law, press strongly for immediate and unhindered humanitarian access across the entire country, and seek to ensure accountability, ending impunity. The EU will continue to support the Commission of Inquiry and urge for its immediate and unfettered access to the country. The EU again reiterates its call on the UN Security Council to urgently address the situation in Syria in these aspects, including on a possible referral to the International Criminal Court.
8. The grave and systematic human rights violations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea deserve the attention of the international community. The EU strongly supports the work of the Commission of Inquiry investigating the human rights situation in the DPRK, and will ensure follow-up to its report and recommendations upon publication, including on accountability.
9. Against the backdrop of an evolving political situation, the EU remains very concerned by the enduring human rights abuses and violations in Iran, including a recent spate of executions. The EU will continue to push for tangible changes and access for UN mandate holders. In view of this the EU will support the extension of the Special Rapporteur's mandate and keeping the country on the agenda of the General Assembly.
10. The EU will actively support efforts to enhance accountability and reconciliation in Sri Lanka, including a credible and independent investigation into the alleged severe crimes during the civil war, as well as to address the current human rights situation in the country.
11. The EU welcomes the cooperation with Myanmar/Burma on a second consensus resolution of the General Assembly in 2013, reflecting the progress made in many areas, as well as remaining concerns such as the situation in Rakhine State, inter-communal violence, and the situation in conflict-affected ethnic areas, such as Kachin State. The EU will continue to engage in active dialogue with Myanmar/Burma and other stakeholders to maintain international attention on developments and encourage further progress, and press for the swift establishment of the OHCHR country office.

11. The EU will continue to support the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus as he addresses the troubling situation in that country, and will support the further renewal of his mandate as a key EU priority for the 26th session of the HRC. In particular, the EU will, through the HRC, raise attention to the systemic and systematic violations of human rights. The EU will also reiterate its call for the prompt and unconditional release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners.
12. The EU continues to call on all parties to the conflict in the Central African Republic to end the violent attacks against the population and human rights violations, and to implement the resolution of the Human Rights Council Special Session. In view of the worrying situation in South Sudan, where hostilities have resulted in suffering, loss of life, and large-scale human rights violations, the EU will press for an adequate response of the HRC. The EU will highlight the dire situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where pervasive human rights violations continue to take place, including gender-based violence, sexual violence as a method of war, and crimes against children. The EU will also support that the HRC addresses the human rights situation in Eritrea, Mali and Sudan.
13. As a firm advocate of the abolition of the death penalty the EU will express its strong and principled opposition to the death penalty through all appropriate UN bodies and channels. The EU, in discussion with all sides, will seek to consolidate and strengthen a broad cross-regional coalition in support of the resolution on a moratorium on the death penalty.
14. The EU will continue to advocate for Freedom of Religion or Belief as a fundamental human right at the UN and call for the implementation of respective resolutions by all UN Member States. The EU looks forward to enhanced collaboration with partners in this area and will continue to support the work of the UN Special Rapporteur.
15. On the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the EU, in close cooperation with Latin American and Caribbean countries, will again introduce initiatives to promote the rights and the protection of children. The EU will maintain its support for the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence Against Children and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

16. The EU will work to advance women's rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment throughout the year. We remain committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and in this context sexual and reproductive health and rights (see Council documents 10914/13 and 11656/13). The EU will continue to be vocal against all forms of violence against women, including sexual violence in conflict, and encourage the UN to be active in this area. The EU will continue to promote UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security. The EU will continue to strive towards the eradication of female genital mutilation and build on the successful adoption of resolutions at the Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly on child, early, and forced marriage.
17. The EU will strive to ensure the inclusion of a rights-based approach, encompassing all human rights, and gender equality, in the post-2015 global agenda. The Commission on the Status of Women will focus this year on "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls", and the EU will seize this as a key opportunity to address these issues.
18. Freedom of opinion and expression is a fundamental right of every human being, an essential foundation for democracy, the rule of law and the participation in public affairs, as well as peace, stability and sustainable inclusive development. The EU will work to defend and strengthen the international protection of these rights, offline and online, and pay special attention to the protection of journalists and bloggers.
19. Freedom of association and assembly are key to the realisation of other human rights and cornerstones of democracy, yet civil society is under threat in many countries around the world as a result of legislative and other restrictions. The EU will continue to address restrictions on freedom of association and assembly, as well as intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders and other civil society representatives. The EU, on the 10th anniversary of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, is committed to protecting space and promoting a safe, enabling environment for a vibrant civil society.
20. In the same vein, the EU will continue to ensure that the UN General Assembly, the HRC, and the treaty bodies remain an open and safe space for civil society representatives and human rights defenders to present concerns on human rights violations and to contribute to debates in these multilateral fora without fear or restraint. Particularly, in the face of recent incidents of reprisal, the EU will step up its efforts against all forms of harassment, intimidation or persecution of those who cooperate, have cooperated or seek to cooperate with the UN human rights bodies, and will actively support the strengthening of UN monitoring in this regard.

21. As we commemorate the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, the EU will continue to express its strong and principled opposition to torture, which remains a serious global problem. The EU presses for the full and effective implementation of the Convention and calls for a concerted effort to eradicate torture worldwide. The EU will also maintain its support for the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
22. The EU will remain a staunch and steadfast advocate for human rights for all, including LGBTI persons. Discrimination and violence perpetrated against people based on sexual orientation and gender identity is entirely unacceptable. The EU will proactively engage partners in the promotion of the human rights of LGBTI persons in UN fora.
23. The EU will continue full and constructive engagement with all countries on the fight against racism, a phenomenon that runs counter to the founding principles of the EU and the UN. All men and women are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and the EU firmly believes that the global fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance should be rigorously pursued by the UN.
24. The EU will contribute to the preparations for the high-level event during UNGA69 Ministerial week 2014 also known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, paying particular attention to the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in this process..
25. As a firm advocate of the universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated nature of all human rights, the EU will intensify its efforts to promote and protect economic, social and cultural rights. The EU will contribute to shaping the agenda on economic, social and cultural rights with specific focus on the UN Human Rights Council and in close cooperation with UN Special Rapporteurs covering the respective rights
26. The EU will encourage and contribute to the dissemination and implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which the Human Rights Council endorsed in 2011, including, as appropriate, through participation in relevant debates and workshops at the UN, support to the multi-stakeholder process, contacts with third countries and the development of national action plans.
27. The United Nations human rights bodies and mechanisms are an important means to advance the human rights agenda and address human rights concerns and violations around the world. The EU will engage countries from all regions and regional organisations to actively support an effective UN human rights system that can foster the realisation of all human rights for all people everywhere."

Euro-Mediterranean industrial cooperation

The Council approved a declaration with a view to the Union for the Mediterranean ministerial meeting on Euro-Mediterranean industrial cooperation, to take place in Brussels on 19 February 2014.

Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement with Cuba

The Council adopted negotiation directives for a political dialogue and cooperation agreement between the EU and its member states, of the one part, and the Republic of Cuba, of the other part. For more details, see [press release](#).

EU strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

The Council endorsed the six-monthly progress report on the implementation of the EU strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, covering activities carried out in the second half of 2013.

Restrictive measures - Syria

The Council amended the EU restrictive measures against Syria so as to allow member states to authorise the release of frozen funds of the Central Bank of Syria and of Syrian state-owned entities in order to make payments on behalf of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for activities related to the OPCW verification mission and the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons, and in particular to the OPCW Syrian Special Trust Fund.

Relations with Lebanon

The Council adopted the EU position within the EU-Lebanon Association Council with regard to the adoption of a recommendation on the EU-Lebanon action plan.

Restrictive measures with a view to combating terrorism

The Council endorsed the results of the review of the EU list of persons, groups and entities involved in terrorist acts and updated the corresponding regulation. One entity was removed from the list, Stichting Al Aqsa, following their decision to wind down their activities.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

EU military operation in the Central African Republic

The Council adopted the Council Decision establishing an EU military operation in the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA). For more information, see [press release](#).

At the same time, the Council authorized the EU High Representative to open negotiations with the Central African Republic for an agreement on the status of that EU military operation.

EU training mission in Mali

The Council authorised the opening of negotiations for a participation agreement between the EU and the Swiss Confederation on its participation in the EU military mission to contribute to the training of the Malian armed forces in Mali (EUTM Mali).

European Defence Agency budget for 2014

The Council adopted the 2014 budget of the European Defence Agency and its staff establishment plan for that year. The budget amounts to €30.5 million.

EU Institute for Security Studies

The Council adopted a decision establishing a legal basis for the European Union Institute for Security Studies and repealed the previous basis, i.e. joint action 2001/554/CFSP. The mission of the institute is to contribute to the development of EU strategic thinking in the field of the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy and Common Security and Defence Policy, through policy-oriented analysis, information, dissemination and debate.

WRITTEN PROCEDURE

Foreign direct investment - investor-state arbitration

The Council adopted a decision authorising the Commission to negotiate a Convention on the application of the rules on transparency for investor-state arbitration under the auspices of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law in respect of the provisions falling within the Union's exclusive competence on foreign direct investment and investor-state arbitration against the Union.
