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President **Konrad Mizzi**
Maltese minister

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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>).
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ITEMS DEBATED

Clean energy for all Europeans

Ministers gave their first reactions to the Commission's extensive '**Clean Energy**' legislative package, which has three main goals: putting energy efficiency first, achieving global leadership in renewable energies and providing a fair deal for consumers.

It includes proposals on **electricity market design, energy efficiency, security of supply, renewables and governance** rules, aimed at implementing the [Energy Union](#) strategy. The overall aim of the strategy is to transform the EU into a low-carbon economy by 2030, whilst increasing economic growth, jobs, consumer protection, innovation and competitiveness.

The Commission stressed that the Energy Union strategy goes beyond climate and energy priorities and is a major overhaul of our energy system and of consumers' attitudes that will prepare our economy for the future.

Ministers acknowledged the importance of this legislation and the need to make progress in its examination. However, they also stressed that the implications of these issues for member states and the responsibility of the co-legislators mean that sufficient time will be needed for the proposals to be examined in detail.

Many ministers also recalled that member states have competence in the choice of their energy mix and that the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality must be fully respected. They also stressed the importance of regional cooperation, in particular for security of supply and energy efficiency.

Concerning the specific proposals:

– *Electricity market design*
([15150/16+ ADD 1](#), [15135/16 + ADD 1](#), [ADD 2](#))

In general, ministers acknowledged that European electricity markets are already changing and must continue to do so: the share of electricity generated from renewable energy sources (RES-E) has increased significantly, renewable energy has become more competitive and consumers must take advantage of the new technological opportunities to reduce their bills and actively participate in electricity markets.

Main comments

- urgency of further action to develop an efficient, flexible and fully functional infrastructure
- need to establish fair conditions for the choice of low-carbon energy resources and technologies, also in relation to third countries
- need to further develop interconnections to achieve the 15% interconnection target by 2030 in order to avoid energy isolation
- importance of free price formation by removing price caps, in order to attract required investments in the electricity market, although some delegations would prefer to retain the possibility of regulated tariffs in order to protect vulnerable consumers
- the value of regional cooperation was acknowledged by several delegations, but it was also underlined that no national powers should be transferred to the regional operational centres, as proposed by the Commission

– ***Energy efficiency***
[\(15091/16 + ADD 1\)](#)

The European Council conclusions of October 2014 set an indicative 27% energy efficiency target at EU level and also called for a review of this target by 2020, having in mind a level of 30% for 2030. Having carried out the review, the Commission now suggests a binding 30% EU target.

The measures proposed seek to maintain the current level of energy efficiency effort and target in particular the renovation of the highly inefficient existing building stock, for instance through a long-term renovation strategy for 2030 and the continuation of the 1.5% annual energy savings obligation.

The Commission and many member states stressed that energy efficiency is crucial if the EU's energy and climate goals are to be reached.

Main comments

- preference for the indicative target of 27% on energy efficiency; limited support for a binding 30% EU target
- doubts as regards the 1.5% annual energy savings obligation until 2030 and beyond and how early efforts by member states would be taken into account
- concerns over the financing of energy efficiency measures beyond 2020 and whether the proposed measures would trigger the desired investments
- the additional calculation principles for the calculation of energy savings create an unnecessary administrative burden

– *Energy performance of buildings*

[\(15108/16 + ADD 1\)](#)

- obligations on long-term renovation strategies are too demanding and unclear, in particular as regards the decarbonisation of the building stock by 2050
- need for flexibility on financial incentives
- importance of energy efficiency in heating and cooling
- need to take into account member states' specific circumstances

Many member states considered that the provisions aimed at alleviating energy poverty in both legislative proposals should be handled under social policy.

– ***Renewable energy***
[\(15120/16 + ADD 1\)](#)

The proposal sets a binding EU-level target of at least 27% renewable energy in the Union's gross final consumption of energy in 2030, in line with the conclusions of the October 2014 European Council.

It addresses support schemes, self-production and consumption of renewable energy, regional cooperation, guarantees of origin, criteria for sustainability and greenhouse gas (GHG) emission savings for biofuels, bioliquids and biomass fuels. It is aimed at three end-use sectors: electricity, heating and cooling, and transport.

Main comments

- several ministers supported the move towards a more market-based approach for renewables; many stressed that flexibility to choose the most cost-efficient option remains a key element
- concerns relating to the proposed partial cross-border tenders for renewable energy
- cautious approach on the gradual phasing out of first-generation biofuels, since this could lead to 'early movers' being penalised and to investor uncertainty in general
- concerns about the proposed setting up of an EU fund for renewables

– *Energy Union governance*
[\(15090/16 ADD 1\)](#)

The proposal on governance provides for a cooperation and control mechanism that should help ensure that the objectives and targets of the Energy Union, including the EU-level 2030 targets, as well as the EU climate targets, are jointly met and that the broad range of measures proposed in these and other areas make up a coherent and coordinated whole.

The control mechanism would require member states to submit integrated national energy and climate plans covering their objectives, policies and measures relating to all five dimensions of the Energy Union, including greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction targets. These plans would cover the period 2021-2030 and, with a view to 2050, be renewed for each 10-year period thereafter.

The proposal also contains 'mirror provisions' relating to targets and objectives included in various EU legislative acts in the area of energy policy, and in several legislative proposals in the area of climate and energy policy recently presented by the Commission.

Main comments

- the examination of the proposal should be coordinated with the examination of the rest of the Clean Energy package, due to its many links with the other proposals
- the November 2015 TTE (Energy) Council conclusions on this matter remain valid
- governance rules must ensure that the EU reaches its 2030 energy and climate goals, but must leave member states the necessary flexibility to cater for specific national circumstances and technological changes

- the deadlines proposed for presenting the integrated national energy and climate plans should be more realistic and allow member states sufficient time for examination (which should include large-scale consultations of other member states, actors and society) and implementation
- the administrative reporting burden should be diminished
- technical support from the Commission could be useful when preparing the plans

To conclude, the Commission said that it was vital to adopt the Clean Energy package as soon as possible not only to respect the EU's commitments under the Paris Agreement but also because it would be necessary to establish new targets for the period after 2020.

Furthermore, it was important to give a strong signal to the industry well in advance, in order to allow for the planning of the necessary investments that would also contribute to growth and jobs.

The Commission declared that it stood ready to help member states to implement the different proposals.

Minister Mizzi also stressed that every effort would be made to make progress on all the files, in close cooperation with the incoming Estonian presidency.

Other business

– *Security of gas supply and energy labelling*

The Council took note of information provided by the Maltese presidency (5807/17) on the state of play of two important legislative proposals on which negotiations with the European Parliament have already started:

- a regulation on measures to safeguard the **security of gas supply**: following intensive work during the Netherlands and Slovak presidencies, a first trilogue meeting was held on 6 February and a second one is scheduled for 2 March. Although a lot of work still lies ahead, the presidency expects to reach political agreement with the Parliament during its semester.

The main elements of the proposal to be discussed with the European Parliament are: regional cooperation, information exchange, participation of the Energy Community, solidarity and the definition of protected customers.

In the follow-up to a recent letter sent by the chair of the European Parliament's ITRE Committee to the chair of the Energy Council on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, several members asked the Commission to clarify its position on this issue.

The Commission stated that it did not see any need to build more energy infrastructure. Furthermore, this new pipeline project would have to comply with EU legislation, in particular the internal energy market and competition rules, as well as with the security of gas supply legislation. It also recalled that one of the aims of the Energy Union was to diversify supply sources and routes.

- a regulation on **energy efficiency labelling**, which allows customers to make informed choices with regard to the energy efficiency and consumption of products, thus helping to moderate energy demand.

Three informal trilogues were held on this file under the Slovak presidency in July, September and October 2016. Several technical meetings also took place at expert level. Provisional agreement was reached on most non-core political issues, including scope, definitions, market surveillance and harmonised standards.

Compromise proposals on the core issues of rescaling, the database and delegated and implementing acts were also discussed at length in preparation for a final agreement between the co-legislators at the forthcoming trilogue on 21 March.

– *European Nuclear Energy Forum (ENEF)*

The Council took note of information from the Czech delegation on the plenary meeting of the ENEF that will take place in Prague on 22 and 23 May 2017 ([5810/17](#)).

The ENEF was established in 2007 as an advisory body to the European Commission and it provides input to European policy-makers on security of energy supply, incentives for investment, R&D, knowledge management, safety and waste management and many other related topics.

– *Ocean Energy Forum*

The Council took note of a presentation by the Commission on the Ocean Energy Forum ([5806/17](#)), which gathers European industry, research communities, financiers and public authorities with the aim of accelerating the development of this sector.

The Commission stressed that the development of ocean energy is fully in line with the objectives of European energy policy and the 'Clean energy for all Europeans' package. It is part of the Integrated Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET Plan) and – as an innovative renewable energy technology – contributes to the Energy Union goals. More than half of the world's wave and tidal energy companies are based in Europe. This sector can provide up to 27 000 jobs by 2035.

Several member states underlined the importance of the ocean energy roadmap and presented some of the projects and initiatives they are already developing in this sector.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****Restrictive measures against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)**

The Council adopted legal acts imposing further restrictive measures against the DPRK. These legal acts transpose the additional restrictive measures imposed by United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 2321 adopted on 30 November 2016. The measures include restrictions on transactions in coal, iron and iron ore from the DPRK, and a ban on imports of copper, nickel, silver, zinc and statues from the DPRK. The measures also include a ban on the export of new helicopters and vessels to the DPRK, the tightening of existing restrictions in the transport sector and the financial sector, such as prohibiting DPRK diplomatic missions and DPRK diplomats from having more than one bank account in the EU, and restrictions on the use of real estate property by the DPRK in the EU.

The legal acts also provide that member states are to take further measures to prevent specialised teaching or training of DPRK nationals in disciplines which would contribute to the DPRK's nuclear or ballistic-missile programmes and to suspend scientific and technical cooperation involving persons or groups officially sponsored by or representing the DPRK, except for medical exchanges.

Like the existing sanctions, these restrictive measures are designed in such a way as to avoid adverse humanitarian consequences for the country's civilian population. They therefore include exemptions for livelihood and humanitarian purposes, where appropriate.

The UNSCR also added 11 persons and 10 entities to the list of those subject to asset freeze as well as travel restrictions for persons. This addition was transposed into EU law by a Council decision adopted on 8 December 2016.

EU restrictive measures against North Korea were introduced on 22 December 2006. The existing measures implement all UNSC resolutions adopted in response to the DPRK's nuclear tests and launches using ballistic-missile technology and include additional EU autonomous measures.

They target North Korea's nuclear weapons and nuclear programmes, and programmes related to other weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. The measures include prohibitions on the export and import of arms, goods, services and technology that could contribute to these programmes.

Restrictive measures against Belarus

The Council decided to prolong the restrictive measures against Belarus for one year, until 28 February 2018. These measures include an arms embargo and an asset freeze and a travel ban against four people listed in connection with the unresolved disappearances of two opposition politicians, one businessman and one journalist in 1999 and 2000. The Council also introduced an exemption to the restrictive measures to allow export of biathlon equipment to Belarus, which will remain subject to prior authorisation by competent national authorities on a case-by-case basis.

Tangible steps taken by Belarus to respect universal fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and human rights will remain key for the shaping of the EU's future policy towards Belarus, as stated in the Council conclusions of 15 February 2016.

The restrictive measures against Belarus were first introduced in 2004 in response to the disappearance of the four persons referred to above. The Council later adopted further restrictive measures against those involved in the violation of international electoral standards and international human rights law, and the crackdown on civil society and democratic opposition. The arms embargo was introduced in 2011. On 15 February 2016, the Council decided to lift the restrictive measures against 170 individuals and four companies, while maintaining the arms embargo and the sanctions against the four persons. This decision was taken while acknowledging the steps taken by Belarus that have helped to improve EU-Belarus relations.

Conclusions on EU priorities at United Nations human rights fora in 2017

The Council adopted conclusions on EU priorities at United Nations human rights fora in 2017.

The conclusions reaffirm the EU's strong commitment to the United Nations human rights system. These Council conclusions are adopted on a yearly basis. They set out the main lines of action for the EU at UN human rights fora in the coming months:

- "1. The EU is strongly committed to the United Nations Human Rights system and will remain actively engaged at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and the Third Committee of the General Assembly to defend and promote the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of human rights. Consistent with EU support for a global order based on international and human rights law, as set out in the EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy and the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, the EU will continue to draw the attention of these fora to human rights violations and abuses worldwide, and the need for accountability and to fight impunity. The EU will also seek to highlight positive experiences where action was taken to prevent or remedy human rights violations and abuses.

2. The EU reiterates its strong support for the dedication and work of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and his Office (OHCHR), whose integrity, independence and effective functioning in delivering his mandate we will continue to defend. The EU calls on all states to offer their full cooperation with the UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures, including by ensuring mandate holders' unhindered access to and contact with individuals and civil society. It underlines the importance of the Universal Periodic Review and calls upon all countries to fully engage in and commit to this process. It will oppose any attempt to weaken the role and effectiveness of the Human Rights Council. Similarly the EU reaffirms its unwavering support for independent UN Human Rights Treaty bodies, and attaches great importance to the strengthening of their effective functioning. The EU restates the importance it attaches to the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and their Optional Protocols, and will continue to call for their universal ratification and implementation.

3. The EU remains seriously concerned at the persistence of human rights violations and abuses worldwide. It will continue to seek dialogue and cooperation with partners from all regions to ensure that the UN bodies pursue an ambitious thematic agenda and address the gravest human rights situations around the world, clearly condemning in the strongest terms human rights violations and abuses, including violence and discrimination. The EU will continue to staunchly support the ICC, which is a key institution for holding perpetrators to account and assisting victims in achieving justice for the most serious crimes, where investigations or prosecution is not possible at the national level.
4. Human Rights NGOs and human rights defenders play an important role in the promotion and protection of human rights. The EU will give high priority to the promotion of a safe and enabling environment for these NGOs and defenders to operate, including a focus on responding to the particular risks faced by women human rights defenders. The EU will speak out against harassment, intimidation or persecution, including violent attacks and killings of human rights defenders, journalists or bloggers, and promote the participation of civil society in UN Human Rights fora. It will continue to oppose the imposition of unjustified or disproportionate restrictions on the activities, registration, and access to funding of Human Rights NGOs and other civil society organisations.
5. The EU also commits its full support to the UN Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights in his efforts to put a stop to all intimidation and reprisals against those cooperating with the United Nations on human rights. It invites the UN Secretary General and the HRC President and its bureau to continue to follow up on specific cases brought to their attention. It will also prioritise the importance of respect for freedom of opinion, and freedom of expression offline and online, of association and assembly. The EU will be a strong advocate for the implementation of UNGA, UNSC and HRC Resolutions on the safety of journalists, especially focusing on fighting impunity, and will aim to address new threats to freedom of expression online and offline.

6. The EU reiterates the need to maintain a strong focus on efforts to advance the protection and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights. It underlines the importance of comprehensive and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through a rights-based approach encompassing all human rights to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, including the human rights dimension in areas such as health, education, food security, housing, water and sanitation, decent work, the development and increased coverage of social protection floors, and to closing the gender gap. The Council expresses its concern at the frequency and scale of acts of destruction of cultural heritage, and commits its support to relevant efforts and initiatives undertaken in various UN fora in highlighting and seeking ways to prevent this problem.
7. The dire human rights and humanitarian situation in Syria deserves the continuous full attention of the UN human rights bodies. The EU will condemn in UN fora the continued, systematic, widespread and gross violations and abuses of human rights and all violations of international humanitarian law by all parties, particularly the Syrian regime and its allies. It will continue to call for full unhindered humanitarian access, accountability for all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and access of the UN mandated Commission of Inquiry to all parts of Syria's territory. The EU will support the one year extension of the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry and welcome further steps towards a swift operationalization of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria. It recalls its conviction that the situation in Syria should be referred to the ICC and renews its call to the UN Security Council to take action in this respect.
8. Given the grave human rights situation and the lack of action by the government of the DPRK to stop the continuing violations of human rights and having taken note of the relevant discussion at the UN, including at the UN Security Council, the EU will continue working with Japan and other partners to draw attention to the human rights violations committed by the DPRK, and the need for the DPRK to fully and credibly engage with all the relevant UN human rights mechanisms, and implement the recommendations of the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly, including on accountability.

9. Concerned by the ongoing violations of human rights in several regions of Myanmar/Burma, in particular against persons belonging to the Rohingya population in Rakhine State, the EU reiterates its call for the elimination of discrimination and persecution against persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, credible and independent investigations into reported human rights violations and abuses, accountability for all perpetrators of violence and hatred, and full humanitarian and observer access. It will support the adoption by the Human Rights Council of a resolution renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, and closely follow developments in the country, as well as engage with the government and other partners to identify the best ways to address issues of concern. The EU will continue to highlight the importance of an OHCHR office being opened in the country.
10. The EU remains extremely concerned by the human rights situation in Burundi and will continue to closely follow developments on the ground as well as the first update to be issued by the newly-created Commission of Inquiry. It will continue to engage with the government of Burundi, African and like-minded partners, and consider appropriate additional steps should human rights violations and abuses persist.
11. Further to the special session of the Human Rights Council in December 2016 and appalled by the initial findings of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, in particular concerning violence against civilians and widespread cases of sexual and gender-based violence, the EU will engage at the Human Rights Council to end impunity and ensure accountability, and support the extension of the mandate of the Commission and its expansion to include investigation of all alleged violations of human rights and the call for South Sudan Government to appoint a Special Representative on Sexual Violence.
12. The EU remains concerned by the human rights violations and acts of repression in the DRC undermining the rule of law and restricting fundamental freedoms. It will continue to closely monitor the situation in the DRC, in particular in the context of the preparation of the elections and the challenging implementation of the transition agreement, to work with the country concerned and all relevant stakeholders, and intensify its cooperation with civil society.

13. The Council continues to be deeply worried by the situation of human rights in Eritrea, and will closely follow the updates to be provided by the Special Rapporteur as well as the cooperation of the government of Eritrea with the OHCHR and implementation of UPR recommendations.
14. The EU will work with the US and the African group to ensure the adoption by the Human Rights Council of a resolution reflecting the situation of human rights in Sudan and extending the mandate of the Independent Expert. It will engage with African partners to support continued Human Rights Council attention on Mali and the Central African Republic. Given the deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation in Yemen, the EU will continue to support independent investigation of all alleged violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by all parties to the conflict. The EU will promote appropriate attention in all relevant human rights fora, including the Human Rights Council to the situation of human rights in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region / South Ossetia, Libya, and the occupied Palestinian territory. It will lend its full support to keeping Sri Lanka on the Human Rights Council agenda with a view to promoting reconciliation and accountability in the country.
15. In light of persisting human rights concerns and the high rate of application of the death penalty in Iran, and with a view to improving the human rights situation, the EU will again support the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and continue to call for her unhindered access. The EU remains concerned about the high rate of application of the death penalty in Saudi Arabia, especially to minors or adults for actions they committed as minors, and about a hardening of the stance on human rights activists.

16. The EU does not recognize and continues to condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. In light of the deeply concerning human rights situation on the Crimean peninsula and the serious human rights violations and abuses linked to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, the EU will continue to support initiatives led by Ukraine addressing these issues within the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, as well as to lend full support to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. It will continue to call for the unrestricted access to Crimea and eastern Ukraine by established regional and international human rights monitoring mechanisms in order to overcome the current obstacles impeding them from carrying out their mandate. The overall strengthening of the rule of law also remains of fundamental importance for the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Ukraine.
17. While taking note of some progress including the resumption of the human rights dialogue between the EU and Belarus, the EU will continue to follow the human rights situation in Belarus closely. In particular, the EU is gravely concerned about the continued application of the death penalty and continues to discuss these concerns with Belarus. It urges the Belarusian authorities to reinstate the rights of former political prisoners, end limitations on the freedom of expression, association and assembly, and eliminate all obstacles to the exercise of a free and independent media.
18. The EU is fully committed to promoting human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in its dialogue with partners held in the framework of the revised ENP, in particular with countries with which new partnership priorities are negotiated.
19. As a firm and longstanding advocate of the abolition of the death penalty, the EU is opposed to the death penalty whenever and wherever it is used. The EU will continue to speak out against executions particularly in the case of mass executions or when the death penalty is applied to offences committed by those under 18. The EU will continue to draw attention to violations of minimum standards. Following the strong cross-regional support to the resolution on a moratorium on the death penalty at UNGA 71, the EU will continue to support the work of the UN towards the abolition of the death penalty worldwide.

20. The absolute prohibition of torture in all circumstances is inscribed in international human rights law. 30 years after the UN Convention against Torture entered into force, fighting torture remains a major human rights challenge, a human rights priority for the EU, and one of our main objectives is to achieve universal ratification and effective implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocol.
21. The EU will continue to uphold the rights of the child in UN fora, and engage with the wider UN membership to advance this priority. At the Human Rights Council, the resolution will address the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while the General Assembly will deal with the issue of violence against children. In that context, the EU will seek to address urgent issues relating to the two topics, including the issue of children deprived of liberty, the protection of children against all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, including in the context of armed conflicts, the protection of girls as well as boys from child, early and forced marriage, and from other harmful practices such as female genital mutilation. Furthermore, the EU again strongly condemns the abuses of human rights perpetrated by terrorist groups against women and children, including the attacks targeting children by Boko Haram in Africa, and the atrocities committed by Daesh, and seeks accountability for these violations.
22. The EU will continue to promote freedom of religion or belief, strongly oppose religious intolerance, and call for greater protection of persons belonging to religious and other minorities against persecution and violence. It remains particularly concerned with persecution of and discrimination against persons belonging to religious minorities across the world.
23. The EU will continue to promote the principles of equality and non-discrimination, firmly opposing discrimination on any ground or status. In this context, in the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, the EU will engage with the relevant special procedures, including the new Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and encourage States to be open to dialogue with them and grant them access. The EU will continue to oppose worldwide all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. It will continue to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in its external action, including their equal participation and social inclusion.

24. The EU will continue engaging in the consultations led by the President of the General Assembly on the possible measures to enable the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in meetings of relevant UN bodies on issues affecting them.
25. The EU will remain actively engaged in international efforts to achieve gender equality; women's empowerment, and the advancement of women' rights as a matter of priority. It will continue to seek the integration of the gender perspective throughout the work of the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly and other human rights fora. Recalling its Conclusions on Gender in Development of 26 May 2015, the Council remains 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 ICPD and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights, in this context. The EU will continue to pursue efforts to implement effectively UN Security Council resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security, and step up efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls around the world.
26. The EU is committed to the implementation of the New York Declaration for refugees and migrants of September 2016 and will support initiatives in UN human rights fora upholding the human rights of refugees and migrants. The EU will continue to underline the importance of compliance with international refugee law including the principle of non-refoulement. It reiterates that this is a shared commitment of all countries concerned to protect the human rights of asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and all displaced persons, particularly bearing in mind the specific risks faced by women and vulnerable groups including children and persons with disabilities, in full compliance with international law. The Union remains steadfast in its commitment to guarantee the right to asylum.
27. The EU will continue to work with partners on the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, including the encouragement of more states to adopt national action plans, and will engage in the work streams of the UN Working Group as well as OHCHR, including its Accountability and Remedy Project. While further legal developments are being discussed, the EU believes that much remains to be done to implement existing obligations to prevent abuses, and ensure access to remedy when abuses occur."

EU Special Representative for human rights

The Council extended the mandate of Stavros Lambrinidis as the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for human rights until 28 February 2019. The EUSR enhances the EU's effectiveness, presence and visibility in protecting and promoting human rights in the world. The Council also allocated €860 000 to cover the expenditure related to the EUSR's mandate for the period from 1 March 2017 to 28 February 2019.

EU Special Representative in Kosovo

The Council extended the mandate of Nataliya Apostolova as the EUSR in Kosovo until 30 June 2018. The EUSR promotes a stable, viable, peaceful, democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo and provides local political guidance to the head of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX KOSOVO). The Council allocated a budget of €3.615 million for the period from 1 March 2017 to 30 June 2018 to cover the expenditure related to the EUSR's mandate.

EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Council extended the mandate of Lars-Gunnar Wigemark as the EUSR in Bosnia and Herzegovina until 30 June 2018. The EUSR offers advice and facilitates progress on political, economic and European priorities, in particular by encouraging the implementation of the coordination mechanism on EU matters and the continued implementation of the reform agenda. The Council allocated a budget of €7.69 million for the period from 1 March 2017 to 30 June 2018 to cover the expenditure related to the EUSR's mandate.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS**Visa waiver suspension mechanism**

The Council adopted a regulation to revise the suspension mechanism which can be applied to all existing visa liberalisation agreements.

[Visas: Council adopts a revision of the visa waiver suspension mechanism](#)

Visa liberalisation – Georgia

The Council adopted a regulation on visa liberalisation for Georgians travelling to the EU for a period of stay of 90 days in any 180-day period.

[Visas: Council adopts regulation on visa liberalisation for Georgians](#)

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY**EU Capacity Building Mission in Somalia (EUCAP Somalia)**

The Council allocated a budget of €22.95 million to EUCAP Somalia for the period from 1 March 2017 to 28 February 2018. The mission is tasked with enhancing Somalia's maritime civilian law-enforcement capacity, for example reinforcing the Somali capacity to carry out fisheries inspections, counter smuggling and fight piracy, supporting Somali authorities in developing the necessary legislation and strengthening the criminal justice chain in the maritime domain, and providing training and equipment.

EUCAP Nestor (now EUCAP Somalia) was launched in July 2012. Its mandate was to assist countries from the Horn of Africa and Western Indian Ocean regions in developing a self-sustaining capacity for continued enhancement of maritime security, including counter-piracy and maritime governance. It was decided that the mission should focus on Somalia, which is now reflected in the renaming of the mission. The head of the mission is Maria-Cristina Stepanescu (Romania).