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High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security
Policy

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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ITEMS DEBATED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Middle East peace process

In the presence of EU Special Representative Fernando Gentilini, the Council discussed the situation in the Middle East in the light of the increased violence, particularly in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, focusing on the peace process.

The High Representative informed ministers about her recent meetings with the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of the Palestinian Authority, during which she underlined the need to explore ways to stop the violence, calm down the situation and start implementing concrete measures on the ground, in line with prior agreements. The objective remains that of improving living conditions for the population, both Israeli and Palestinian, to open up new perspectives on the political process.

Ministers highlighted the importance of keeping the issue high on the agenda in the light of the increased violence and the fragility of the situation, including as regards the security situation at the holy sites. They also welcomed the interpretative notice on indication of origin of goods from the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967, adopted by the European Commission on 11 November, which provides useful guidance to member states on how to implement existing legislation in this regard.

The High Representative concluded the debate by stating that the EU should continue its efforts to facilitate the revival of a credible political process and that she will continue to engage with both parties, as well as with regional and international partners, both within the Quartet and through her bilateral contacts.

Migration

The Council discussed migration, following up on the high-level conference on the Western Balkans route held on 8 October and on the Valletta Summit on migration held on 11 and 12 November. Ministers discussed the follow-up to the decisions already taken on the central Mediterranean route and on the Western Balkans route. They welcomed the frank discussions with African partners in Valletta. In relation to the Western Balkans and eastern route, they discussed cooperation with Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, which has multiple dimensions, going well beyond the issue of refugees and management of refugee flows and borders.

Syria

Over lunch, ministers discussed Syria with UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. They discussed the latest developments, taking into account recent diplomatic efforts, including the discussions in Vienna on 23 October and 14 November.

The High Representative emphasised that finding a political solution to the Syrian conflict would offer the best conditions for defeating Da'esh. She reported that the sense of urgency, especially for Europe, was felt and understood very clearly by everyone around the table in Vienna. She also pointed out that an ambitious timetable had been set out.

The EU stands ready to continue contributing:

- on a humanitarian level, through ongoing projects - the EU is the leading humanitarian contributor in response to the Syrian crisis
- on a political level, in particular by working to bring the opposition groups to the table and to start the political transition in Syria.

MEETING OF DEFENCE MINISTERS

Mutual defence clause (article 42(7) TEU)

Defence ministers discussed the reaction to the Paris attacks of 13 November 2015. French President François Hollande had invoked article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union, requesting bilateral aid and assistance from the other EU member states. Ministers expressed their unanimous and full support for France and their readiness to provide all the necessary aid and assistance. In the coming days France will have bilateral discussions with other member states.

As pointed out by High Representative, offers of material assistance or of support in theatres of operation where France is engaged may be made. No formal decision or conclusion by the Council will be required to implement article 42(7). The High Representative underlined that this is not a CSDP operation, but an activation of bilateral aid and assistance.

Article 42(7) reads as follows:

"If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States."

European defence action plan

The Council held an initial discussion on the European defence action plan of the European Commission.

The aim of this action plan is to ensure that the European market and industrial and skills base will be able to deliver the military capabilities that member states may need to meet future security needs.

It is expected to include preparatory action for CSDP-related research, as well as other joint capacities and industries which are of interest to member states, such as government satellite communications and measures to support the EU's technological independence. Greater funding for dual-use technologies through Horizon 2020 could also be promoted in this context, as well as initiatives to improve defence procurement and to support defence-related SMEs.

In June 2014, the European Commission presented a roadmap for measures to strengthen the single market for defence, to promote a more competitive defence industry and to foster synergies between civil and military research.

Capacity building for security and development

Defence ministers discussed efforts to help partner countries prevent and manage crises. They were joined by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who underlined that while both the EU and NATO were doing a lot in terms of capacity building, more needed to be done. All member states supported the view that increasing capabilities in partner countries was the best way to create stability and diminish the need for crisis-management intervention.

The High Representative concluded the debate by indicating that the EU would address these questions in the coming months by:

- starting to implement pilot projects in a few partner countries, including Mali, the Central African Republic and Somalia
- working on the various possible financial instruments, including within the African Peace Facility and a possible new dedicated instrument.

The Commission's work programme for 2016 includes a package on capacity building in the security sector, which covers security sector reform and a possible new dedicated instrument for capacity building in support of security and development in non-EU countries.

One aspect is to formulate proposals in response to gaps in the EU's comprehensive approach, for example when training or other capacity-building activities are performed by an EU mission under the Common Security and Defence Policy, but their effectiveness is hampered by a deficient training environment or a lack of basic non-lethal equipment.

In their joint communication of 18 April 2015, the Commission and the high representative proposed exploring the practical feasibility of a proposal to adapt the African Peace Facility to address its limitations, the establishment of a facility linking peace, security and development in the framework of one or more existing instruments and/or a new, dedicated financial instrument.

[Commission press release on new EU strategy on capacity building in support of security and development](#)

CSDP operations

Defence ministers, joined by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, discussed CSDP operations, in particular:

- EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia, the EU's military operation in the southern central Mediterranean
- EUMAM RCA, the EU's military advisory mission in the Central African Republic.

Ministers were told that operation Sophia had so far resulted in the handover of 42 smugglers to the Italian authorities and saved the lives of about 5 400 migrants.

EUNAVFOR MED was launched on 22 June 2015 in order to counter the smuggling and trafficking of migrants and to help reduce further loss of life at sea. Its aim is to undertake systematic efforts to identify, capture and dispose of vessels and enabling assets used, or suspected of being used, by migrant smugglers or traffickers.

On 28 September 2015, the Political and Security Committee agreed to start the first step of phase 2 of EUNAVFOR MED on 7 October 2015. The operation was renamed 'Sophia' on 26 October 2015. During phase 2, EUNAVFOR MED assets are conducting boarding, search, seizure and diversion, on the high seas, of vessels suspected of being used for human smuggling or trafficking.

The operation is headquartered in Rome, Italy.

EUMAM RCA was established on 19 January 2015 and launched by the Council on 16 March 2015. It aims to support the Central African authorities in preparing for reform of the security sector, especially regarding the management of the CAR armed forces (FACA).

EUMAM RCA replaced the EU military operation in the CAR (EUFOR RCA), which was established on 10 February 2014 in order to contribute to a secure environment in the CAR, as authorised by the UN Security Council in 2014.

EUMAM RCA is headquartered in Bangui. The budget for the preparation phase and the first year of the mission is €7.9 million.

European Defence Agency steering board

Over lunch, defence ministers met in the format of the European Defence Agency (EDA) steering board, under the chairmanship of Federica Mogherini as the head of the agency. All member states except Denmark participate.

Ministers discussed the three-year planning framework detailing the agency's work plan and priorities for 2016-2018, as well as the resources required to support this.

The agency updated ministers on the progress achieved in the four key capability programmes: air-to-air refuelling, government satellite communications, cyber defence and remotely piloted aircraft systems. Ministers endorsed initial roadmaps on the following potential new capability projects: biological joint deployable exploitation and analysis laboratory (Bio-JDEAL), medical evacuation and anti-tank weapons.

Ministers noted progress in the agency's work on defence cooperation, in particular the annual assessment of pooling and sharing, which analyses the overall defence capability situation in Europe, as well as initial work on barter mechanisms, which could facilitate the exchange or sharing of capabilities among member states without any financial transaction.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****Burundi**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The growing insecurity and the continuous increase in violence in Burundi demand the attention of the international community. The European Union (EU) strongly condemns all human rights violations, human rights abuses and acts of violence in Burundi and expresses its solidarity with all the victims of violence and with the populations forced to move in a climate of insecurity and uncertainty. It regrets the persistent political deadlock in the country, marked by the refusal of Burundian parties to engage in a real dialogue and by violence. Any inflammatory rhetoric and incitement of hatred could worsen an already precarious situation and is wholly unacceptable. These developments may have tragic consequences for Burundi and for the entire region. The EU calls on all parties, both government and opposition, to show the utmost restraint in language and to avoid triggering a cycle of violence at all costs. It recalls that it is primarily the responsibility of the Burundian government to protect its population.
2. Recalling the Council conclusions of 22 June 2015, the EU reiterates the view expressed by the East African Community (EAC), the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) that only through dialogue and building consensus, in accordance with the Arusha Agreement and the Burundian Constitution, can a lasting political solution be found in the interests of all Burundi's people.
3. In this spirit, the EU has invited the Burundian authorities to participate in the consultations provided for in Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement to seek a solution acceptable to the parties in order to address the failure to comply with the essential elements of the Agreement, namely human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law. The consultations, which the EU proposes in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation, also aim to support the efforts to prevent the damaging consequences of the ongoing violence, ensure lasting peace in Burundi, and support the decisions taken by the EAC and the AU. The EU would like the consultations to take place as soon as possible, to allow swift agreement on initial de-escalation measures, which could pave the way for substantial progress towards ending the crisis.

4. The security and freedom of people, human rights defenders, journalists and the media and the re-establishment of the rule of law are essential to ensure the success of inclusive, meaningful and calm inter-Burundian dialogue. In this context, the EU reserves the right to adopt new restrictive measures targeted against those whose actions or words may have led or may lead to acts of violence and repression and serious human rights violations, and/or may hamper the search for a political solution within the framework proposed by the EAC and the AU. The EU reiterates that there can be no impunity for those responsible for violations or serious abuses of human rights, and that they must be held individually responsible and brought to account in a court of law. In this context, the EU welcomes the statement of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Fatou Bensouda, on 6 November 2015.

5. In welcoming and supporting the communiqué of the AU's Peace and Security Council of 17 October, the EU reiterates its support for the EAC's mediation efforts led by Uganda and the AU, and expects the Government of Burundi to take all necessary steps to initiate without delay an inclusive dialogue involving all stakeholders who reject violence. The dialogue should be held in accordance with the criteria desired by the international community and outside Burundi. The EU will actively support all diplomatic efforts conducive to finding a consensual solution to end the crisis and stands ready to take additional initiatives, depending on how the situation develops.

6. The EU welcomes and supports the unanimously adopted UN Security Council Resolution 2248 (2015), and commends the call for the Government of Burundi to respect, protect and guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms, in accordance with international obligations, and to uphold the rule of law. In this context, the EU stresses the importance of cooperation with the AU's human rights observers. It also supports the call for the Government of Burundi to cooperate with the EAC's mediation, endorsed by the AU, so that a real and inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue can be convened immediately, as well as the UN's intention to consider additional measures against all Burundian stakeholders whose actions and statements contribute to the perpetuation of violence and hamper the search for a peaceful solution. The EU welcomes the UN's desire for joint contingency planning with the AU so that the international community can react to any further deterioration of the situation. Finally, it welcomes the decision of the Secretary-General to appoint a special adviser on the prevention of conflicts, including in Burundi, with responsibility for working together with all relevant stakeholders to support an inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue and a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

7. The EU, which is one of Burundi's main development partners, confirms its willingness to continue its action in support of the Burundian people."

Sri Lanka

The Council adopted the following conclusions on Sri Lanka:

- "1. The Council welcomes the significant advances made by the Government of Sri Lanka since the presidential elections held in January 2015 to restore democratic governance, initiate a process of national reconciliation and re-engage with the international community and the United Nations (UN) system.
2. Following the invitation by the Government of Sri Lanka, the European Union deployed an Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to observe the parliamentary elections in August, which were assessed positively by the EU EOM. The elections saw a strong endorsement of the change in policies initiated since January. In line with the Government's commitment for electoral reform, it will be key to implement the recommendations provided by the EU EOM.
3. There are now new opportunities for the EU to engage with the Government of Sri Lanka in making further progress on reconciliation, strengthening good governance and tackling corruption, promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law, and fostering inclusive economic growth and sustainable development, while continuing work to reduce poverty and addressing global issues such as climate change and sustainable development. The EU and its Member States actively support the new reform-oriented dynamism in Sri Lanka in order to overcome underlying causes of the past conflict. In this spirit, they will review their respective assistance programmes to support these objectives, including ensuring coordination with other donors.
4. The Council welcomes the resolution "Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka" adopted at the 30th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva as a crucial step towards a credible transitional justice process in the country. The Council commends the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil National Alliance for respectively sponsoring and supporting the resolution. Continued political leadership will be needed from all sides to ensure the implementation of a comprehensive approach to deal with the past and at the same time establish a lasting foundation for a peaceful future. In this regard, the Council takes positive note of Sri Lanka's proposal to establish a Commission for Truth, Justice, Reconciliation and Non-Recurrence, and to set up with the expertise from the International Committee of the Red Cross, an Office on Missing Persons.

5. Accountability is essential to uphold the rule of law and build confidence in the people of all communities of Sri Lanka in the justice system. The EU welcomes Government of Sri Lanka's proposal for the establishment of a judicial mechanism to investigate allegations of violations and abuses of human rights, including allegations of sexual violence. The participation of foreign judges, defence lawyers, prosecutors and investigators will be important in ensuring that the process is both credible and perceived as such by all sides. The Council underlines the importance of continued cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
6. Addressing the underlying causes of the conflict will be key to uniting the people of Sri Lanka. The EU welcomes the steps that have been taken to strengthen civilian administration in the North and East and calls on the Government to move swiftly to find durable solutions for all Internally Displaced Persons. The devolution of political power to the provinces, as originally envisaged in the Thirteenth Constitutional Amendment, will be a vital step in allowing communities to have their say in how they are governed and a positive contribution to the reconciliation process. The EU takes note of the Government's plans for a new Constitution. Initiation of a broad domestic dialogue and consultation on wider constitutional change will be vital to ensure the sustainability and popular support for any changes that are ultimately proposed.
7. The Council encourages the Government of Sri Lanka to take early steps to build the confidence of communities, including releasing the identity of the detainees and accelerating their prosecution or release, repealing the Prevention of Terrorism Act, calibrating the military presence according to identified security needs and returning land sequestered by the military to its rightful owners. Further action is also needed on a number of human rights concerns, including sexual and gender based violence, torture and the protection of persons belonging to religious, ethnic and other minorities, Human Rights Defenders and journalists.
8. The Government of Sri Lanka has indicated its intention to apply at the appropriate time to be granted the tariff preferences provided under the special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance (GSP+). The Council reiterates that the purpose of GSP+ is to encourage beneficiary countries to effectively implement the core international conventions on human and labour rights, environmental protection and good governance. It takes positive note of the progress recently achieved and encourages Sri Lanka to undertake all remaining necessary preparatory work. The Council calls on the High Representative and the European Commission to continue to engage with Sri Lanka to support its efforts to lay the groundwork for a renewed application for GSP+.

9. The Council commends the steps Sri Lanka has taken to comply with the regulations of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and encourages the Sri Lankan authorities to take the further measures necessary to address the shortcomings established in the context of the EU legislation on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, so that the ban on fishery exports to the EU can be lifted as soon as possible.
10. The Council looks forward to regular updates on future progress and welcomes continued dialogue between the EU and the Government of Sri Lanka, including through meetings of the joint bodies established under the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development."

EU support to transitional justice

The Council adopted conclusions on the EU's support to transitional justice, in particular reaffirming the EU's intention to play an active and consistent role in its engagement with partner countries and international and regional organisations in support of transitional justice processes. The Council also adopted the EU's policy framework on support to transitional justice. The EU is the first regional organisation to adopt a transitional justice policy. (See [13575/15](#).)

Yemen

The Council adopted the following conclusions on Yemen:

- "1. The present situation in Yemen is of deep concern. All humanitarian actors have described the humanitarian situation as catastrophic for many Yemenis, as fighting continues in a number of areas, and humanitarian access for essential supplies of food and fuel remains extremely limited. Recalling its Conclusions on Yemen from 20 April 2015, the EU reiterates that the solution to this crisis must be a political one. It is increasingly urgent, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2216, to stop the fighting through a durable ceasefire, and put in place an inclusive political process that will enable the restoration of peace and legitimate state authority as well as the delivery of essential public services, while preserving the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen.

2. The EU therefore strongly supports the efforts of the UN Secretary General and the Special Envoy for Yemen to achieve a resumption of negotiations, fully in line with the framework provided by the GCC initiative, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. The EU welcomes the announcement by the UN Special Envoy that inclusive intra-Yemeni talks could resume shortly. It also welcomes the recent commitment of the Government of Yemen to participate in the consultations and the clear acceptance expressed by the Houthis and the General People's Congress of UN Security Council Resolution 2216 to the UN Secretary General and the UN Special Envoy. The EU urges all parties to use this opportunity to gain renewed momentum in building trust and establish a stable foundation for further negotiations towards a sustainable peace between all parties.
3. The EU calls on all the parties to engage in a flexible and constructive manner, without preconditions and in good faith in the preparation and conduct of UN-facilitated negotiations. Within a Yemeni-led process, they should settle their differences through dialogue, reject violence to achieve political goals, and refrain from provocation and unilateral actions that prevent the resumption of the political transition. In parallel, the implementation of practical confidence building measures will be essential to facilitate a return to the political track such as immediate steps towards a sustainable ceasefire, a mechanism for a monitored withdrawal of forces, facilitation of humanitarian and commercial access, and the release of political prisoners. The EU renews its call on all regional actors to engage constructively with Yemeni parties in order to enable a de-escalation of the crisis and avoid further regional instability.
4. The EU urges the Government of Yemen to assume its responsibility in the fight against extremist and terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Da'esh in Yemen, which are taking advantage of the current instability. It is particularly important that all parties to the conflict take resolute action against such groups that pose a direct internal and external threat. The EU condemns all terrorist attacks in the strongest terms, in particular those against civilian and religious targets. It reaffirms its commitment to support the Government in this endeavour.

5. The EU is extremely concerned by the impact of ongoing hostilities, including bombardments, reported use of cluster munitions, fighting between competing factions on the ground and the disruption of essential services on the civilian population, in particular on children, women and other vulnerable groups. It is also very concerned by the damage inflicted to civilian infrastructure and cultural heritage. Yemen is experiencing an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe, with 21 million people or 80% of the population in need of humanitarian assistance and 6 million in need of immediate life-saving assistance. The EU urges all parties to respect the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality, as well as to ensure the protection of civilians and of humanitarian aid workers. The EU is deeply concerned by the indiscriminate targeting of civilian infrastructure notably medical facilities, schools and water systems, ports and airports, and by the use of civilian buildings for military purposes. The EU regrets the deaths of humanitarian workers in Yemen since the beginning of this conflict. All parties to the conflict should urgently prioritise and facilitate sustained and systematic access, including safe passage for emergency, humanitarian and commercial goods – including fuel - through all of Yemen's ports. Onward distribution across the country must urgently and unconditionally be restored. The EU looks forward to the swift implementation of the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) for commercial shipping – including fuel - for Yemen, to which it will contribute financially. The EU and its Member States, having so far committed more than €200 million worth of humanitarian assistance to Yemen in 2015, stress once again the need for coordinated humanitarian action under UN leadership, and urge all countries to contribute to addressing humanitarian needs.

6. All parties should take all the necessary measures to ensure the respect of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law. Ensuring accountability for violations is an important part of the process to achieve a lasting settlement of the current conflict. The EU stresses the need to fully implement the resolution on *"Technical assistance and capacity-building for Yemen in the field of human rights"* adopted during the UN Human Rights Council 30th session, which inter alia requests the Office of the High Commissioner to assist the national Commission of inquiry in meeting international obligations in its work. The EU looks forward to the High Commissioner's oral update at the Council's 31st session and to a comprehensive written report during its 33rd session. It expects that the national Commission of inquiry will be able to work independently and reiterates its call for the independent investigation of all alleged violations of International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law.

7. The EU and its Member States highlight the need for a concerted, coordinated and strategic approach of the international community and the Government of Yemen to the country's reconstruction, and stand ready to play their part in efforts to the benefit of all Yemenis."

Report by the European Court of Auditors on the EU police mission in Afghanistan

The Council adopted conclusions on the special report entitled "The EU police mission in Afghanistan: mixed results", welcoming its publication by the European Court of Auditors. This was the first time that the court had audited solely an EU civilian CSDP mission. It assessed whether the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) had been effective in delivering its mandate. (See [14034/15](#).)

Mandate extension for the European Union Special Representative in Kosovo*

The Council extended the mandate of the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) in Kosovo* until 28 February 2017. Samuel Žbogar was initially appointed on 25 February 2012.

EUSRs promote the EU's policies and interests in troubled regions and countries and play an active role in efforts to consolidate peace, stability and the rule of law. The first EUSRs were appointed in 1996. Currently, nine EUSRs support the work of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini.

Restrictive measures in view of the situation in Tunisia

The Council reviewed the restrictive measures in view of the situation in Tunisia in light of the information forwarded by the Tunisian authorities concerning the latest developments in the ongoing judicial proceedings in Tunisia against 48 persons listed in Council decision (CFSP) 2015/157. The Council concluded that no changes needed to be made to these designations.

Restrictive measures in view of the situation in Afghanistan

The Council amended the restrictive measures in view of the situation in Afghanistan to implement the decision of the UN Security Council Committee on sanctions against the Taliban, adding one person to the list of individuals, groups, undertakings and entities subject to restrictive measures.

Restrictive measures in view of the situation in Somalia

The Council amended the restrictive measures in view of the situation in Somalia to reflect the de-listing of one deceased person by the UN.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 (1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

EU's position for the eighth review conference of the biological weapons convention

The Council adopted the EU's position for the eighth review conference of the convention on the prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of bacteriological (biological) and toxin weapons and on their destruction (BTWC) taking place from November to December 2016. The Council specified a list of priorities including ensuring compliance, supporting national implementation, supporting the mechanism for investigation of alleged use of biological weapons and promoting the universality of the BTWC. It testifies to the EU's strong and ongoing commitment to strengthening the BTWC. The EU will underpin its common position with concrete actions, thereby helping to secure a successful outcome for the conference.

Disarmament and arms control activities in south-east Europe - Albania

The Council added Albania to the list of beneficiaries of funding activities to reduce the threat of the illicit spread and trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in south-east Europe. Other beneficiaries of the activities to improve SALW stockpile management are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

EU's position for the EU-Georgia Association Council meeting

The Council adopted the EU's position for the second meeting of the EU-Georgia Association Council. Among other issues, the Council will reaffirm the EU's continuing commitment to political association and economic integration with Georgia and commend Georgia's active contribution to the Eastern Partnership.

Union for the Mediterranean ministerial conference on the blue economy

The Council adopted the position of the EU on the draft declaration of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) ministerial conference on the blue economy. The conference, taking place in Brussels on 17 November 2015, aims to promote the blue economy in the Mediterranean region, focusing on the further development of the blue economy, on investing in blue research, technology, innovation, knowledge and skills, and also on maritime governance.

Discussions will focus on the need to make the best use of the potential of the blue economy, to promote growth, jobs and investment and reduce poverty, whilst safeguarding healthy seas and developing a clear vision for the sustainable and integrated development of the marine and maritime sectors at national and sea-basin level. The main outcomes are expected to be the establishment of a UfM forum on the blue economy, bringing Mediterranean countries together to exchange information, views and best practices, and support for the virtual knowledge centre on marine and maritime affairs.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Conclusions on Central African Republic

On 17 November 2015, the Council adopted conclusions on Central African Republic.

- "1. The European Union (EU) remains determined to support the transition in the Central African Republic (CAR) as it moves towards its conclusion with the holding of credible and transparent elections. The EU condemns the recent violence and attempts at destabilisation which have endeavoured to undermine the return to constitutional order and reignite communal hatred. There must be no tolerance for those parties that refuse to comply with the disarmament agreement signed on 10 May 2015, the agreement on the cessation of hostilities and violence signed in Brazzaville on 23 July 2014, or with the commitments to end the recruitment and use of children which were made by the political and military groups at the Bangui Forum and signed on 5 May 2015. In this context, it is essential to improve the protection of the civilian population and to press ahead without delay with the efforts to fight impunity. It remains vital to implement the recommendations from the Bangui Forum in order to ensure security, peace, justice and national reconciliation.

2. The EU welcomes the transitional authorities' announcement on 9 November of an election timetable and the notices of 10 November 2015 calling the electorate to participate in the referendum and the presidential and parliamentary elections. The high level of voter registration in the CAR testifies to the people's readiness to go to the polls. It is now important to mobilise all internal and external efforts to organise the constitutional referendum and the first round of the presidential and parliamentary elections by the end of 2015. It is particularly important for Central African refugees in neighbouring countries to be able to register to the greatest extent possible. It is also important for further efforts to be made towards the rapid publication of a definitive, credible and inclusive electoral roll in order to reinforce the CAR's national cohesion. The efforts that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the affected countries in the region have made to enable Central African refugees to vote are to be commended.

3. The EU invites the International Mediator, the President of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the countries of the sub-region to give their full support to the new election timetable approved by all the Central African stakeholders and to endorse the technical extension of the transition period so as to adjust it to the new timetable. In line with the efforts already under way, the EU continues to assess the conditions for sending electoral experts to the forthcoming CAR elections in an acceptable security environment with the support of international forces. Furthermore, the EU, which is the largest contributor to funding for the electoral process, welcomes the contribution promises made by various States and encourages the international community to honour its commitments promptly.
4. The EU applauds the work of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the support of Operation Sangaris, which remain indispensable to ensuring a secure environment, in particular during the elections so that the entire population can participate. Outside of the elections, MINUSCA's work to support lasting stability in the CAR and security sector reform (SSR), including moving the DDR process forward, is essential and must take place in conjunction with the international community.
5. To ensure lasting stability in the country, the transitional authorities must continue their efforts to fight impunity with the support of MINUSCA and the international community. Transitional justice, as well as the rebuilding of the criminal justice and prison system, are essential to ending human rights abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence. In this context, the EU calls on all the parties to make every effort to prevent such acts of violence and reiterates the importance of respect for international human rights law.
6. In this difficult political and security context, the Council applauds the EUMAM mission's work to support the restructuring of the Central African armed forces. The recent introduction of non-operational training is a new step in supporting the restructuring of the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), and one which the Council welcomes. Building on this, the Council considers it necessary to provide further support to the FACA and to respond to the CAR's needs in support of the United Nations, which is mandated by the Security Council to support security sector reform in the CAR. [It is on this basis that the Council invites the High Representative to begin preparations for the presentation in early 2016 of a Crisis Management Concept outlining a process to transform EUMAM into a mission that provides strategic advice and operational training, to be launched after the inauguration of the democratically elected authorities and in good time before the end of EUMAM's mandate. This should be done in cooperation with the United Nations and in line with the ongoing security sector reform process in the Central African Republic. However, the Council emphasises that it is important for EUMAM RCA to work intensively with MINUSCA and the Central African authorities given the acts of violence at the end of September.

7. As part of its comprehensive approach, the EU, which has so far provided EUR 238 million in support of the transitional government's main actions, reiterates its commitment to strengthening the resilience of the Central African population through actions financed by the Bêkou Trust Fund. The EU calls on other partners to join its efforts, in particular in support of the national budget, in order to increase the public sector's capacity to provide the population with essential services such as healthcare and education, and to ensure the durability of the State. The EU continues to engage in dialogue with the Central African authorities in order to improve public finance management.
8. The EU is continuing its humanitarian efforts to assist all those suffering the effects of the crisis, both in the CAR and in neighbouring countries. It pays tribute to the humanitarian and development organisations for the work they have done under difficult security conditions, as demonstrated by the recent events in Bangui. The EU calls on the Central African government and the international forces on the ground to continue their efforts to safeguard the staff of these organisations so they can be swiftly redeployed. It is vital to ensure that the humanitarian and development organisations in the CAR have safe and unfettered access to people in need. The EU calls on the parties to the conflict to stop and to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed groups and to continue identifying, releasing, and reintegrating these children into civilian life. The EU reiterates the importance of complying with the obligations of International Humanitarian Law."

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Acquisition and cross-servicing agreement: negotiations with the US

The Council adopted a decision authorising the High Representative to open negotiations with the United States for an acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA) to be used in the framework of military CSDP operations and exercises.

Such an agreement would make it possible for EU military operations to receive logistical assistance from the US and for the EU to provide logistical support to the US in the same theatre of operations.

Once negotiations have been finalised, the Council will decide whether to authorise the signing of the agreement.

EU military capabilities: Single progress report

The Council took note of the single progress report on the development of EU military capabilities from November 2014 to October 2015, and approved its transmission to NATO for information purposes.

European Defence Agency: annual report

The Council took note of the annual report by the head of the European Defence Agency. The report summarises the main highlights and achievements, including:

- major progress on four key programmes (AAR, RPAS, SatCom, Cyber)
- support for CSDP operations
- cooperation enablers: standardisation, certification, test and evaluation
- VAT exemption for EDA projects
- pilot project leading to preparatory action for CSDP-related research

European Defence Agency: guidelines for work in 2016

The Council approved the guidelines for the work of the European Defence Agency (EDA) in 2016. It encouraged the EDA to continue to support the development of defence capabilities through cooperation, defence research and technology, including preparatory action for CSDP-related research, the defence industry, and member states vis-à-vis wider EU policies and their implications for defence.

TRADE POLICY

EU-Bosnia and Herzegovina - preferential rules of origin

The Council adopted the EU's position within the Stabilisation and Association Council established by the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina as regards the replacement of protocol 2 to that agreement in order to take into account the regional convention on pan-Euro-Mediterranean preferential rules of origin agreed in 2007. This replaces the previous system of rules of origin based on bilateral free-trade agreements.