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To: Delegations

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Subject: Council Conclusions on Iraq

Delegations will find in the appendix the Council conclusions on Iraq, adopted by the Council at its 3438th meeting held on 14 December 2015.

Council Conclusions on Iraq

1. The EU reiterates its firm support for Iraq's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The EU remains committed to achieving lasting peace, stability and security in Iraq and the wider region, as well as to countering Da'esh which poses a clear threat to Iraq, our partners in the Middle East, to wider international security and to Europe directly. The EU supports efforts by the Global Coalition to counter Da'esh, including military action in accordance with international law. It recalls that military action in this context is necessary but not sufficient to defeat Da'esh. The EU underlines that inclusive political governance is crucial to sustainable peace and stability in Iraq. It stresses that a strong and unified Iraq is key to resolving the present crisis and to the country's long term development and prosperity. The EU calls on the countries of the region to play a constructive role and support the Iraqi Government in its efforts to restore long-lasting peace and stability in Iraq.

2. Furthermore the EU reiterates its strong support for the democratically-elected Iraqi Government, led by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, and welcomes the government's commitment to pursue reforms and comprehensive dialogue with a view to tackle the underlying political crisis in Iraq, achieving inclusiveness, reconciliation at national and local level and long-term peace and stability. The EU emphasises that the Iraqi Government's September 2014 programme, as well as its August 2015 reform package, which aims to tackle corruption, improve the delivery of services to citizens and strengthen good governance, remain the basis for delivering meaningful, tangible reforms for all of Iraq's people. The EU commends Prime Minister al-Abadi's courage in proposing these measures and calls on the Iraqi authorities to step up their reform efforts, accelerate the pace of their implementation and deliver comprehensive dialogue, in order to achieve effective progress rapidly. In particular the establishment of the National Guard, the review of the so-called De-Ba'athification law and the release of prisoners held without charge are measures that should be adopted and implemented without delay. The EU calls on all Iraq's political forces to work constructively in support of these vital endeavours to the benefit of all segments of Iraqi society. The EU also underlines the urgency of reviving the agreement on the transfer of revenues and oil between the Federal Government of Iraq and the Government of the Kurdistan Region.
3. The EU condemns in the strongest terms continued gross, systematic and widespread human rights abuses and violations, as well as the destruction of cultural heritage carried out by Da'esh. Whilst the primary victims of these acts have been Iraqi Muslims, persons belonging to minority groups, particularly Christians and Yezidis, have also been the target of Da'esh atrocities that are likely to amount to crimes against humanity. Those responsible for these crimes must be held accountable.

4. The EU welcomes progress in the fight against Da'esh that has been accomplished in Iraq throughout 2015 by Iraqi Security Forces including the Peshmerga, and strongly supports the efforts of the Global Coalition to back Iraq to counter Da'esh. The EU will continue to implement its Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat and the Counter-terrorism Strategy for Syria and Iraq, with particular focus on Foreign Fighters, as its main framework to tackle the threat posed by Da'esh and its extremist ideology and it looks forward to the next six monthly report on the implementation of the March 2015 Strategy. It will in particular step up its efforts to prevent the terrorist financing, curbing its revenues such as illicit sales of oil and cultural artefacts. Efforts will also be multiplied to counter the terrorist narrative and improve information exchanges to stop terrorist foreign fighters. Moreover, the EU intends to deepen its political dialogue on these issues with its partners and in this context will seek to accelerate implementation of the strategies where possible, and refers to the outcomes of the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting on 3-4 December 2015.
5. The EU underlines the importance of full respect for international law, human rights and the rule of law in the fight against Da'esh and in all the liberated areas. It recalls that the fight against terrorism will only be successful if conducted in full respect of international human rights, preventing sectarian violence, defusing sectarian tensions and preserving the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-confessional character of the Iraqi society, as underlined in the action plan adopted at the 8 September Paris Conference on the Victims of Ethnic and Religious Violence in the Middle East. It stresses the necessity of rebuilding inclusive and democratically controlled Iraqi Security Forces and underlines that all armed groups must come under the command and control of the Iraqi State. In this context, it particularly urges the Iraqi Government and the Council of Representatives to press ahead with security sector reforms aimed at centralising the command and control of these forces and improving their respect for human rights. The EU welcomes PM al-Abadi's commitment to investigate all allegations of abuses and violations and ensure the perpetrators are brought to justice. The EU reiterates its call on Iraq to accede to the Rome Statute.

6. The EU stresses that IDPs returns to places of origin must be safe, informed, voluntary and non-discriminatory, in line with international protection standards. The EU recognises stabilisation as a key condition for the return of IDPs as well as for reconciliation. In this context it reaffirms its support for the Iraqi Government-led stabilisation efforts in liberated areas, such as the training of the Iraqi Police forces. It commends the Government for its constructive work and cooperation with the Global Coalition's Working Group on Stabilisation (SWG) as well as the United Nations. The EU welcomes Member States' contributions to UNDP's Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilisation (FFIS), which has been crucial in providing rapid and effective stabilisation support to liberated areas of Iraq, such as Tikrit. The EU will continue to work closely with the Iraqi Government and all relevant actors contributing to stabilisation in Iraq, including the SWG and the United Nations.
7. The EU remains extremely concerned at the dire humanitarian situation and the displacements of large numbers of civilians and strongly condemns the egregious violations of International Humanitarian Law in the conflict. The EU and its Member States, the largest humanitarian donors responding to the crisis in Iraq, will continue to provide humanitarian assistance guided by independent needs assessments and seeking to provide an impartial response. They will also insist with all relevant parties on the need to comply with the International Humanitarian Law, bringing the protection of civilians to the forefront of the EU humanitarian and political engagement in Iraq. The EU reiterates its call for the Federal Government of Iraq and the Government of the Kurdistan Region, to make all possible efforts to ensure that humanitarian aid is delivered to all civilians, in particular IDPs and refugees, including all vulnerable groups, in line with international law and humanitarian principles and again stresses the importance of offering equal protection to all ethnic and religious communities that are part of Iraqi society. This is crucial to alleviate the suffering of all civilians and consistent with the objectives of avoiding further deepening of sectarian and ethnic fault lines, without impacting on the diverse and plural character of the Iraqi society. The EU also acknowledges the strong role played by the United Nations in coordinating much-needed humanitarian assistance.

8. The EU calls on the different parties in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to work together in a spirit of compromise to resolve the current political impasse through dialogue and moderation. The EU reiterates the necessity of unity and stability at a time when the Kurdistan Region is facing economic, social, humanitarian challenges and is making a substantial contribution to the fight against Da'esh. It invites the Government of the Kurdistan Region and all political parties to respect democratic principles and values in order to restore the institutional order and press ahead with necessary reforms.

9. The EU remains strongly committed to working closely with the Iraqi partners who face many challenges, including through the EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. It intends to maintain its focus on counter-terrorism cooperation, immediate stabilisation of liberated areas, and support to reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives. The EU and its Member States reiterate their sustained and comprehensive engagement in the medium and longer term to address the root causes of the crisis and improve Iraq's governance, ensuring continued enhanced support to rule of law and human rights (including the reform of the judiciary and the civilian security), and, closely linked to that, the socio-economic development. The EU and its Member States will explore the possibilities to further support these areas, using all available instruments. The EU continues its strong support of UNAMI's role in providing assistance and reconstruction to the people of Iraq.
