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President **Federica Mogherini**
High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security
Policy

P R E S S

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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.

ITEMS DEBATED

Syria

Foreign ministers discussed the latest developments in Syria, including the aftermath to the targeted US, French and UK airstrikes on chemical weapons facilities. Ahead of the Brussels II conference on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region', they discussed the need to relaunch a political solution to the conflict in the framework of the UN-led Geneva process. The Council adopted conclusions on Syria.

[Council conclusions on Syria, 16 April 2018](#)

Iran

The Council discussed Iran. Ministers reiterated their full unity for the continuing implementation of the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA). They encouraged the diplomatic efforts being made to ensure that there continues to be a strong commitment of all parties involved to the agreement.

Ministers also discussed other issues outside the scope of the JCPOA, in particular the role of Iran in regional conflicts, not least in Syria and Yemen, as well as the EU's concerns at Iran's ballistic missiles programme and its human rights situation. These issues are addressed outside the JCPOA, including through existing EU sanctions.

[EU restrictive measures against Iran](#)

Russia

The Council exchanged views on Russia. Foreign ministers unanimously reconfirmed the relevance of the five guiding principles agreed in March 2016 for the EU's policy towards Russia. They provide a flexible framework for EU relations with Russia, allowing firmness on EU values and selective engagement where there is a clear EU interest.

In the discussion, in the aftermath of the Salisbury attack and following-up on the European Council conclusions, foreign ministers highlighted in particular the need to strengthen the resilience of the EU and its neighbours against Russian threats, including hybrid threats. This includes Russian disinformation campaigns, in relation to which ministers commended the work conducted by East StratComms taskforce in the European External Action Service. Foreign ministers also highlighted the importance of supporting Russian civil society and of continuing to develop people to people contacts.

The five guiding principles for the EU's policy towards Russia are:

- demand the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, as a key element for any substantial change in EU-Russia relations;
- strengthen relations with the EU's Eastern Partners and Central Asia countries;
- strengthen EU resilience to Russian threats, including hybrid threats, an element even more relevant today following the [European Council's](#) tasking;
- engage selectively with Russia on foreign policy issues such as certain international issues such as Iran and the Middle East Peace Process, and other areas where there is a clear EU interest;
- support Russian civil society and engage in people-to-people contacts, in particular between the youth.

Western Balkans

Over lunch, foreign ministers discussed the Western Balkans in preparation for the EU-Western Balkans summit in Sofia on 17 May 2018.

[EU-Western Balkans summit in Sofia, 17/05/2018](#)

[Strategy for the Western Balkans \(European Commission\)](#)

External action financing instruments

The Council had a preliminary exchange of views on the future financing of external action instruments after 2020. The Commission is preparing its proposal for the EU's next long-term budget (the future multiannual financial framework, MFF) which is expected to be presented on 2 May 2018.

[Multiannual financial framework: shaping EU expenditure \(Background information\)](#)

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****EU strategy against weapons of mass destruction**

The Council approved the annual progress report on the implementation of the EU strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which covers activities carried out in 2017. The report describes the main non-proliferation, disarmament and arms export control activities undertaken in 2017.

The guiding principles of EU actions are:

- effective multilateralism, including promoting the universality of international treaties, conventions and other instruments and their implementation, through diplomatic action and financial assistance to third countries and international organisations;
- close cooperation with countries to strengthen the international non-proliferation regime;
- addressing non-proliferation issues in the EU's bilateral political and non-proliferation and disarmament dialogue meetings and in more informal contacts;
- the effective and complementary use of all available instruments and financial resources – the CFSP budget, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), other instruments – in order to maximise the impact of the EU's activities in pursuit of its foreign policy objectives.

All actions were undertaken within the broader context of EU security policy and conflict-prevention.

Council conclusions on chemical disarmament and non-proliferation

The Council adopted conclusions on chemical disarmament and non-proliferation with a view towards the fourth special session of the conference of the states parties to review the operation of the chemical weapons convention on the prohibition of the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and on their destruction. This session will take place in The Hague on 21-30 November 2018.

The Council recalls that the European Union stands united in its support for the total prohibition and elimination of chemical weapons worldwide and that it strongly believes that use of chemical weapons, including the use of any toxic chemicals as weapons, by anyone, be it a State or a non-

State actor, anywhere, and under any circumstances is abhorrent and must be rigorously condemned.

The Council reaffirms that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable, constitutes a breach of international law and may amount to a war crime or a crime against humanity and that there can be no impunity and those responsible for such acts must be held accountable. It underlines that the most recent reports from Syria, which are truly shocking and must be urgently and independently investigated, only serve to reinforce the EU's shared determination.

Furthermore, the Council welcomes the upcoming fourth review conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention and expresses its commitment to contributing constructively to its successive outcome.

[Read the full text of the conclusions](#)

Council conclusions on South Sudan

The Council adopted the following conclusions on South Sudan:

1. 2018 is a critical year for securing peace in South Sudan as the term of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU), as set out in the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS), comes to an end. The EU strongly supports efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to address the situation and bring peace to South Sudan through the High Level Revitalisation Forum (HLRF). All stakeholders should be able to participate freely and without fear in the HLRF. The EU welcomes the prominent role played by civil society, youth, women and faith-based organisations during the first two phases of the Forum. Political space for their participation, as well as for vulnerable groups, must be ensured.

While ARCSS remains the basis for the process, the discussions must reflect the reality on the ground. The EU remains deeply concerned at the continued fighting and grave violations and abuses of human rights that have inflicted horrific levels of human suffering and left the country in ruins. The EU urges all parties to the negotiations to put the future of the country and the needs of its people first.

2. The EU urges all parties to the conflict in South Sudan to immediately cease fighting and participate in the peace process in good faith. During the HLRF, all parties must show real increased commitment and be serious about agreeing on: viable, revised responsibility-sharing; accountable, realistic governance structures reflecting the political, regional and ethnic diversity of the country; a clear transitional period; and monitored, durable and effective security sector arrangements that cannot be used to pursue the interests of any single individual group. This is a premise to lay the ground for sustainable and lasting peace and stability in South Sudan.
3. The EU welcomes the signature of the Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access Agreement (CoHA) on 21 December 2017. However, the EU is deeply appalled by the continued violations of the agreement by all sides. All parties must immediately end military and other violations of the agreement, including the obstruction of humanitarian operations, hostile propaganda, and the harassment of civil society, the media and the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM). The EU commends the work done by CTSAMM to date in reporting on CoHA violations in difficult circumstances. It is crucial that the parties unconditionally disclose information pertaining to their military units so that the African Union (AU) may take action against those responsible. The EU calls on all parties to support the verification process, including through facilitating access for CTSAMM.
4. The EU strongly welcomes the important role played by the AU, and the relentless efforts by the United Nations (UN) and its Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to protect civilians and support the peace process. The EU reiterates its calls that UNMISS, including the Regional Protection Force (RPF), must be allowed to deliver on their mandates as per UNSCR 2406 (2018). It stresses the need for a united approach by all countries of the region.
5. The EU remains gravely concerned about the persistent catastrophic humanitarian situation that is caused mainly by the ongoing conflict. Seven million people – two thirds of the population – are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance as a result of more than four years of conflict, with children being particularly affected. More than four million people are displaced, including over two million who have fled to neighbouring countries. Humanitarian organisations continue to face security threats and other forms of obstruction, including bureaucratic impediments. Parties to the conflict continue to divert resources, including through exorbitant work permit fees and arbitrary taxes. The EU condemns all attacks on humanitarian personnel and urges all parties to the conflict to grant free, safe and unhindered access to all areas, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The EU also calls for strong collective actions by all donors, UN agencies and NGOs to respond in a more systematic and resolute manner. The EU calls on all parties to comply with international humanitarian law, to protect civilians and to facilitate medical care. More than ever, consistent and safe access for sustained humanitarian assistance is crucial to prevent a recurrence of famine in 2018.

6. The EU condemns in the strongest terms attacks against civilians, including but not limited to those reported by the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan (CHRSS). Grave human rights violations and abuses, some of which may amount to war crimes, including ethnically targeted violence, rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, recruitment and use of children during conflict, enforced disappearances and incommunicado detention, arbitrary arrest and detention, as well as torture are regularly documented and reported. The space for human rights defenders and journalists to work freely continues to shrink across the country. The culture of impunity must not be allowed to continue; the EU emphasises the urgent need to end it and reiterates its calls on all parties to hold perpetrators to account and to ensure effective remedies for victims. The EU strongly supports the implementation of transitional justice institutions in South Sudan and urges the TGoNU to make progress on the mechanisms provided for in ARCSS Chapter V, and in particular to sign without further delay the Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of a Hybrid Court for South Sudan. The EU will support the effective operation of the mechanism in the future.
7. The EU strongly condemns the high levels of corruption and illicit financial flows that fuel the conflict. It calls for greater financial accountability, adherence to international financial standards and responsible engagement with the regional and international financial sectors and encourages South Sudan to join the Eastern and Southern African Anti-Money Laundering Group. This is crucial in order to initiate the process of restoring the confidence of the people and international partners in the management of public funds in South Sudan. The EU is deeply concerned by continuing arms imports and allegations of regional complicity. The EU will continue applying its autonomous arms embargo and reiterates the call for a UN arms embargo. The EU commends the decision of the 61st Council of Ministers of IGAD on 26 March 2018 to take targeted sanctions against individual violators of the CoHA, and encourages the AU to implement this decision. The EU remains ready to apply all appropriate measures to those obstructing the political process.
8. Once an agreement is reached at the HLRF and a new transition starts, the new government of South Sudan will have to take on critical challenges. First and foremost, a permanent ceasefire must be achieved. Security of the population and improved humanitarian conditions must be ensured to foster a safe environment for the eventual voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons. The constitutional review process should be completed in an inclusive manner, ensuring an open political and civic space. Accountability, reconciliation and truth-telling processes should be prepared, as they are essential elements of providing justice for the population. These will lay the ground for the transitional authorities to prepare for inclusive and credible elections to a revised timeline.

In the light of the above, the EU would be ready to consider the best way to support South Sudan on its path towards peace and stabilisation."

Council conclusions on malicious cyber activities

The Council adopted conclusions on malicious cyber activities which underline the importance of a global, open, free, stable and secure cyberspace where human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law fully apply.

The Council expresses its serious concern about the increased ability and willingness of third states and non-state actors to pursue their objectives by undertaking malicious cyber activities. The EU will continue to bolster its capabilities to address cyber threats.

The Council firmly condemns the malicious use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), including in Wannacry and NotPetya, which have caused significant damage and economic loss in the EU and beyond. It stresses that the use of ICTs for malicious purposes is unacceptable.

The EU expresses its willingness to continue working on the further development and implementation of voluntary non-binding norms, rules and principles for the responsible state behaviour in cyberspace within the UN and other appropriate international fora.

[Read the full text of the conclusions](#)

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

High Representative report on Operation Althea

The Council approved the High Representative's six-monthly report on Operation Althea, which covers the period from 1 September 2017 to 28 February 2018.

The military operation was launched on 2 December 2004 with the aim to provide capacity-building and training to armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and support the maintenance of a safe and secure environment.

[EUFOR Operation ALTHEA](#)

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Banque de France

The Council adopted a decision approving Mazars and KPMG S.A. as the external auditors of the Banque de France, the national central bank of France, for the 2018-23 period ([7330/18](#) + [7329/18](#)).
