



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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PRESS RELEASE

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Foreign Affairs

Brussels, 18 February 2013

President

Catherine Ashton
EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security
Policy

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Main results of the Council

*The Council expressed its support for the efforts made by the international community to bring about stability and security in **Mali** and reaffirmed its commitment to the fight against the threat of terrorism. It launched an EU training mission in Mali to support the training and reorganisation of the Malian Armed Forces.*

*The Council was appalled by the increasingly deteriorating situation in **Syria** and the unacceptable levels of violence there. It commended the initiative taken by the President of the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, Moaz al-Khatib, to engage in political dialogue, bearing in mind the conditions necessary to bring about a peaceful transition towards a future without Assad. The Council called on the representatives of the Syrian regime not to miss this opportunity and to respond positively to the offer of political dialogue.*

*The Council condemned in the strongest terms the nuclear test conducted by the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)** on 12 February and demanded that the DPRK refrain from carrying out any further such tests. As a first step in defence of the international non-proliferation regime, the Council reinforced EU restrictive measures against the DPRK.*

*The EU welcomed steps forward in the implementation of the Global Political Agreement in **Zimbabwe**. Recognising the significance of these advances, the Council eased EU restrictive measures against Zimbabwe, and underlined that the EU stands ready to adjust its policy in recognition of further progress as and when it is made by the Zimbabwean parties in line with the SADC roadmap.*

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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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Czech Republic:

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United Kingdom:

Mr William HAGUE

First Secretary of State, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Commission:

Mr Andris PIEBALGS

Member

Mr Štefan FÜLE

Member

The government of the acceding state was represented as follows:

Croatia:

Ms Vesna PUSIĆ

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

ITEMS DEBATED**Mali**

The Council discussed events in Mali. It adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The EU supports the efforts of the international community to achieve stability and security in Mali, most notably Operation Serval and the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), and reaffirms its commitment to the fight against the threat of terrorism.
2. The EU reiterates its full support for the implementation of the roadmap for transition in Mali. To that end it urges the Malian authorities, in consultation with ECOWAS, to take steps to maintain the arrangements necessary to sustain the transition until free and transparent elections are held this year, and to ensure that the civilian government has definitive control over the armed forces. It reiterates its willingness to support the electoral process. The EU also calls on the Malian authorities to follow up their pledge, as laid down in the roadmap, to set up a National Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission. This will enable Mali's key players to take ownership of the results of the process of negotiation, including with all non-terrorist and non-criminal armed movements which agree unconditionally to respect the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Mali.
3. The EU welcomes the meeting of the Support and Follow-Up Group in Brussels on 5 February 2013 on the situation in Mali. It is important for the international community to support the transition in Mali, particularly through regular meetings of the Group and through the resumption of the political dialogue between Mali and the EU under Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement.
4. The Council welcomes the gradual resumption of EU development aid, including through the development of a State-Building Contract. In this context, the implementation of the roadmap remains vital. The Council welcomes the immediate launch of concrete actions, particularly in the field of elections, reconciliation and dialogue, food security and basic services. The EU is preparing to rapidly implement measures aimed at supporting medium- and long-term stability, development, the strengthening of the rule of law and good governance, and enabling the provision of public services throughout Malian territory. The Council reiterates its commitment to a close cooperation between the EU and the Member States as regards development aid. The EU welcomes the upcoming international conference of donors for the development of Mali.

5. The EU recalls its humanitarian commitment to the populations affected by the crisis, both in Mali and in the neighbouring countries. It will continue to provide, and if necessary will increase, its humanitarian aid to populations in need. Strengthening the resilience of populations in crises remains one of its priorities. When the time comes, it will contribute to the free and voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees in the countries in the region.
6. The EU is alarmed at the allegations of breaches of international humanitarian and human-rights law and reminds the Malian authorities that they have an overriding responsibility for the protection of civilian populations. The Council welcomes the intention of the EU to provide support for the deployment of civilian human rights observers by the AU, ECOWAS and the United Nations and for the contribution of independent civil society organisations working in this sphere. All perpetrators of human rights violations must be held responsible for their actions.
7. The Council has decided to launch the EUTM Mali mission, thanks to an accelerated planning and preparation process. The EUTM mission will immediately begin providing advice for the Malian armed forces and will make preparations to set up their military training. Particular attention will be paid to human rights, international humanitarian law, the protection of civilians, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and to internal rules of conduct and the control of the armed forces by the civilian government. It welcomes the mobilisation of the EU's "clearing house" mechanism in order to coordinate support for AFISMA and the equipment of the Malian armed forces. In accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2085, the Council stresses the urgent need for a European and international commitment to supporting the Malian armed forces, including through the rapid provision of suitable military equipment. In this respect, it welcomes the initial contributions made by the Member States and the international community. This commitment will complement the efforts of EUTM Mali.

Likewise, in the regional context of the fight against terrorism, the Council welcomes the decision to reinforce the Bamako liaison office for the EUCAP SAHEL Niger mission with justice and police experts.

8. The EU recalls its commitment to regional and international coordination, particularly with ECOWAS, and reiterates its determination to provide financial and logistical support for AFISMA, under the guidance of the AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel, Mr Buyoya. It calls for the implementation of all commitments undertaken at the Addis Ababa donors' conference on 29 January 2013.

9. The EU remains concerned by the potential risks to regional and international security posed by the crisis in Mali. It particularly reiterates its concern regarding international trafficking, illicit financial flows and their ties with extremist groups in the Sahel. In this respect, the Council points out the importance of the EU's Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel and calls on the High Representative and the Commission to make concrete proposals for the implementation of stabilisation measures within the framework of the overall approach.
10. The Council invites the High Representative to submit a proposal as soon as possible for the appointment of an EU Special Representative for the Sahel."

In addition, the Council launched an EU training mission in Mali. For more details, see press release [6340/13](#).

Eastern Partnership

The Council took stock of the implementation of the EU's Eastern Partnership. It adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council reaffirms the importance it attaches to the Eastern Partnership, as a specific dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and its objective of accelerating the political association and deepening the economic integration of the Eastern European partner countries with the EU, based on the Eastern Partnership Joint Summit Declarations of May 2009 and September 2011. The Council acknowledges the European aspirations and the European choice of some partners and their commitment to build deep and sustainable democracy. It highlights the particular role of the Eastern Partnership to support those who seek an ever closer relationship with the EU.
2. Highlighting the Eastern Partnership Roadmap as a basis for guiding and monitoring the further implementation of Eastern Partnership objectives, the Council took stock of developments and discussed the way forward to the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2013.
3. The Council recalls that at the heart of the Eastern Partnership lies a shared commitment to international law and fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to market economy, sustainable development and good governance. Looking forward to the Vilnius Summit, it emphasises that the pace of reforms will determine the intensity of cooperation and partners most engaged in reforms will benefit most from their relationship with the EU. In this context, the Council looks forward to the elections in 2013 in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and underlines the importance of them being held in line with international standards and previous relevant recommendations by OSCE/ODIHR.

4. The Council welcomes the substantial progress made in the negotiations of Association Agreements. Recalling its conclusions on Ukraine of 10 December 2012, the Council reiterates its commitment to the signing of the Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DCFTA), as soon as the Ukrainian authorities demonstrate determined action and tangible progress in three key areas, possibly by the time of the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit: ensuring the compliance of elections with international standards and appropriate follow-up actions for the 2012 elections; addressing the issue of selective justice and preventing its recurrence; and implementing the reforms set out in the jointly agreed Association Agenda. The signature could be accompanied by opening for provisional application of parts of the Agreement. The Council recalls that the European Council has called for progress as regards the Association Agreements including DCFTAs with the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Armenia with a view to their finalisation by the time of the Summit. It appreciates the launching of work with these partners on Association Agendas to replace the ENP Action Plans with a view to preparing for and facilitating the implementation of the Association Agreements. The Council also welcomes the progress underway in the Association Agreement negotiations with Azerbaijan.
5. The Council reaffirms the EU's commitment to the shared objective of visa free travel in due course provided that the conditions for well managed and secure mobility are in place and welcomes the progress made in this regard. It welcomes the progress made by the Republic of Moldova in implementing the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan and the launching of the assessment of the benchmarks set out under the second phase of the Action Plan. It encourages Ukraine to increase efforts towards fulfilment of its first phase benchmarks. The visa dialogue with Georgia has progressed swiftly and, by the time of the Summit, implementation of the future Visa Liberalisation Action Plan should be under way. Negotiations on both the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements with Armenia have been swiftly concluded and the Visa Facilitation Agreement with Armenia was signed in December 2012. The Council now looks forward to their entry into force by the time of the Vilnius Summit. There has also been good progress in negotiations of Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements with Azerbaijan, and the Council looks forward to their conclusion by the time of the Vilnius Summit. The Council also looks forward to the early conclusion of the amended Visa Facilitation Agreements with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. It reiterates its readiness to launch negotiations on a visa facilitation and readmission agreement with Belarus and welcomes that Member States continue to make optimal use of the existing flexibilities offered by the Visa Code.
6. The Council welcomes the significant range of activities ongoing in the framework of the multilateral dimension of the Partnership which provide a forum for all six partners and EU Member States to exchange best practice in terms of approximation to EU standards. It also welcomes the establishment of informal Eastern Partnership Dialogues allowing for informal discussions between the EU and partner countries and enhancing dialogue on key sectors of cooperation. It stresses the importance of giving enhanced visibility to Eastern Partnership objectives, projects and activities through implementation of a visibility strategy envisaged in the Eastern Partnership Roadmap.

7. The Council stresses the importance it attaches to the engagement of broader society in contributing to and monitoring the implementation of Eastern Partnership objectives. The Council underlines the particular importance of civil society in this regard and welcomes the development of the Civil Society Forum, the establishment of its National Platforms and the creation of a Secretariat. It also stresses the importance of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly and the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership in furthering cooperation with the parliaments and local and regional authorities of the partner countries. The Council takes good note of the important contributions of these stakeholders to the development of the Eastern Partnership and looks forward to continued close cooperation in the run-up to the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit. It encourages the business communities in the EU and partner countries to develop further the Business Forum. It attaches great importance to people to people contacts and support for youth and student exchanges and scholarship programmes.
8. It recalls the significant EU financial support provided for partner countries' reform efforts in the period from 2010 to 2013 amounting to €1.9 billion. It also recalls that the Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation Programme (EaPIC) has provided additional financial support to the reform efforts of the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, according to the principle of "more for more". It stresses the importance of the continuing implementation of the €173 million Comprehensive Institution Building Programmes agreed with five partner countries to strengthen their administrative capacity to push forward key reforms. The Council encourages partner countries to advance sector reform and to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the participation in EU programmes and in the work of EU agencies. It welcomes the intention of the Commission to develop a second generation of Eastern Partnership flagship initiatives. The EIB is invited to continue to step up its support for investment in the region.
9. With a view to preparing the Vilnius Summit of November 2013, the Council looks forward to the Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers meeting in July of this year. It underlines the importance of fully engaging partner countries in the preparation of the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit."

Iraq

The Council discussed the situation in Iraq and how the EU can contribute to promoting stability in the country.

Syria

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

- "1. Recalling its previous Council Conclusions, the EU is appalled by the increasingly deteriorating situation in Syria and the unacceptable levels of violence, which continue to cause suffering to millions of Syrians and destruction of infrastructure and cultural heritage. The EU strongly urges the regime to stop targeting civilians, halt airstrikes and artillery attacks, and calls for an immediate end to all violence. The EU further calls on the regime to free political prisoners, in particular peaceful activists, women and children. The EU remains deeply concerned by the spill-over effects of the Syrian crisis in neighbouring countries and reiterates its attachment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria.
2. The EU welcomes all efforts to bring a peaceful solution to the violence in Syria. The EU continues to believe that the key to the solution of the conflict lies in facilitating the Syrian-led political process. In this context, the EU reiterates its full support to the Joint Special Representative of the UN and the League of Arab States, Lakhdar Brahimi to promote a credible and effective political solution with those genuinely committed to the transition. The EU urges all countries active in promoting a solution to the crisis to support these efforts. This process should be based on the principles included in the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 and on the UNSC resolution 2042. The EU commends the proposals made by Brahimi in his briefing to the UN Security Council on 29 January 2013, and strongly calls on all members of the UNSC to uphold their responsibilities regarding the crisis in Syria.
3. The EU commends the initiative made by the President of the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, Moaz al-Khatib, of a political dialogue, bearing in mind the necessary conditions that would lead to a peaceful transition towards a future without Assad. In the face of the ever deteriorating conflict and growing human suffering, the EU calls on the representatives of the Syrian regime not to miss this opportunity and respond positively to the offer of political dialogue. The EU encourages the Coalition to continue to engage with the UN/LAS Special Representative and confirms its readiness to assist the necessary dialogue process, in any way possible.

4. Following up the Marrakesh meeting of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People and the international conference held in Paris on January 28, the EU will continue its engagement in strengthening its support to the National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, including its technical structures. The EU underlines the importance of further efforts by the Coalition to include representatives of all sections of the Syrian society regardless of their origin, affiliations, religion, beliefs or gender based on its commitment to the respect of the principles of human rights, inclusivity and democracy.
5. The EU is extremely concerned at the dramatic deterioration in the humanitarian situation. As announced at the Kuwait Donors' Conference on 30 January, the EU significantly increased its humanitarian assistance to the affected population inside Syria and in neighbouring countries. The EU calls on all donors to promptly deliver on their pledges, according to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. The EU calls on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and facilitate humanitarian access for aid workers throughout the country. In order to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, the EU will take steps in line with humanitarian principles, towards providing humanitarian assistance to all areas in the country, including those currently not reached by humanitarian aid. In this regard, the EU urges the regime in Damascus to allow delivery of humanitarian assistance by whatever routes are most effective in order to reach all the population in need.

The EU also reiterates its demand for the specific protection provided to medical personnel and facilities. The whole international community must use its influence on all parties to respect their obligations in this regard. The EU reaffirms the leading role of the UN in providing assistance in Syria, which should be intensified in the light of growing needs in all parts of the country and should reach all the population in need through all possible channels. The EU highly commends those countries that keep their borders open in order to host the Syrians who flee the violence. The EU will continue to support all neighbouring countries, including Lebanon and Jordan with financial and in-kind assistance.

6. In accordance with the European Council conclusions of 13-14 December the EU will pursue efforts to reinforce its support and assistance to the civilian population. In this context it welcomes the establishment by the National Coalition of an Assistance Coordination Unit and looks forward to enhancing its coordination with it.
7. The Council agreed to renew the restrictive measures against Syria for a further three months, amending them so as to provide greater non-lethal support and technical assistance for the protection of civilians. The Council will actively continue the work underway to assess and review, if necessary, the sanctions regime against Syria in order to support and help the opposition.

8. The EU remains deeply concerned about the widespread and systematic violation of human rights and international humanitarian law which, according to the Independent International Commission on Inquiry, may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The EU calls on the UN Security Council to urgently address the situation in Syria in these aspects, including on a possible referral to the International Criminal Court as requested in the Swiss letter to the Security Council of 14 January 2013. The EU recalls that all those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes must be held accountable. The Council supports the work of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the situation in Syria and welcomes the updated report.
9. The EU remains committed to strengthening its support in building the capacity of civil society to participate in a future Syria. It welcomes the efforts made by the Coalition in setting out its vision for transition and encourages the Coalition to further develop this activity including working closely, when possible, with local structures on the ground. It reiterates its support to these efforts as part of a Syrian-led transition process. The EU welcomes the initiatives being developed within the framework of the Working Group on Economic Recovery and Development of the Friends of the Syrian People.
10. The EU will continue to work closely with international partners on planning to ensure that, as soon as genuine democratic transition begins, the international community is ready to provide rapid support to Syria across all areas of mutual interest, addressing the short term needs and the long-term reconstruction efforts."

Middle East peace process

During lunch, ministers took stock of developments in the Middle East peace process and discussed in particular how the EU can contribute to the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties in the Middle East.

Zimbabwe

The Council eased the EU's restrictive measures against Zimbabwe and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The EU welcomes the agreement reached between the political parties in Zimbabwe on a final draft constitution and the announcement of a referendum. This step forward in the implementation of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) adds further momentum to the reform process and paves the way for the holding of peaceful, transparent and credible elections later this year.
2. Recognising the significance of these advances the EU has agreed to suspend immediately the travel ban imposed on 6 Members of the Government of Zimbabwe. The EU has also agreed to delist 21 persons and one entity subject to restrictive measures.
3. The EU is encouraged by the continued commitment of the South African Facilitation Team and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as expressed at the recent extraordinary SADC Summits in Dar Es Salaam, in supporting the efforts of the Zimbabwean parties to implement the GPA and the SADC Roadmap.
4. As demonstrated in July 2012 and the agreement by the Council today the EU, consistent with its incremental approach, stands ready to further adjust its policy to recognise progress as it is made by the Zimbabwean parties along the SADC Roadmap. As stated in the Council Conclusions of July 2012, a peaceful and credible constitutional referendum would represent an important milestone justifying an immediate suspension of the majority of all remaining EU targeted restrictive measures against individuals and entities.
5. Reaffirming its partnership with the people of Zimbabwe, the EU calls on all political parties to maintain the momentum allowing for the holding of democratic elections later this year and to complete the implementation of the GPA and the SADC Roadmap. The EU reiterates its commitment to political dialogue with the Government of National Unity and to work with any Government formed as the result of a peaceful, transparent and credible electoral process."

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****Democratic People's Republic of Korea**

The Council strengthened EU restrictive measures against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). It adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council condemns in the strongest terms the nuclear test conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 12 February which clearly violates its international obligations under UN Security Council Resolutions 1718, 1874 and 2087, and demands that it abstains from further tests. This nuclear test represents a serious threat to regional and international peace and security and is furthermore a serious affront to the principles set out in the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The EU calls on the DPRK to sign and ratify the CTBT without delay.
2. The Council deplores that the DPRK has once again chosen the ill-advised path of provocation and isolation, in defiance of the international community's united condemnation of its use of ballistic missile technology on 12 December 2012. The pursuit by the DPRK of its illegal nuclear and ballistic missile programmes constitutes a grave challenge to the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and presents the risk of aggravating regional tensions. These do not serve the DPRK's claimed objective of improving its security.
3. The Council recalls that UN Security Council Resolution 2087, unanimously adopted on 22 January this year, provides for a strengthening of sanctions already in force and expresses the UN Security Council's determination to take significant action in the event of a further launch or nuclear test. As a first step in defence of the international non-proliferation regime, the Council therefore decides to further strengthen sanctions against the DPRK by adopting EU autonomous measures in addition to those contained in UN Security Council Resolution 2087. These new measures relate to trade in conventional weapons involving the DPRK and to the export to the DPRK of certain key materials for the ballistic missile sector, as well as financial restrictions.

4. Furthermore, the Council judges that the increased risk posed by the DPRK's new provocative act warrants further robust and effective measures by the international community aimed at preventing the DPRK from pursuing its nuclear and ballistic programmes, including its uranium enrichment activities. In consultation with key partners and in light of ongoing deliberations in the UN Security Council, the EU will consider the imposition of further appropriate restrictive measures to support this objective, including in the financial sector.
5. The EU calls upon the DPRK to re-engage constructively with the international community and in particular the members of the Six-Party Talks, in order to work towards lasting peace and security on a nuclear-free Korean peninsula and as the best means to secure a more prosperous and stable future for the DPRK. The EU stands ready to continue working with its partners in support of these objectives."

For more details, see press release [6330/13](#).

EU priorities at UN Human Rights Forums

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. Ahead of the 22nd regular session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the EU reaffirms its strong support for the Human Rights Council and other United Nations bodies tasked with the promotion and protection of human rights around the world, including the Third Committee of the General Assembly.
2. The EU remains fully committed to a strong and effective multilateral human rights system that impartially monitors the implementation by all States of their human rights obligations. The EU will vigorously defend the universality of human rights and will continue to speak out against human rights violations worldwide. This commitment has been reaffirmed in the 2012 EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy.
3. The EU pays tribute to the leadership of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay and her Office which this year celebrates its 20th anniversary. The EU strongly supports her work and that of her staff, underlining the full independence and integrity of the mandate of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

4. The EU will actively participate in the Human Rights Council and General Assembly sessions in 2013 through statements and interventions as well as by introducing thematic and country-specific initiatives targeting key human rights concerns and promoting accountability for human rights violations. The EU will seek close cooperation with other countries to this end.
5. During the upcoming main session of the Human Rights Council, the EU, together with a broad cross-regional coalition, will make sure that the HRC addresses, as a matter of priority, the grave situation of human rights in Syria. The EU will insist on the need for accountability and preventing impunity for the serious human rights violations and abuses, including crimes under international law, perpetrated in Syria. The EU supports the work and extension of the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry.
6. The EU will continue to draw the attention of the HRC and the General Assembly to the persistent critical human rights situation in the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea. The EU will reinforce its calls on the government of the DPRK to urgently improve the human rights situation in the country. Together with Japan, the EU will propose, at the HRC, the creation of an independent inquiry mechanism in support of the Special Rapporteur.
7. The EU will actively support the extension of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Islamic Republic of Iran who undertakes important work to address the worrying human rights situation in the country and should urgently be granted access to the country.
8. The EU will also support efforts aimed at keeping the issues of accountability and reconciliation as well as the current human rights situation in Sri Lanka on the agenda of the Human Rights Council.
9. Gravely concerned by the developments in Mali, the EU calls for an appropriate response by the Human Rights Council.
10. The EU welcomes the cooperation with Myanmar/Burma on a consensus resolution of the General Assembly in 2012, reflecting the progress made while also recognising remaining human rights concerns, particularly in ethnic areas. The resolution to be presented at the 22nd session of the HRC seeks to maintain international attention on the developments and encourage further reforms.
11. A key EU priority for the 23rd session of the HRC in June will be the situation of human rights in Belarus which continues to give rise to grave concern.

12. The EU supports that the HRC continues to address the state of human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Sudan and South Sudan.
13. The EU will continue to present resolutions on freedom of religion or belief at the UN. A key objective for the HRC will be the renewal of the important mandate of the Special Rapporteur on this issue. The EU will participate in the discussion of his upcoming report which focuses on the situation of persons belonging to religious minorities.
14. Together with Latin American and Caribbean countries, the EU will devote particular attention to children's rights both at the HRC, with a resolution focusing on the enjoyment for children of the right to health, and later in the General Assembly. The EU will also seek to achieve concrete improvements for children in armed conflicts, in close cooperation with, and support of, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General.
15. The EU will continue to advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment and the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action. The EU will push for a strong commitment to the elimination of all forms of violence against women at the upcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2013. The EU strongly supports the work of UN Women as well as UN activities related to Women, Peace and Security, including sexual violence in conflict.
16. The EU will work with like-minded partners to continue to keep the issue of discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity on the agenda of the United Nations, in follow-up to the HRC resolution of 2011 and the successful cross-regional activities in New York.
17. The EU will continue to support efforts for the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet and pay special attention to the protection of journalists and bloggers.
18. The EU underlines the need for UN human rights forums and bodies to address freedom of association and assembly, and to provide concrete support to human rights activists and civil society organisations. Legislative and other restrictions placed on NGO activities are a growing concern in many countries. The EU will also defend the role of civil society representatives and human rights defenders in the UN context and react against any threats to those who cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms.
19. The EU will also support efforts for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, to be given particular attention at a General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Disabilities and Development in September.

20. Democratic governance, the rule of law and the full realisation of human rights are important for achieving sustainable development. The EU will therefore work to ensure that these key issues are integrated in the post-2015 global development agenda.
21. The EU continues to attach great importance to the UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures; their access to countries and their free and unhindered contact and cooperation with individuals and civil society are indispensable. The EU calls on all countries which have not yet done so to extend a standing invitation.
22. The EU also reaffirms its unwavering support for the UN Human Rights Treaty Body system. The EU will pro-actively engage in the treaty body strengthening process with the aim of improving the capacity of the treaty bodies to fulfil their mandate effectively and efficiently, while ensuring their independence.
23. The EU reaffirms its attachment to the Universal Periodic Review, underlines the importance of preserving its universality and calls upon all UN Member States to effectively cooperate with the mechanism. In addition, the EU discusses with partners about the implementation of recommendations stemming from this review, as well as those formulated by Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures.
24. The EU is committed to engage with countries from all regions on initiatives that genuinely contribute to the protection of human rights and strengthens their universal application. The Council stresses the importance of addressing key human rights concerns and discussing human priorities at the UN in contacts with third countries at all levels, with a view to mobilising cross-regional cooperation for an effective UN human rights system."

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY**EU assistance to Kosovo related to the rule of law**

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the European Court of Auditors Special Report No 18/2012 of 3 October 2012, entitled "European Union Assistance to Kosovo related to the rule of law":

- "1. The Council welcomes the publication of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) Special Report No 18/2012: *European Union Assistance to Kosovo*¹ related to the rule of law on 30 October 2012, focusing on the period 2007 to 2011, as well as the efforts, for the first time, to audit EU assistance in a complex post-conflict environment. The constructive participation of the European Commission and EEAS throughout the process is likewise noted and appreciated.
2. The Council shares the Court's appreciation that rule of law is a key feature of the EU Western Balkans Agenda and recalls that the focus on reinforcing the rule of law will be further strengthened, as the region continues to move forward toward the EU. Assisting and promoting the rule of law in Kosovo is a joint effort of the local authorities, the European Union and EU Member States following a comprehensive approach that respects the combined need for political engagement, technical expertise, and long-term capacity-building in Kosovo and the wider region. Major efforts are needed by all actors, in particular the Kosovo authorities, to consolidate rule of law.
3. In considering the Court's observations, the Council notes the importance of acknowledging the complex political and institutional context in which the EU's assistance has been delivered, especially regarding the north of Kosovo. The effectiveness of EU actions cannot be measured only by quantitative means as it reflects the local and regional political environment and comes in combination with the local authorities' responsibilities in this field. In this regard, the Council commends the EU's efforts, in particular the personal engagement of HR/VP Catherine Ashton, to facilitating a high-level political dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the International Court of Justice's opinion on Kosovo's declaration of independence.

4. The Council notes that the Court's report contains valuable recommendations to enhance the efficiency of EU assistance in Kosovo, including the need for better integration of internal and external EU security priorities, the need for closer EU coordination to ensure that projects and investments are complementary and effective, and the need for EU procedures on procurement to be fit for purpose for CSDP missions. The issues related to force generation and legal framework of CSDP missions need to be further explored by the competent Council bodies.

 5. The Council acknowledges that several of these recommendations have already been acted upon since the Report's reporting period, most notably in regard to integration of EU processes and closer coordination. The successful restructuring and reconfiguring of EULEX in Summer 2012 (occurring after the reporting period of the Court) addressed many of the report's observations regarding closer coordination and the comprehensive approach. To this effect, the Council encourages the EEAS and the Commission to further enhance their efforts to ensure full coordination on rule of law activities. Both the EEAS and the Commission have integrated a stronger focus on benchmarking into their activities and reporting procedures, also in order to facilitate allocation of resources. The Council welcomes this and underlines the importance of systematic examination of the impact of EU assistance to Kosovo."
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