



COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION



Council conclusions on Lybia, Syria, the EU-Russia relations and the situation in Venezuela

FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting

Florence, May 24th 2017, European Union Institute venue at Villa Salviati

Libya

1. The Council follows with concern the recent escalation of violence in the southern part of the country. It calls on the High Representative to launch immediately consultations for exploring the possibility of a CSDP mission, at the request of the United Nations with a view to assisting the Libyan government to restore order in the country, fight terrorism and contribute to a better [stemming] of migratory flows. Recalling the positive outcomes of the EU integrated border assistance in Libya and highlighting the need to strengthen it, in particular by preventing irregular migrants from leaving Libya by boat to arrive in the EU.
2. The EU remains committed and continues to support the Presidency Council (PC) and the Government of National Accord (GNA) as the [sole] legitimate authorities in Libya under the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). We call for the consolidation of Government of National Accord of Libya and the inclusion in that government of all forces in combatting chaos and terrorism.
3. It reminds all parties that stability and the rule of law in the country are necessary prerequisites for the economic recovery and a prosperous future for the people of Libya.
4. In this context it strongly believes that the only solution to achieve stability and restore order is through an inclusive dialogue with all Libyan actors with a view to consolidating the political transition and making Libyan institutions more representative.
5. At the same time it stresses the need to disarm all armed forces which are not under the authority of the GNA. Calls for cessation of hostilities between the parties of the conflict which is the main prerequisite for inclusive dialogue.

6. The Council warns all Libyan actors against undermining current mediation efforts led by the UAE and reiterates its readiness to strengthen restrictive measures against those threatening peace, stability and security in the country.

7. It reiterates its support to the UN and its mission; it thanks Martin Kobler, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, for his relentless efforts and calls on UN membership to overcome divisions and swiftly appoint Mr. Kobler's successor.

With specific regard to migratory issues

8. The Council recalls the need to address the growing pressure on the Central Mediterranean Route, while actively monitoring the Eastern and Western Balkans Routes to help stem the flow of irregular migrants. The Council also stresses the importance of seeking an EU mission to stabilise the southern Libyan border with neighbouring countries as part of our broader effort to curb migration.

9. It takes the view that Operation Sophia should increase its role in the rescue operations to actively fight against smugglers and human traffickers, in close cooperation with the Libyan authorities, and in synergy with the CSDP missions and operations in the Sahel (EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUTM Mali), which need to be re-orientated towards strengthening the capacity of these countries to stem migratory flows. Frontex mandate and budget is expanded to include search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean in support of operation Sophia. The Council stresses the importance of social, economic, and medical assistance to migrants that arrived from Sub-Saharan Africa and Sahel Region into Libya. The Council also emphasises the importance of human rights issues in the country.

10. It calls on the High Representative/Vice President to inject further dynamism into the high level dialogues with a view to concluding migration compacts with the five African partners. Reminds that these compacts should deliver in terms of readmissions for returns for irregular migrants, in full compliance with international humanitarian and refugee law, and that they should be based on mutual commitments/obligations between the EU and its Member States and partner countries. EU societies must be ready to sustainably integrate migrants into society after they seek asylum.

11. [it believes that EU interests should be brought to bear also in the context of EU development assistance and] recalls the legal obligation that ACP partner countries have under the Cotonou Agreement in matters relating to the reintegration of irregular migrants into their home countries

12. Recalls that the EU Agenda for Migration foresees also the provision of legal migration pathways, based on a common analysis of labour market needs, subject to adequate security considerations and the number of migrants that have already been resettled in the member states.

Syria

13. Recalling the Council Conclusions of 23 May and 17 October 2016 and the European Council Conclusions of 15 December 2016, the Council is appalled by the continuing dire situation in Syria and the persistent humanitarian, security and political issues arising from the conflict. 13.5 million Syrians are now in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria including 6.3 million internally

displaced, 1.5 million living under siege conditions, and a further 5 million Syrian refugees hosted by its neighbours and the wider region.

14. The Council therefore calls upon the Syrian regime and all its allies and involved parties, notably Russia including as a co-Chair of the ISSG and as a major international actor involved in the conflict to undertake all efforts to ensure: a full cessation of hostilities; the lifting of sieges; and full unhindered sustainable country-wide humanitarian access, for which the Syrian regime has the primary responsibility for ensuring these protections. The Council strongly condemns the continued systematic, widespread and gross violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law by all parties responsible. This must end and those responsible must be held accountable. The Council condemns the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare through the besieging of populated areas, as well as the forced displacement of populations. The EU recalls that there can be no lasting peace in Syria until there is a democratic transition with a stable government.

15. The Council recalls that the EU's strategic objectives in Syria are focused in six key areas:

a) An end to the war through a genuine political transition (in line with UNSCR 2254, negotiated by the parties to the conflict under the auspices of the UN Special Envoy for Syria and with the support of key international and regional actors.

The EU firmly believes that there cannot be only a military solution to the conflict and any action should be in line with the Comprehensive Approach, with commitment to the unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Syrian State. Only a credible political solution, as defined in UNSCR 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué will ensure the stability of Syria and enable a decisive defeat of Da'esh and other UN-designated terrorist groups in Syria and ensure the inclusion of the [moderate islamic] political opposition in the process. The EU continues to support the efforts of the Global Coalition to counter Da'esh in Syria and Iraq.

b) Through the promotion of inclusive democracy, human rights and freedom of speech, the EU seeks to save lives by addressing the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable Syrians across the country in a timely, effective, efficient and principled manner.

The EU will continue to support Syrian civil society organisations, as the Council recognises the prominent role that Civil Society will need to in post-conflict Syria and in the process of reconciliation the EU is willing to send a mediation expert to contribute to post-war Syrian reconstruction, in coordination with the UN. The Council agreed to increase EU efforts to promote free speech, including through supporting free and independent media. As the biggest funder of humanitarian efforts inside Syria, the EU will continue intensive humanitarian diplomacy and seek ways to improve access and protection including through the re-establishment of safe zone areas under international supervision.

e) Promote accountability for war crimes with a view to facilitating a national reconciliation process and transitional justice.

The EU will continue to work to help ensure accountability for war crimes, human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, including the confirmed use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and other military forces. The EU deplores in the strongest

terms the systematic violations perpetrated in Syria, as documented by the UN established Independent International Commission of Inquiry, including the detailed survey on crimes committed last year in Aleppo. We call for the UN institutions a speedy and thorough investigation with the aim of finding the guilty party for the recent apparent chemical attack against civilians in the Idlib Province.

f) Support the resilience of the Syrian population and Syrian society.

16. The EU reiterates that it will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria once an inclusive political transition has been agreed by all stakeholders and once stability has been achieved. At that point, the Council will examine possible post-conflict assistance as detailed in the Joint Communication. In this context, the EU could review the current restrictive measures, engage in resuming co-operation with the transitional authorities, mobilise funds in support of post-war recovery and reconstruction, including cultural heritage, and use the appropriate tools under the EU Neighborhood Policy and other programmes to tackle transitional challenges and stabilise communities through economic development. The EU is actively supporting the process in Astana, as regards the cessation of hostilities UN in its coordination of post-agreement civilian stabilisation planning and will work with the UN, International Financial Institutions and other donors. The Council recalls that all participants have responsibility to ensure that the agreement is upheld and respected. In particular we call on Russia and Iran to participate in this process, both of whom continue to support the Syrian Regime. Moreover, the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva should be strengthened, in order to include the results of Astana Process in the Geneva Process under UN leadership.

17. The EU is conscious of the effects the Syrian conflict has on neighbouring states, and confirms its commitment to provide support to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, as well as Iraq [and Egypt], who have demonstrated their commitment and resilience in hosting millions of Syrian refugees over the past few years. The Council commends these efforts and agrees on the need to maintain this support through the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement and the EU-Jordan and EU-Lebanon Compacts, as well as the continued relationships with Iraq and Egypt.

18. The Council reaffirms the outcomes reached from in the Brussels Conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region" on 4-5 April 2017, following the London conference of February 2016, the Kuwait conferences of 2013-15, the Berlin and Helsinki Conferences of 2014 and 2017. The Conference strengthened international support for the UN-led political process and raised funding to meet the needs outlined in the UN-coordinated appeals as well as supporting refugee-hosting countries. The EU Strategy will serve as policy guidelines for the EU approach. The Council call for the protection of cultural cities of ancient civilizations in Syria and Iraq and for better protection of world heritage properties in conflict zones under the supervision of UNESCO

EU-Russia relations

19. The EU highlights its political relationship with Russia, both in a bilateral context and in relation to specific regional and international issues (Syria, Iran, Middle East, Crimea and Georgia)

20. The EU condemns the illegal annexation of Crimea and restates its common strong position of non-recognizing this violation of international law. The Council recalls how actions in the Donbass have put a question mark over the European peaceful order. It recalls that the full implementation of

the Minsk agreements is necessary prerequisite for any substantial change in our relations. The management of security in the EU and non-EU states that border Russia is a crucial issue for our future productive relations. The EU reiterates the value of sanctions as one tool used to deter violations of international law.

20. The EU takes notice of the minorities of Greek and Crimean Tartars, living in Crimea and calls on Russia to ensure a non-discriminatory atmosphere and a full respect for the rights of minority members.

21. The EU is determined to strengthen relations with its Eastern Partners and other neighbours, in particular in Central Asia. The Council is determined to foster these relations through bilateral and regional association agreements with the Eastern Partners, also through the use of visa liberalisation tools, which are currently developing and put in action. Therefore the EU looks forward to the forthcoming Eastern Partnership Summit in November, and reiterates that such increased relations are not directed against Russia.

22. The EU intends to strengthen internal European Union resilience through energy security, hybrid threats, strategic communication. Diversification of energy imports and loyal partnership with supplying countries, cyber security, and respect of sovereign territory. Considering cyber operations and cyber warfare have become a part of modern warfare and energy dependence has become an increasing means of influence in international politics, the EU plans to concentrate on these crucial matters.

23. The EU unanimously agrees on a line of selective engagement and dialogue with Russia, both on foreign policy issues and in other areas where there is a clear EU interest.

24. The EU restates the importance of economic assistance through EU structural funds to the member states, badly hit by the current mutual sanctions, as corresponding to the principles of the European Cohesion policy.

25. The EU is willing to increase its support to Russian civil society and engage and invest in people-to-people contacts and exchanges (youth, NGOs), for instance through the European Endowment for Democracy.

26. The EU calls on the Russian authorities to put an end to any act of harassment, including at the judicial level, against political opponents, journalists and human rights defenders (freedom expression and association); recalls Russia's international obligations (OSCE, Council of Europe, Council of the Baltic Sea States); is resolved to developing a unified policy on the role of human rights in the EU-Russia relationship. The EU calls upon Russia to release political prisoners. In particular the EU restates that the restriction of the freedom of religion against the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and the persecution of LGBTI people in the Chechen Republic have reached an intolerable level. That restriction may be only in compliance with international human rights standards, which Russia shall implement as a member of the Council of Europe.

The situation in Venezuela

27. The EU supports the efforts in Venezuela to facilitate an urgent, constructive and effective dialogue between the Government and the parliamentary majority, creating the conditions for peaceful and stable solutions to the multidimensional challenges the country faces (political, regional, dire economic situation, humanitarian crisis, social unrest.).

28. The EU condemns the escalation of violence which has caused multiple deaths and injuries and regrets that mediation efforts have not yet yielded the desired results and recognizing that under the current conditions the mediation process is stagnant. The EU also calls on the government to respect of fundamental rights of the people including the right to demonstrate peacefully. The EU supports mediation efforts by the Vatican and urge all parties to cooperate fully the process). (Investigations needed? Respect of fundamental rights of the people must be respected, including the right to demonstrate peacefully - students killed on the streets/ increasing armed civilian groups is worrying).

29. The EU calls on all actors and institutions to work together in a constructive manner towards a sustainable political solution for the country (respect of rule of law, judicial system that all can trust in, future electoral calendar and separation of powers); rebuild trust and political stability.

Furthermore demands the Venezuelan Government to free the leaders of the opposition in order to achieve full democratic elections.

30. The EU is fully ES: withdrawal) committed to helping Venezuela address the most urgent needs and is ready to use its instruments to support regional and international efforts to that end EU funds and cooperation with USA (in the framework of the OAS provided that the executive power opens up to dialogue with the opposition and shows more flexibility towards the demonstrators)+MT: The EU will provide through NGOs basic amenities and resources until the crisis comes to an end.

31. The EU remains concerned about the security and well-being of the 600000 European citizens adversely affected by the situation and intends to cooperate with Venezuelan authorities to ensure protection and assistance.