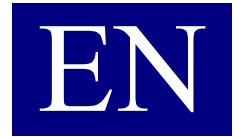




**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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PRESS RELEASE

3288th Council meeting

Foreign Affairs

Brussels, 20 January 2014

President

Catherine Ashton

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy

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Main results of the Council

Iran

As part of the implementation of the Joint Plan of Action agreed by Iran and the E3/EU+3, which entered into force today, the Council suspended certain EU restrictive measures against Iran for a period of six months. By putting the sanctions relief in place, the EU has implemented its part of the first step towards a comprehensive solution to address concerns about the Iranian nuclear programme. "We aim to start negotiations about a comprehensive solution with Iran in February", said EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton. The suspension took effect today.

Central African Republic

The Council is deeply concerned by the extreme insecurity and instability in the Central African Republic (CAR). It commended the rapid deployment by the African Union of the International Support Mission in the CAR (MISCA) and the support given to it by France's Operation Sangaris. "We've been fully mobilized since the beginning of the crisis to support the efforts of our African partners," Catherine Ashton said after the Council.

So as to step up the European involvement in the CAR, the Council gave political approval for a possible EU military operation and approved the related crisis management concept. The operation could contribute to providing a safe and secure environment in the Bangui area, with a view to handing over to the African Union, taking into account UN Security Council resolution 2127. "We'll move forward with operational planning, under our fast track procedures," said the High Representative.

A donors conference organized today by the EU and the UN collected € 366 million in pledges for humanitarian aid to the Central African Republic.

Syria

Ministers discussed the crisis in Syria and fully supported the peace conference on Syria on 22 January. The Geneva conference should be the first step in a process that will lead to a political solution to the conflict. The Council reiterated that the only solution to the conflict is a genuine political transition, based on the full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012 and preserving the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

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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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Mr Andris PIEBALGS

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Ms Kristalina GEORGIEVA

Member

Mr Štefan FÜLE

Member

ITEMS DEBATED**Southern neighbourhood****- Syria**

The Council held a discussion about the situation in Syria and the preparations for a peace conference on 22 January. It adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The EU fully supports the peace conference on Syria, which will take place on 22 January in Switzerland. The Geneva conference should be the first step in a process that will lead to a political solution to the conflict. The EU reiterates that the only solution to the conflict is a genuine political transition, based on the full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué, and preserving the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. The EU commends the efforts of the Joint Special Representative Brahimi and his team.
2. The EU recalls that the objective of the conference is the formation by mutual consent of a Transitional Governing Body (TGB) with full executive powers, including over security, military and intelligence. Any elections in Syria should only take place within the framework of the Geneva Communiqué. The regime, as well as the opposition, must commit themselves to the full implementation of the Communiqué as a matter of urgency, and demonstrate that commitment through their actions. The EU calls on all parties to engage constructively in a genuine negotiation.

The EU welcomes the invitation sent by the UN Secretary General to the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOC), commends its decision to participate in the conference and welcomes its commitment to establish an inclusive and representative delegation including women. The EU stands ready to assist the opposition delegation led by the SOC in needs that might arise as part of the negotiation.

The EU considers it important throughout the Geneva process to also work on promoting confidence building measures that would directly benefit the local population and increase the chances of the conference's success. Confidence building measures could for example be agreements on local ceasefires, lifting of sieges on certain urban areas so to allow for improved humanitarian access, and the release of arbitrarily detained prisoners or the exchange of detainees.

3. The EU remains gravely concerned with the continuing and indiscriminate bloodshed among the civilian population and calls for the cessation of all violence to allow urgent humanitarian access on the ground. It strongly condemns the regime's escalating indiscriminate attacks, including use of SCUD missiles, barrel bombs, air and artillery strikes and brutality on the ground, notably in Aleppo. The regime bears the primary responsibility for the conflict and its actions on the ground are undermining the potential for genuine political transition and fuelling extremism.

The EU shares growing concern about the spread of extremism and extremist groups, including ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra. Their involvement in the conflict poses a threat to the peace process, the territorial integrity of Syria and to regional and international security. The EU welcomes the SOC's condemnation of all forms of terrorism and extremism, and that the moderate opposition is opposing extremist groups.

As the majority of Syrians reject violence, all efforts must be channelled towards the common goal of rebuilding the country, rid it of its authoritarian past, preserve its traditions of inter-religious, inter-ethnic and cultural co-existence, and ensure full respect of all human rights. The EU is concerned about the plight of all vulnerable groups, and ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians.

4. The EU has consistently supported civil society groups, with a view to supporting a political solution to the conflict. Member states have also provided assistance and capacity building, including through recent events such as the Cordoba conference, and will continue to do so throughout the Geneva process.
5. The EU stresses the importance of an inclusive Syrian peace process and supports the active and meaningful participation of women and civil society in the overall political transition process. This will help facilitate an inclusive and sustainable outcome that meets the needs of the Syrian people. The EU encourages both parties to appoint women to their Geneva II delegations as their involvement in the process leading to a political settlement is crucial for its sustainability. The EU also calls upon the UN to facilitate the participation of women's groups and civil society organisations at Geneva, in a way that supports the two official delegations to the talks and into the peace process, in line with UNSC resolutions 1325 and 2122. In this context, the EU welcomes the meeting "Promoting Women's Engagement in the Syrian Political Process" convened by UN Women and the Netherlands on the 12-13 of January.

6. The EU will continue to defend human rights and will remain active in ensuring accountability for the widespread and systematic violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law perpetrated in Syria. The EU reiterates its call 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 EU reaffirms its support to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry for Syria established by the Human Rights Council.
7. Following the Kuwait II Donors' Conference on 15 January where the EU and its Member States pledged € 550 million, and in line with the European Council conclusions of 20 December 2013, the Union will continue to urge for progress and engage its partners in the framework of the UN-led High Level Group on humanitarian challenges.. Humanitarian aid and access cannot, and should not, be taken hostage of military tactics and political negotiations. Therefore, the EU calls on all the parties to the Syrian conflict, in particular the Syrian government to immediately implement in full the provisions of the Presidential Statement of the UN Security Council of 2 October 2013. Considering the unprecedented scale and nature of the crisis, the EU calls for a humanitarian resolution by the UNSC. The EU urges all parties to the conflict, in particular the Syrian government, which has the greatest responsibility in enabling humanitarian access, to take decisive steps to facilitate safe, unhindered and immediate access to all people in need, including those in besieged areas, through the most effective ways, including across conflict lines and across borders, and to protect aid and medical workers, and health facilities. The EU calls on the Syrian regime and encourages the governments of neighbouring countries to facilitate access for international aid organisations.
8. Recalling its conclusions of 30 November 2013 on the regional impact of the Syria crisis, the EU will continue ongoing efforts to support the Syrians affected by the conflict inside and outside Syria as well as the hosting communities and governmental institutions of Syria's neighbours that have courageously welcomed the refugees. EU remains committed to be an important actor in all aspects of the post-conflict reconstruction.

9. The EU welcomes the start of the transfer of chemicals from Syria for destruction outside the country. This development marks an important step, but much remains to be done, including the actual destruction of the chemicals. Therefore this step must be followed by swift and decisive action by the government of Syria to meet all its obligations and commitments within the agreed timelines of SC Resolution 2118 and OPCW Executive Council decisions. The EU acknowledges the invaluable work of the staff of the UN-OPCW Joint Mission and the contributions of a large number of countries. The EU has provided assistance to the joint mission and to the OPCW trust fund. It will continue its support financially, politically and logistically. The EU notes that further financial contribution to the OPCW trust fund is required in order to achieve a swift elimination of the Syrian stockpile. In this regard the EU emphasises the responsibility of the Syrian regime to cover the costs associated to the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons stockpile.
10. The EU calls on all foreign fighters in Syria, including Hezbollah, to withdraw immediately.

In view of the risks posed by foreign nationals traveling to Syria, including from Europe, to join extremist groups and following the work of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, the EU calls on all states bordering Syria or with direct air or maritime routes in to Syria to remain vigilant. It encourages those states to take appropriate measures to prevent the flow of foreign fighters to and from Syria. The EU is determined to engage with third countries also to deal effectively with terrorism and the financing of the flows of foreign fighters."

- Egypt

The Council took stock of the situation in Egypt, following the constitutional referendum of 14/15 January.

Middle East peace process

The Council debated the latest developments in the Middle East peace process.

The EU fully supports the on-going efforts of the parties and of the US to arrive at a just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is ready to contribute substantially to post-conflict arrangements for ensuring the sustainability of a peace agreement. An unprecedented European political, economic and security support package to both parties can be expected in the context of a final status agreement.

Afghanistan

The Council paid tribute to the victims of last Friday's attack in Kabul, including two staff members of the EU police mission in Afghanistan. It exchanged views on EU engagement in Afghanistan after 2014 and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. 2014 is a critical year for Afghanistan in which all Afghans should have the opportunity to participate in making the fundamental decisions that will determine the immediate future of the country.
2. The European Union remains firmly committed to long-term partnership with Afghanistan. The Council called on the Government of Afghanistan to reciprocate that commitment by finalising negotiations on the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development (CAPD). The text should fully reflect Afghanistan's international obligations. Sustained development will require the maintenance of security. With that in mind, the finalisation of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the United States of America is vital and will provide the basis for ongoing international support to increase the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces. The continued provision of significant international development assistance to the Afghan people across the country is dependent on a conducive security environment.
3. For Afghanistan to fully benefit from the funds committed by the international community at the Tokyo Conference in 2012, the Government of Afghanistan must meet its commitments under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF).
4. In this context, the EU appreciates the progress made in preparing for the presidential and provincial elections, including the important roles played by the Independent Election Commission and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission. It will be vital that the Afghan-led and owned electoral process is inclusive, transparent and credible leading to a legitimate outcome. The Council welcomes the call from President Karzai to all government officials and security personnel not to interfere in the election. The Afghan authorities must ensure that a comprehensive security plan is in place to enable all Afghans to have the opportunity to exercise their democratic right. It will also be important that appropriate measures are in place to avoid multiple voting, in particular men voting on behalf of women, ensure the security of ballot boxes, and prevent electoral fraud. The EU is providing financial and technical assistance through the UN and other bodies to strengthen the electoral process and is considering further support, including observing the elections.

5. The EU is concerned by the decline in economic confidence and the projected slowdown in economic growth, in particular the impact on reduced employment opportunities, especially for Afghan youth. The Government of Afghanistan needs to urgently take steps to strengthen investors' confidence, increase revenue generation and combat corruption. Passing the Anti-Money Laundering Law, Counter-Terrorist Financing Law, Tax Administration Law, the Law introducing Value Added Tax and the Mining Law will send an important message of commitment to tackle these issues.
6. The EU will remain focused on sub-national governance and provincial budgeting in Afghanistan with an emphasis on strengthening capacity to ensure the timely and sufficient distribution of resources to the sub-national level and increasing provincial capacity to allocate resources.
7. The EU remains concerned about human rights in Afghanistan, in particular the situation of women and girls. Urgent action is required to improve the full implementation of the statutory measures relating to women's rights. The publication of the report on the implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women can be an important benchmark in assessing future progress. The EU emphasises the importance of ensuring the full independence of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. Sustained improvement of human rights will require systemic judicial reform, including by addressing the position of the Chief Justice, and a legal and judicial system that fully complies with international human rights norms.
8. The EU will continue to support Afghan efforts to strengthen civilian policing and the justice sector beyond 2014. The EU assistance currently provided through development programmes and through the EU Police Mission to Afghanistan (EUPOL) should, by the end of 2016 and based on a proper transition of tasks to relevant actors, be consolidated in the context of a clearly defined comprehensive approach, taking into account the context post 2014. The Council notes that a strategic review of EUPOL Afghanistan is under discussion and looks forward to a decision on its new mandate beyond 2014. The EU's future engagement in the Rule of Law sector should be comprehensive and make full use of all available instruments. To ensure the complementarity of the various EU and Member State interventions beyond 2014, the Council emphasises the importance of continued sharing of analysis, establishing a clear division of labour and aligning and sequencing the various EU and Member States' instruments.

9. The announcement by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) of a sharp increase in opium poppy cultivation is alarming. The EU will take stock of how it can strengthen its engagement with Afghanistan, other countries in the region and international organisations on the transnational threats posed by drug trafficking and organized crime. The illicit drug industry constitutes a major threat to Afghanistan's stability and undermines efforts to improve economic and human development. The EU acknowledges the capacity improvement made in the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics, but more must be done to bring the seizure rate closer to the level of other producing countries. The Council underlines the need for the Government of Afghanistan to use the improvements in capacity to build an integrated approach for reducing production of opiates and other illicit drugs. This should include concrete measures to improve border management, interdiction, law enforcement, prevention campaigns, health provision and sustained investment in agriculture to provide rural jobs.
10. The EU calls on all political forces in the country to support a credible peace process, in which civil society is able to play a full part, that eschews violence and any link with terrorist groups and respects the Afghan Constitution, including the rights of women.
11. The countries in the region have an important role to play in contributing to peace and stability in Afghanistan. The EU calls on all countries in the region to support regional stability by using their good offices to advance an inclusive Afghan-led peace process and through non-proliferation and disarmament. It reiterates its support for the Heart of Asia process and will continue to support both bilateral and regionally-driven initiatives aimed at deepening political and economic cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours.
12. Conflict in Afghanistan continues to generate suffering to a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons. The Council commends the hospitality of Afghanistan's neighbours, especially Iran and Pakistan, who continue to host large numbers of refugees. The EU reiterates its commitment to the Regional Solution Strategy for the Reintegration of Afghan refugees and the principle of voluntary repatriation and investment in sustainable reintegration. The EU will continue its efforts to address both the refugee situation and the problems caused by uncontrolled and illegal immigration primarily to the neighbourhood, and also to Europe.
13. Regarding the role of the EU in Afghanistan in the coming years, the Council concluded that the overarching strategic goal should be the development of Afghanistan's institutions to provide the resilience needed to safeguard progress to date and provide a countrywide platform for the development of a more effective and ultimately sustainable Afghan state. The EU will focus its efforts in areas in which it adds most value. The key objectives should be to promote peace, stability and security in Afghanistan and the wider region; reinforce democracy; encourage economic and human development, including further improving access to health and education, and foster rule of law and respect for human rights, in particular the rights of women and girls. The strategy should take into account the regional dimension and maintain the flexibility to respond appropriately to potential changes in Afghanistan.

14. Based on this guidance, the Council invited the High Representative and the Commission, to present a proposal for a strategy to the end of 2016. The strategy should encompass a comprehensive approach and the mutual commitments identified in the TMAF and the draft CAPD. It should include an implementation plan that specifies deliverable outcomes, ensures the synergy between the various instruments, and establishes a clear, coordinated division of labour amongst the EU and Member States, working in close cooperation with Afghan partners, the UN, NATO and other stakeholders. In the longer term the EU and Member States will look to adopt a joint programming approach that will further strengthen coordination and results. The strategy should be ready for endorsement by the second quarter of 2014.

15. The Council expresses its deep sorrow for the victims of the heinous and senseless attack on civilians in a Kabul restaurant on Friday. The Council expresses its condolences to their family and friends. The Council pays tribute to the courage and dedication of the members of the EU police mission in Afghanistan, that work to improve security and justice for all Afghans. The Council restates its determination to support the people of Afghanistan both during the transition and beyond to achieve their aspirations of security, democracy, justice and respect for human rights."

Iran

The High Representative briefed the Council on the implementation of the joint plan of action agreed between Iran and the E3/EU+3 in November. As the joint plan of action entered into force, the Council suspended certain EU sanctions against Iran. For more details, see press release [5321/14](#).

Russia

During lunch, ministers exchanged views on the state of play in EU-Russia relations, with a view to the EU-Russia summit on 28 January.

Ukraine

The Council discussed the latest developments in Ukraine and adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. Recalling the statement of HR Ashton of 17 January 2014, the Council expresses deep concern about the legislation passed by the Verkhovna Rada on 16 January under doubtful procedural circumstances. These legislative acts would significantly restrict the Ukrainian citizens' fundamental rights of association, media and the press, and seriously curtail the activities of civil society organisations. The EU calls on the Ukrainian authorities to ensure that these developments are reversed and that its legislation is brought in line with Ukraine's European and international commitments.
2. The EU is very concerned about recent developments in Ukraine and urges all actors to seek through an inclusive dialogue a democratic solution to the current political crisis that would meet the aspirations of the Ukrainian people. It calls on all actors to exercise restraint and on the authorities to fully respect and protect the peaceful demonstrators' right to assembly and speech, and the freedom of the press. All acts of violence must be duly investigated and those responsible brought to justice.
3. Recalling the Council's Conclusions of 10 December 2012, the EU remains committed to Ukraine's political association and economic integration, based on the respect for common values, and to signing the Association Agreement with its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, as soon as Ukraine is ready."

Central African Republic

The Council debated the situation in the Central African Republic. It adopted the crisis management concept for a possible EU military operation to contribute to stabilisation in the Central African Republic.

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The European Union (EU) is deeply concerned by the extreme insecurity and instability in the Central African Republic (CAR), particularly since the attacks of 5 December 2013, which caused heavy civilian casualties, massive displacements of populations, several serious human rights violations and a dramatic worsening of the humanitarian situation. It expresses its concern about the risk of the Central African conflict having an effect on the neighbouring countries. In this context, the EU commends the rapid deployment by the African Union (AU) of the International Support Mission in the CAR (MISCA) and the support given to it by France's Operation Sangaris in accordance with United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2127 (2013). These joint efforts have brought improved security which, as a prerequisite for the country to return to stability, must be consolidated.

2. The Council, convinced of the importance of supporting African efforts and stepping up EU involvement in the CAR as part of its overall approach, wishes to thank the High Representative for the proposal she has put forward to ensure that the EU plays an active part in helping to stabilise the CAR under the CSDP. The Council reached political agreement on a future CSDP military operation and, to that end, approved the Crisis Management Concept. It asked the competent bodies to prepare the necessary measures in order rapidly to establish this operation, subject to a new Council decision. The operation will provide temporary support, for a period of up to six months, to help to achieve a secure environment in the Bangui area, with a view to handing over to the AU. This objective takes full account of UN Security Council Resolution 2127, and in particular of the possibility of MISCA being transformed into a UN peacekeeping operation.

The military force would thereby contribute, within its area of operations, to international and regional efforts to protect the populations most at risk and would contribute to the free movement of civilians. All these efforts will create the conditions that are required in order to provide humanitarian aid for those who need it. The Council wishes to stress that this operation must be based on a United Nations Security Council resolution which will make it possible for a EUFOR operation in the CAR to be launched without delay in support of the efforts deployed by the international community, in particular the AU, the UN and France, and by the Central African authorities, and it stresses the importance of an accelerated planning process.

3. To that end, the Council has designated the EU OHQ in Larissa as the planning authority . It has requested that operational planning activities continue using accelerated procedures. Lastly, the Council emphasises the importance of close coordination with the partners involved, in particular the Central African authorities, the UN, the AU and France, to ensure good cooperation and complementarity of the efforts under way to restore stability in the CAR.
4. The EU calls for the continued mobilisation of the international community to assist the CAR, in particular in the context of the Donors Conference for MISCA scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa on 1 February 2014 at the invitation of the AU. It also stresses the important role of the United Nations in the CAR.
5. The EU welcomes the initiative taken by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), aimed at relaunching the political process, in accordance with the framework that resulted from the Libreville Agreement of 11 January 2013, the N'Djamena Declarations of 18 April 2013 and 21 October 2013, the Constitutional Charter of the Transition and UNSC Resolution 2127 (2013). It has noted the resignations of the Head of State of the Transition in the CAR, Michel Djotodia, and of the Prime Minister, Nicolas Tiangaye, confirmed by the regional summit held in N'Djamena on 9 and 10 January 2014.

6. The EU invites the ECCAS and the AU to continue to support the political process. It reminds all those involved in the Transition of the need to work together, as well as with the political parties and civil society, in an inclusive manner and in good faith, to bring the Transition process to a conclusion and enable elections to be held by February 2015 at the latest as the first stage in a sustainable political process. The EU stands ready to support the preparation and holding of elections, in conjunction with its international partners, notably the United Nations.
7. The EU is committed to inclusive dialogue, national reconciliation, participatory processes and ensuring that all those who should steer the Transition process are represented. The EU welcomes all the mediation and reconciliation initiatives taken by religious leaders, which are indispensable if the different Central African communities and religions are soon to live peacefully side by side once again. It calls on all stakeholders, and in particular the new transitional authorities, to seek to resolve the root causes of the persistent instability in the CAR.
8. The EU recalls that all state and non-state actors are required to respect human rights and humanitarian law in the CAR. It calls on all parties to the conflict to end the violent attacks against the population and other violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The EU strongly condemns impunity and recalls that all who perpetrate such violations, including the leaders and members of the Lord's Resistance Army and other armed groups, such as for instance the ex-Seleka and anti-balaka groups, will have to answer for their crimes in court. It condemns in particular summary executions, mutilations, enforced disappearances, rape and other forms of sexual violence, the recruitment and use of children by armed groups and armed forces and deliberate attacks against civilians motivated by their religious or ethnic background, which have been highlighted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. It welcomes the fact that the Human Rights Council is to hold a special session on 20 January on the human rights situation in the CAR. The EU again stresses that primary responsibility for protecting civilian populations rests with the CAR transitional authorities. The EU notes that the CAR has ratified the Rome Statute and that acts constituting crimes against humanity and war crimes come under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The EU encourages the rapid establishment of the international commission of inquiry provided for in UNSC Resolution 2127 (2013). In this context, the EU reaffirms its resolute support for the ICC.

9. The EU remains concerned by the seriousness of the humanitarian situation, which is affecting the whole population. It recalls that all the parties must ensure immediate, unfettered and safe access to humanitarian aid organisations working to help the populations in the CAR, with due regard for international humanitarian law and principles. The EU and its Member States, which together constitute the largest humanitarian donor, will remain on alert to increase the European financial commitment for the humanitarian response to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations in Bangui, in the rest of the Central African Republic's territory, and in the countries of the sub-region taking in refugees from the Central African Republic. The Council welcomes the resolute action by the European Commission, in particular the high-level meeting being organised jointly by Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva and UN Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos on 20 January 2014 in Brussels. The EU urgently appeals to members of the international community to make a substantial contribution to the basic needs of the CAR population and to take an approach that closely links the emergency relief effort and development aid, coordinated by humanitarian and development actors and international financial institutions.

10. As the largest contributor to development aid in the CAR, the EU undertakes to examine immediately, in coordination with international financial institutions, all the measures which will make it possible to rebuild the state and prevent worsening conditions for the population as a result of the fall-out from the crisis. The EU pledges to examine straight away the conditions for an engagement in the rule of law area and security sector reform. Moreover, it plans to resume its cooperation projects, as soon as the security situation allows it to contribute fully to the CAR's reconstruction."

South Sudan

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The European Union (EU) condemns the ongoing hostilities in South Sudan and deplors the resulting suffering and loss of human life. It is alarmed by the deteriorating humanitarian situation and reports of large-scale human rights violations. The EU calls on all parties to agree an immediate cessation to hostilities and violence. It urges all political and military leaders to protect the population and to act in the interests of the South Sudanese people as a whole.
2. The EU stands firmly behind the mediation led by the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and commends their efforts to achieve an immediate ceasefire accompanied by effective monitoring, and to open the way for an inclusive political dialogue. In the context of a political process, the EU strongly supports the call by IGAD and the African Union (AU) for the immediate release of all political leaders currently detained in Juba. The EU calls on all parties to negotiate in good faith towards a peaceful, comprehensive and sustainable solution that addresses the underlying causes of the conflict. The EU encourages all regional and international efforts to align with and support IGAD mediation efforts and strongly discourages external intervention that could exacerbate the political and military tensions. It will continue to support IGAD's mediation efforts to resolve the crisis, including through the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa in close coordination with the "Troika" and other international actors. The EU stands ready to consider financial support for the negotiations and their eventual outcome, including a possible ceasefire monitoring mechanism.
3. The EU is deeply concerned at reports of widespread human rights violations and abuses, including ethnic targeting. All those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law must be held accountable for their actions. In particular the protection of all civilians must be respected. The EU welcomes the AU's intention to establish a Commission to investigate the human rights violations and abuses committed since 15 December 2013, including the root causes and triggering factors that led to the violence, and encourages this Commission to begin its work as soon as possible.
4. The EU also supports the efforts of the United Nations (UN), in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2132 (2013), to allow for the swift strengthening of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), in particular in relation to its mandate to ensure the protection of civilians as well as the strengthening of its human rights investigative capacity.

5. The EU is increasingly concerned by the humanitarian consequences of this new crisis, which comes on top of an already fragile situation, and the increasing number of internally displaced persons and refugees. It pays tribute to the work of those humanitarian aid organisations and individuals who have stayed and delivered help, in a highly volatile and dangerous environment, sometimes at the cost of their lives. The EU welcomes the role of the UN in coordinating the humanitarian response. It condemns all restrictions on humanitarian activities and calls on all parties to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all populations in need, in accordance with international humanitarian law and principles. The EU remains fully committed to respond to the deteriorating humanitarian situation and calls for adequate assistance to sustain humanitarian efforts in South Sudan.

6. The EU stands ready, if necessary, to consider targeted restrictive measures against individuals obstructing the political process, in support of AU and IGAD efforts and in close coordination with international partners."

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Relations with Serbia

The Council confirmed political agreement on a regulation concerning certain procedures for applying the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the EU-Serbia Interim Agreement.

Relations with Russia

The Council took note of the state of play of preparations for the 32nd EU-Russia summit, to be held in Brussels on 28 January 2014.

Relations with Iraq

The Council adopted the provisional agenda for the first meeting of the EU-Iraq Cooperation Council, to take place on 20 January 2014.

Restrictive measures - Libya

The Council amended the regulation concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Libya. The no claims and the non-liability clauses were changed to bring them into line with the guidelines on the implementation and evaluation of EU restrictive measures.

EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus

The Council allocated € 1.04 million to cover the expenditure of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, Mr Philippe Lefort, for the period from 1 January 2014 to 30 June 2014.

EU Special Representative

The Council repealed the mandate of the EU Special Representative for the Middle East peace process, Mr Andreas Reinicke. It ended on 31 December 2013.

Relations with Georgia and Albania

The Council authorised the opening of negotiations with Georgia as well as with Albania for agreements between the European Union and each country respectively on the security of classified information.

Restrictive measures - Belarus

The Council approved technical amendments to the EU restrictive measures against Belarus.

RESEARCH

Joint Technology Initiatives - Budgetary discharge

The Council endorsed a joint statement with a view to applying a separate discharge of the EU's budget to the future Joint Technology Initiative (JTI) undertakings ([5103/14](#)).

Under the joint statement, the three European institutions (Parliament, Council and Commission) agree that in order for the JTI undertakings to benefit from simplified financial rules better adapted to their public-private nature, they should be set up under article 209 of the EU's financial regulation.

In addition, the JTI undertakings should continue to be subject to a separate discharge to be given by the European Parliament upon recommendation of the Council. For this reason, specific derogations from article 209 of the financial regulation will be introduced in the constituent acts of the JTI undertakings.

Five JTIs are to be set up under the Horizon 2020 research framework programme. Three of these are for continuation of existing initiatives on innovative medicines ("IMI"), aeronautical research ("CleanSky") and fuel cells and hydrogen ("FCH"). A JTI on electronic components and systems ("ECSEL") combines two previous ones ("Artemis" and "Eniac" initiatives). A new JTI is proposed for bio-based industries ("BBI").

EU-Russia cooperation agreement in science and technology

The Council adopted a decision approving the renewal of the agreement on cooperation in science and technology with Russia for a further five years (13152/13).

The content of the new agreement will be identical to the current one, which expires on 20 February 2014.

APPOINTMENTS

Economic and Social Committee

On 13 January, the Council appointed, by written procedure, Ms Lise-Lotte LENBERG (Sweden) as a member of the European Economic and Social Committee for the remainder of the current term of office, which runs until 20 September 2015 ([17912/13](#)).
