



Council of the
European Union

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COASI 37
ASIE 8
CFSP/PESC 166
RELEX 147
POLGEN 13
JAI 160
DEVGEN 19

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
No. prev. doc.:	5993/18
Subject:	Cambodia - Council conclusions (26 February 2018)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on Cambodia, as adopted by the Council at its 3598th meeting held on 26 February 2018.

Council conclusions on Cambodia

1. The Council recalls the significant efforts and resources the European Union and its Member States have invested since the Paris Accords into supporting the reconstruction, the economic development and the pluralistic democratic transition in Cambodia.
2. The Council recalls that the 1991 Paris Accords, signed by Cambodia and 18 other countries, including France and the United Kingdom, have created binding legal obligations upon the parties, including the duty of the Cambodian government to maintain "a system of liberal democracy, on the basis of pluralism" as well as to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. These commitments are enshrined in the Cambodian Constitution.
3. It is therefore with particular concern that the Council has followed recent worrying political developments and the continuing deterioration of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, including the escalating repression of the opposition, media and civil society. The Council notes with deep concern the arrest of opposition leader Kem Sokha on 3 September 2017 and the closure or suspension of several NGOs and media outlets. Of equal concern are the enforced dissolution of the main opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) on 16 November 2017, the banning from politics of 118 CNRP senior members for five years, and the mandatory reallocation of all CNRP's local and national seats to unelected members of other parties, with the ruling party taking the vast bulk of local seats.
4. The Council strongly urges the Cambodian government to cease using the judiciary as a political tool to harass and intimidate political opponents, civil society, labour rights activists and human rights defenders.

5. The EU reiterates its demands for the immediate release of Kem Sokha. It also calls on Cambodia to take the necessary measures to ensure that the dissolution of CNRP be swiftly reversed and that CNRP members of Parliament and CNRP local counselors be reinstated. The Council notes that CNRP won 44% of the vote in the 2017 local elections and 44.5% in the 2013 legislative elections. With general elections due in July 2018, the enforced dissolution of CNRP denies the will of the voters and undermines the credibility of the current election process. The Council reiterates that an electoral process from which the main opposition party has been arbitrarily excluded is not legitimate. In this context, recalling the recommendations of the 2008 and 2015 EU electoral missions in Cambodia and the importance of effective follow-up, the Council welcomes the decision of the Commission to put on hold the EU's financial assistance to the National Election Committee (NEC).
6. The Council invites the Commission and the High Representative to closely monitor the situation and to continue a thorough and comprehensive assessment of development cooperation programmes in close cooperation with Member States with a view to ensure the strengthening of democratic principles, respect for human rights and the rule of law.
7. The Council also invites the Commission and the High Representative to strengthen the EU support to civil society and human rights defenders.
8. The EU is Cambodia's biggest export market. The Council notes that Cambodia has been granted preferential access to the EU market under the "Everything But Arms" (EBA) scheme. In this context, the Council recalls that respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including labour rights, is also a crucial part of EU's trade policy and underpins the granting of EU trade preferences. The Council invites the Commission to enhance the monitoring of the situation and to step-up the engagement with Cambodia in light of the provisions of Regulation (EU) No 978/2012.
9. In view of recent developments, the Council may consider specific targeted measures if the situation does not improve.

10. The Council urges Cambodia to restore democracy and the government to engage in a constructive dialogue with the elected opposition. The Council also urges the Cambodian government to take all necessary measures to ensure a political environment in which opposition parties, civil society and media can operate freely. The EU remains ready to assist Cambodia in meeting its obligations in terms of democratization, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and to support its economic and sustainable development.
 11. The EU will continue to closely monitor the situation in Cambodia.
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