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Subject: Mali and the Sahel
- Council conclusions (19 June 2017)

Delegations will find attached the Council conclusions on Mali and the Sahel as adopted at the 3551st meeting of the Council on 19 June 2017.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON MALI AND THE SAHEL

1. The EU reaffirms its commitment to support the countries in the Sahel which continue to be under threat due to terrorist attacks, and transborder criminal activities – including smuggling and trafficking in human beings, drugs and firearms. The Council strongly condemns yesterday's terrorist attack. Other risk factors include deficits in governance, inclusiveness and the fight against impunity. The EU has taken a strong integrated approach, on the basis of the Sahel Strategy and its Regional Action Plan, in order to contribute to the stabilisation of the region, by deploying the full range of relevant instruments in the fields of diplomacy, long-term development cooperation, support to human rights, stabilisation efforts, resilience building, migration, and security, including CSDP missions. The EU also provides assistance to meet the humanitarian needs of those in vulnerable situations in Mali and in the Sahel region.

2. The participation on 5 June 2017 of the High Representative (HR) in the Comité de Suivi de l'Accord de Paix (CSA) in Bamako, as well as the active and ongoing engagement of the EU Special Representative for the Sahel as member of CSA and the mediation efforts, confirm the strong commitment of the EU to the Agreement. Two years after the signature of the Malian Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, its swift and comprehensive implementation continues to be the only way to restore peace and security in the country, with full involvement of civil society, including women and youth. The EU expects all Malian actors to find consensual solutions to their differences so as to swiftly allow for the return of the State in the north of Mali, and to refrain from any action that may put in peril the progress made so far. The primary responsibility for ensuring the protection and well-being of the population lies with the Malian parties themselves. The EU also encourages an enhanced engagement of the G5 Sahel countries in the Malian peace process.

3. The persistent insecurity in northern and central Mali, fuelled by terrorism, radicalisation and transnational organised crime, including drug trafficking, and its negative impact on the access of the population to humanitarian aid and basic social services, threaten the stability, territorial integrity, governance, social and economic development and the rule of law of the country, and of the wider Sahel region. It is key that the population experiences concrete improvements on the ground. The EU recalls that all actors must respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law in order to ensure the protection of the civilian population, including to ensure and safeguard children's right to education. In this context, the EU is examining the deployment of a time-limited Action to support the return of civilian administration to the centre of Mali, thereby addressing the nexus between security and development. The EU will continue to implement crucial actions financed by the EU Emergency Trust Fund, for instance by supporting the capacity building of civilian forces (e.g. PARSEC, GARSI, support to the regional cooperation of G5 Sahel countries and to the Sahel Security College), in full coordination with other related activities on the ground. The EU stresses its intention to improve its ability to build security and defence capacities in Africa, including through Capacity Building in support of Security and Development (CBSD). The Council reiterates its call for the swift adoption of the legislative proposal amending the EU Regulation 230/2014 establishing an Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace.

4. The EU commends the political leadership of the G5 Sahel countries, ECOWAS and the AU in their efforts to support regional security, development and reconciliation. In this context, the Council stresses the importance of the EU partnerships with the region and welcomes the participation of the HR in the ECOWAS Summit on 4 June 2017 in Monrovia, and in the third ministerial meeting with foreign affairs ministers and the Permanent Secretary of the G5 Sahel, which took place on 5 June 2017 in Bamako.

5. The EU reiterates the importance of ensuring close coordination between all security actors, including the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and welcomes the initiative of the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel on the establishment of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. The EU has been the first to announce a financial contribution, with EUR 50 million as planned support to this initiative. This is an important step in common work to strengthen security and to fight terrorism and transnational organised crime – including smuggling and trafficking of human beings, drugs and firearms – while ensuring respect for human rights. In this context, the EU commends the engagement by France through Operation Barkhane.

6. The EU welcomes the effective contribution of the CSDP missions in Mali and in the Sahel, namely EUCAP Sahel Mali, EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger, in line with their respective core mandates, and the participation by EU Member States in these missions. It underlines the need for imminent operationalisation of the regionalisation work of CSDP missions in their civilian and military dimensions with the aim of supporting regional security cooperation, including by examining options for further support to the G5 Sahel Joint Force. This regionalisation approach will also take into account EU efforts, including CSDP, to stabilise Libya.

7. The EU confirms its commitment to engage with the G5 Sahel countries on migration in line with the five pillars of the Valletta Action Plan and the Partnership Framework, including in the area of returns. The Council supports the initiatives to combat smuggling and human trafficking, together with efforts to provide economic alternatives to communities along the main routes, including through projects under the EU Trust Fund. The EU reiterates its determination to bring forward cooperation with countries in the Sahel and Libya in the fields of enhanced border management, situational awareness, support to consular services of Sahel countries to facilitate assisted voluntary return of their citizens and support their reintegration, as part of a coherent approach to addressing flows and drivers of the key routes, monitoring possible alternative routes, and addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement.

8. The EU firmly condemns all terrorist attacks by AQMI, Da'esh and Boko Haram, and their affiliated groups on civilians and state officials, the armed and security forces in the region, as well as UN peacekeepers and French forces, and recalls that the perpetrators must be held accountable and brought to justice. Reiterating its full support to MINUSMA and in the context of the renewal of the mission's mandate, the EU urges the provision of sufficient, well-trained and well-equipped forces and adequate assets to fulfil its core mandate in the north, while allowing for a special emphasis on central Mali. The EU encourages new partners to contribute to the force generation of MINUSMA.

9. While acknowledging the serious security situation and the current challenges in the Sahel, the Council highlights that the EU's approach to the region also recognises its vast human and cultural richness as well as its growth potential. The role of Sahelian youth is central in order to achieve medium and long-term goals in the region. In this respect, the Council welcomes the Youth Initiative launched with the G5 Sahel, and underlines its relevance for the upcoming 5th Africa-EU Summit. The EU will ensure a close follow-up to the issues raised by youth representatives at the youth event in Bamako with the HR on 5 June 2017.