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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: The European Union's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel
- Council Conclusions (16 April 2021)

Delegations will find attached the Council conclusions on the European Union's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel, as approved by written procedure on 16 April 2021.

**Council conclusions
on the European Union's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel**

Introductory remarks

1. The countries of the Sahel and of the European Union are natural partners, bound by history, geography and culture. As recalled in the June 2020 Council conclusions on Africa, it is of utmost interest for the EU to develop an even closer and more ambitious partnership with Africa and its regions, particularly in support of multilateralism; peace, security and stability; sustainable and inclusive development; economic growth. In their Joint Declaration of 28 April 2020, the members of the European Council and the G5 Sahel Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the security, stability and development of the Sahel. The EU also underlines its commitment to its regional and integrated approach, as stated in the Council conclusions of May 2019.

2. The privileged relationship between the Sahel and the EU offers mutual strategic opportunities. It can facilitate the adoption of common positions to address common challenges. Furthermore, a stable Sahel is essential for the people of the Sahel and the EU to be able to fully benefit from economic opportunities, within a win-win partnership.

3. However, in recent years, the Sahel has faced complex situations involving mutually exacerbating vulnerabilities, fragilities and insecurity. The profound security crisis affecting parts of the region since 2012 is hampering its development and risks wiping out the progress made in recent decades. The EU sympathises with all victims and commends the courage of the people of the region.

4. Long-term trends such as climate change, demographic pressure in a context of insufficient economic growth, the increasing scarcity of natural resources, epidemic risks – including the COVID-19 health crisis and its effects – have exacerbated existing tensions and even raised new challenges, such as the issue of access to water and sanitation, and land, the issue of access to education, healthcare and employment, and the scale of migration flows. Several of these structural challenges require a local, national, regional and international response and a long-term commitment. The EU, as a privileged partner, remains ready to contribute to this.

5. In this context, and noting the voices raised against violations of human rights, inequalities, corruption and impunity, the EU is concerned about the fragility of the social contract and challenges to the legitimacy of the State, already undermined by its weak presence in several regions. The gradual expansion of insecurity and its impact, of which civilian populations are the first victims, has exacerbated a situation of multiple crises, with unprecedented humanitarian consequences in the region, including an increase in the number of internally displaced persons and refugees, forced displacements, abuse, inter- and intra-community tensions, the proliferation of recurrent food and nutrition crises, an increase in health needs, and difficulty establishing state services in conflict areas. Recognising that instability also contributes to irregular migration, the EU remains committed to its Sahel partners in these areas.

6. All these challenges, the increase in activity of armed groups, several of which are linked to international terrorist groups, the aggravation of insecurity, often of a cross-border nature, as well as calls for a strengthening of the political and humanitarian response, led the region's governments and their international partners to organise a collective response, involving major efforts in terms of security, development, governance and peace restoration: the creation of the G5 Sahel in 2014 and the subsequent growth in strength of its Joint Force since 2017 and the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to fight Boko Haram within the framework of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (2014). In parallel with this the Sahel Alliance was launched in 2017, followed by the Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel (P3S) in 2019 and the International Coalition for the Sahel in 2020, as a framework for political and strategic engagement in the Sahel. If these efforts are to continue to bear fruit, they must be intensified further in all areas.

7. These Council conclusions are aimed at carrying on from the 2011 strategy, revised in 2014, and the accompanying regional action plan for the period 2015-2020, within the current context and taking important developments into account. They complement and reinforce the Sahel strategies of EU Member States in an integrated approach which works to strengthen synergies and coherence between the various actors and instruments deployed in the Sahel.

8. The EU stands by the countries of the Sahel in their efforts to respond fully to the aspirations of their people and wishes to step up its support by placing greater emphasis on the political dimension, with governance at the heart of its action.

9. The main geographical scope of this new strategy is the five G5 Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. However, it places EU action in the wider context of regional and cross-border challenges, from the situation in Libya to insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin and the Gulf of Guinea, from the west coast to the dynamics of East Africa, taking into account the overlaps between the various regional, continental and global challenges. The EU will also place its interventions in the Sahel in the context of the formal and informal political, cultural and commercial links that exist, in particular those between the Sahel and North Africa.

A long-standing partnership in constant adjustment

10. This strategy ensures the continuation of a solid and long-standing partnership with the Sahel. Over the period 2014-2020, the EU mobilised all instruments at its disposal, from humanitarian aid to support for defence and security forces, through to stabilisation and support for sustainable development, at all levels of cooperation – national, regional, continental, international and thematic. Overall budgets have more than doubled. The terms of aid have been adapted in order to make it possible in particular to support security and stability. New cooperation instruments have been created to increase the speed and impact of EU support, such as the Emergency Trust Fund and the Capacity Building for Security and Development missions. For the first time in its history, the EU has undertaken a stabilisation action in Mali under Article 28 of the Treaty on European Union. It has revised the arrangements for use of its African Peace Facility (APF) in order to be able to provide support for the G5 Sahel Joint Force and for action of a more regional nature by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The APF has also been supporting the MNJTF since 2016 in its fight against Boko Haram.

11. The deployment of two civilian missions (EUCAP Sahel Niger in 2012 and EUCAP Sahel Mali in 2014) and one military mission (EUTM Mali in 2013) which, in accordance with their respective mandates, aim at supporting the region as a whole, contributes to strengthening the capabilities of defence and security forces in order to ensure the protection of populations. Since 2019, this effort to regionalise European action has been complemented by the work of the Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell. Several EU Member States are involved in the fight against terrorism, in particular through Operation Barkhane and the Takuba Task Force and by supporting the G5 Sahel countries in the military field, including through bilateral military agreements and cooperation. The EU also supports the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. An increasing number of EU Member States are involved in MINUSMA. These efforts reflect Europe's commitment to peace, security, stabilisation and the protection of civilians in the Sahel.
12. The EU welcomes the support of the international community in the Sahel. It welcomes all efforts aimed at greater coordination and coherence between the many initiatives there are for the region, particularly the Sahel Alliance, P3S and the Coalition for the Sahel, in which the EU is a participant. The EU remains committed to the four pillars identified in April 2020 and taken up under the Coalition for the Sahel, with an approach based on independent but closely coordinated pillars: (i) the fight against terrorism, (ii) strengthening the capabilities of national defence and security forces and of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, (iii) deployment of the State, administrations and basic services in a context of stabilisation, (iv) development actions.

13. The EU plays a critical role, together with the Executive Secretariat of the G5 Sahel, in coordinating and steering pillars (ii) and (iii), which are grouped together under the P3S, whose secretariat sits within the European External Action Service. As a founding member of the Sahel Alliance, the EU will continue its involvement in this initiative as part of its support for development.

An ambitious, inclusive and flexible strategy, based on the principle of accountability

14. The EU would like to reiterate its founding principles in its partnership with the Sahel countries and undertakes to adapt its working methods in order to maximise the impact of its support and thus to contribute to a lasting improvement in living conditions in the Sahel. In implementing its strategy, the EU will therefore pay particular attention to the effectiveness of the action it undertakes and to abiding by the principles of doing no harm and leaving no one behind.

15. Respect for and promotion of human rights, including gender equality and the protection of the individual from any attack on their integrity, will remain central to the EU's action in all areas of its involvement in the Sahel.

16. Given the need to achieve tangible results as soon as possible, the EU wants to make its action part of a partnership based on each partner's responsibility to fulfil its commitments. This mutual accountability is based on close and continuous political dialogue, allowing progress to be made in jointly agreed priority areas, in a climate of trust. Its aim is to encourage the achievement of concrete and measurable objectives, in particular in the areas of governance, the rule of law and the fight against corruption and impunity.

17. The Joint Declaration of 28 April 2020 reaffirmed that the G5 Sahel States hold primary responsibility for regional stabilisation. In order to maximise its impact, the EU's action needs to be supported by unfailing political will and dedication on the part of both the Sahel governments and the local authorities to act on their commitments and mobilise the necessary resources. The Sahel benefits from significant external support, in particular from the EU. Yet this support, despite its scale, cannot be fully effective unless there is strong ownership on the part of the Sahel authorities and at local and community level.
18. The EU will continue to provide emergency support and humanitarian assistance in response to crises affecting the most vulnerable populations, in accordance with international humanitarian principles. It will continue to actively promote respect for international humanitarian law vis-à-vis its Sahel partners, to strengthen the protection of civilian populations, to reaffirm the importance of ensuring safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to vulnerable people affected by conflict situations, and to strengthen civil-military coordination, in particular with a view to protecting and promoting humanitarian principles. As part of an integrated and coherent approach, the EU will base its action on the nexus between humanitarian aid, support for sustainable development and support for peace.
19. The EU will continue to support social cohesion, stabilisation, prevention of conflict and cross-border crime, mediation and peacebuilding by addressing the immediate and root causes of insecurity and instability. It will continue to support efforts to limit the spread of instability, and intends to continue to pay particular attention to the most vulnerable regions in terms of security, notably the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad regions.

20. As part of an inclusive approach, the EU will also make sure to draw on decentralised authorities and civil society in all its diversity.
21. The EU will be careful to tailor its approach to each context, taking into account the specific needs of populations, decentralised entities and states. Drawing on its experience, and in order to adapt its action as effectively as possible, the EU will also continue to rely on its delegations and the representatives of its Member States in the Sahel and to support studies and analyses that include a focus on gender and are designed to improve understanding of regional, national and local issues and challenges, and of the specific needs of populations, in order to be able to address them appropriately.
22. In accordance with its priorities, the EU will take into consideration, first and foremost, the national and regional policies and strategies in the Sahel, together with input from regional organisations, notably ECOWAS and the African Union. The preferred framework for the EU's action will comprise, in particular, the G5 Sahel countries' Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel from 2016 and the Integrated Strategic Framework from 2020, alongside the Emergency Plan for its implementation and the Priority Investment Plan, both adopted at regional level.
23. In order to ensure effective, rapid action with lasting results, the EU will focus on joint initiatives and will continue to improve its internal coordination. To this end, the EU will also rely on its Special Representative for the Sahel. In addition, the EU will ensure that its efforts are well coordinated with its international partners, in particular the G5 Sahel, ECOWAS, the AU, the United Nations, international financial institutions and bilateral strategic partners who share a desire to contribute to stability and development in the Sahel. The Coalition for the Sahel and its pillars provide the preferred framework for the EU's action, without prejudice to the EU's internal decision-making processes.

24. In order to ensure maximum effectiveness and efficiency, the EU will continue to call for coordinating bodies such as the Coalition for the Sahel, including the governance structures of its pillars, to remain flexible, inclusive and streamlined.

Strategic priorities

25. The EU's Sahel Strategy will provide the framework for its policies and action in this region. The EU emphasises the importance of the 'civilian and political leap forwards': a new political and governance pact focusing in particular on short-term stabilisation and long-term prospects for sustainable social, environmental and economic development, above and beyond military involvement. The EU will continue to support the four pillars of the Coalition, while respecting their independence.

26. In accordance with the 2020 Council conclusions on EU external action on preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism, the EU will remain active in the fight against terrorism and armed groups, cross-border trafficking and organised crime. In this regard, the EU will continue to support action taken by the G5 Sahel countries and their Joint Force in the area of security, including through military and civilian missions carried out under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The EU welcomes the commitment shown by several EU Member States in the Takuba Task Force to supporting the Malian armed forces in combat.

27. The EU will continue to support security sector reform (SSR), working to improve operational efficiency and management of human resources, increase transparency, including financial transparency, and strengthen control and internal accountability mechanisms. It will continue to call for internal security forces to have a more central role in strengthening trust between people and the State, in particular by advocating for the gradual replacement at local level of armed forces by internal security forces and for improvement of the latter's communication with the affected populations. The EU's support for SSR should continue to contribute to the return of human security and should remain based on the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, in particular as concerns humanitarian access and the protection of civilians.
28. The EU is ready to step up its support for effective and fair management of all territories, responsible state presence and provision of basic public services to all people on an inclusive basis, with a view to both stabilisation and development. In order to allow public institutions and local authorities to fulfil these essential functions, the EU stands ready to assist the Sahel countries in pursuing initiatives designed to strengthen trust between people and institutions, in particular by supporting the processes of decentralisation and increasing public participation in local decision-making.

29. The EU will pay specific political attention to efforts in the areas of governance and the rule of law. It will support reforms and contribute to capacity building, particularly institutional capacity building. It stands ready to support key moments for democracy, including discussions on the social contract, electoral processes and inclusiveness in political processes and reforms. The implementation of the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers process, the stabilisation efforts in the centre of the country and the reforms expected within that framework will be closely monitored. In this context, the EU will also continue to support decentralisation and civil society activities.

30. The EU will remain alert and ready to support efforts to combat corruption, human rights violations, including by defence and security forces, and feelings of injustice, of abandonment, of being left without protection – all of which seem today to be undermining the social contract between states and citizens and fuelling recruitment by armed groups. Violations or abuses of human rights or international humanitarian law must be prosecuted, and those responsible must be held accountable. The EU will continue to pay particular attention to the justice sector as a whole, and to accountability mechanisms that can be used to fight impunity and to restore the population's trust in its justice system. The EU will continue to promote, protect and respect all human rights and all fundamental freedoms and to support their defenders. In this context, it will also continue to support journalists in the free exercise of their profession, and to promote freedom of expression.

31. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services.
32. In line with the UN's Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the EU Action Plan¹, the EU will pay particular attention to gender equality and the role of women, especially in promoting peace-building and peace-keeping, better governance and sustainable development. It will support efforts towards women's empowerment, representation and full, equal and meaningful participation. It will step up its action to combat sexual and gender-based violence, in particular against women and girls.
33. The EU will pay particular attention to the issue of children affected by the conflict and the security crisis, including in the framework of its support for security sector reform, and emphasises that it is imperative to prevent and put an end to violations of children's rights, including their recruitment and use, and to reintegrate these children into society.

¹ [UNSC Resolution 1325 \(2000\) and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security](#), and the [EU Action Plan](#)

34. In line with Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security², the EU will support the authorities in giving youth a central place in policies and development, and investing in quality education, youth employment and young people's participation. Improving their prospects, in particular for young women and girls, will require a distinctive approach, adapted to their needs and expectations as well as to the social and economic contexts.
35. The EU remains at the forefront in terms of commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as set out in the 2030 Agenda, and will keep the fight against poverty and the other SDGs at the centre of its action. Pursuing the objectives of the Paris Agreement, it will encourage the countries of the Sahel in their efforts to achieve sustainable and inclusive development, including habitat protection, preserving biodiversity and combating desertification. The EU will continue to support efforts to combat climate change, conscious of its direct consequences for populations, including in terms of security. It will continue to support strengthening the resilience of populations, participate in the international effort to limit the impact of COVID-19 and provide support for structural economic reforms and the creation of decent jobs.
36. The EU will also promote increased sustainable private investment to support the Sahel economies and their diversification.
37. Aware of the major challenges to sustainable development and the stabilisation of region posed by the issues of access to land, water – including drinking water – and other natural resources, the EU will promote their sustainable, integrated and inclusive development and cooperation in this regard at regional, national and local level. To reduce severe food and nutrition insecurity, the EU will also promote the strengthening of sustainable agriculture systems.

² [UNSC Resolution 2250 \(2015\)](#)

38. The EU wishes to continue to promote fruitful cooperation in the area of migration, based on the constructive partnerships established in recent years.
39. The EU will continue to work, in the Sahel and with its Sahel partners, to strengthen the multilateral system, of which the United Nations is the heart. It will contribute to the smooth functioning of multilateral cooperation, alongside regional organisations such as ECOWAS and the AU, and UN organisations in the Sahel, including the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and the Special Coordinator for development in the Sahel. The EU pays tribute to the key role played by MINUSMA, in particular in supporting the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, for which the EU and the United Nations are members of the Monitoring Committee, and will work towards the operationalisation of the technical agreement between the EU, the UN and the G5 Sahel countries, with a view to providing operational and logistical support to the Joint Force³. It also stands ready to explore the most appropriate forms of support for building the capacity of the G5 Sahel Executive Secretariat. The EU also stands ready to contribute to international reflection on permanent and predictable funding in support of the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

A wide range of instruments for implementing the strategic vision

40. The EU reaffirms its readiness to mobilise the full range of its instruments to implement its strategy. A strengthened political dialogue between the EU and its Member States, on the one hand, and the G5 Sahel and each of its Member States, on the other, including at the highest level, will enable us to move forward together and take stock of the objectives set. The EU also counts on the key role of its Special Representative for the Sahel to enhance the overall coherence of its actions, and contribute to international coordination and political dialogue.

³ As provided for by [UNSC Resolution 2391 \(2017\)](#)

41. In addition, and as part of its support for democracy, governance and human rights, the EU will be able to mobilise its election missions to accompany national electoral processes. It will also be able to build on the development of a human rights due diligence policy as provided for in the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024. Where appropriate, the EU reserves the right to review its support and to mobilise at any time its regime of restrictive measures relating to serious violations of human rights worldwide.
42. In a ‘Team Europe’ approach, the establishment of the Neighbourhood, Development Cooperation and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe will make it possible to contribute to efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to finance actions in the field of conflict prevention, stabilisation, consolidation and peacekeeping. It will also allow for the continuation, under the circumstances covered by the instrument, of European assistance for capacity building of military actors in support of development and security for development. The creation of the European Peace Facility will assist military or defence capacity-building actions, including in support of the mandates of CSDP missions, to support the G5 Sahel Joint Force and state institutions. Furthermore, the mobilisation of the EU’s new innovative financial instruments will also be particularly relevant for the sustainable development of the region.

43. The EU will also continue to contribute to capacity building in the fields of defence and security, through the mobilisation of its CSDP missions and by continuing to adapt the mandate of EUTM Mali, particularly as regards decentralised actions and the regional dimension of the mission, including for the benefit of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. The EU will continue to adapt the mission to the needs and developments on the ground. It will also contribute to the ‘civilian and political leap forwards’ through its civilian CSDP missions and their support for the deployment of the state and reform of security sector governance.
44. The EU will put in place an ambitious public communication policy to raise awareness of the nature and extent of its support for the Sahel. It will also continue to tackle disinformation attempts and hybrid threats. It will also tailor its communication to local populations, for example by seeking to ensure that its public communications are translated into the languages of the region. These communication efforts should accompany and support national and/or inter-community peace and reconciliation initiatives.

45. In order to ensure constant political monitoring of the implementation of its strategy and to be able, where necessary, to adapt its action to developments and lessons learned, the EU will identify, in consultation with the Sahel partners, specific priority objectives, country by country and at regional level. The Council wishes to be able to rely on the EU delegations and the representations of its accredited Member States in this process, as well as for the regular monitoring of progress on the respective commitments in each of the G5 Sahel countries and identification of actions to be taken in order to achieve these objectives. The Council will regularly review progress on the EU's priorities. The results of these reviews will be shared with the other partners in the Coalition for the Sahel, to improve the coherence of international action in the region. The Council invites the EU High Representative and the European Commission to propose arrangements for the operationalisation, monitoring and evaluation of this strategy.

Concluding remarks

46. Committed to adapting its objectives and methods to changing circumstances, the EU reiterates its desire to strengthen and deepen its partnership with the G5 Sahel, its member states, its institutions and its peoples. In a spirit of mutual accountability and on the basis of concrete commitments visible to the affected populations, the EU wishes to be able to contribute even more to the consolidation of democracy, peace and stability and sustainable development of the Sahel, for the benefit of the people of the Sahel.
