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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: The Horn of Africa: a geo-strategic priority for the EU
- Council conclusions (10 May 2021)

Delegations will find attached the Council conclusions on the Horn of Africa: a geo-strategic priority for the EU as approved at the 3792nd meeting of the Council on 10 May 2021.

The Horn of Africa: a geo-strategic priority for the EU

Council conclusions

1. The Horn of Africa (HoA) is a strategically important region, with which Europe has longstanding political and economic ties. The EU is fully committed to deepen its strategic relationship and partnership with the HoA region and its countries, the objective being to support peace and security, democracy, human rights, rule of law, gender equality, sustainable development, economic growth, climate action and regional cooperation. The people-to-people links between the EU and the HoA are strong, including through the large and engaged diasporas.
2. The Council is establishing a new EU strategy, building on the 2011 HoA Strategic Framework¹, in line with the EU's overall approach to Africa², in order to give new impetus to this relationship, and to sustain the EU's political, security and economic interests. This strategy aims at strengthening the EU's partnership with the HoA countries and improving the EU's effectiveness and visibility in an increasingly competitive environment. It covers the eight countries of the Horn³ as well as regional organisations, in the framework of the wider neighbourhood including the Red Sea and the Western Indian Ocean.
3. The HoA region has undergone important developments over the last decade and is increasingly witnessing shifting regional dynamics. Historic peace agreements and the advent of democratic transitions have offered hopes and opportunities. However, conflicts – often fuelled by ethnic tensions – competition for power and natural resources, violent extremism, internationalised competition for influence and a history of violent conflict are exacerbating instability and fragmentation in the HoA at a time when multilateral cooperation is decreasing. To support regional stability and democratic transitions to which the population rightfully aspires, current and intertwined crises need to be addressed.

¹ [Council conclusions on the Horn of Africa](#), 14 November 2011, later updated by the Council Conclusions on the [EU Horn of Africa Regional Action Plan 2015-2020](#), 26 October 2015

² [Africa - Council conclusions](#), 30 June 2020

³ Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan

4. Demographic changes, urbanisation, digitalisation and the emergence of new markets provide important opportunities. Yet the region is affected by the dire effects of climate change and more frequent natural disasters. Governance challenges need to be overcome to address persistent poverty, socio-economic inequalities, difficult access to basic services and lack of decent job opportunities, all of which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The region hosts the largest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in Africa. Violations and abuses of human rights and violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) persist, while humanitarian challenges are growing exponentially. It also remains a region of origin, transit and destination of important migration flows, including irregular migration, to other countries in the wider region as well as to the EU.
5. Beyond its strong political, economic and trade relations, the EU is a major, longstanding and reliable partner for peace, sustainable development and humanitarian assistance. The EU intends to strengthen its position, mobilising the full range of its policies and tools in support of its strategic priorities in the HoA.

Guiding principles

6. Ownership and commitment from regional, national and local authorities are necessary for the concrete, sustainable and long-term development of the region. In order to increase the impact of its engagement, especially in the fields of peace, security and governance, the EU will apply an approach based on **partnership and mutual accountability**. A common understanding of each partner's responsibility, as well as joint priorities and concrete and measurable objectives, will be clearly defined through a frank, open and reinforced political dialogue.

7. The EU strategy in the HoA is based on the continued promotion and respect of **human rights**, gender equality, democracy, the rule of law, humanitarian principles and IHL, which will remain at the centre of all EU action. The EU will in particular sustain its strong commitment to the promotion and protection of the full enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls. It will keep working towards preventing and combatting sexual and gender-based violence. The EU will increase its efforts to ensure that children’s rights are fully respected. It will also increase its cooperation with human rights defenders and civil society organizations. The EU will keep promoting freedom of expression. It will keep pursuing the abolition of death penalty.
8. The EU will pay special attention to **inclusivity**. Civil society, women and youth are key drivers of change and must be included in peace and state-building efforts. The EU will continue to strongly promote their increased engagement in the political sphere, and to support their socio-economic empowerment. The EU will also keep fighting discrimination, and promote the inclusion of persons in vulnerable situations and marginalised communities in society.
9. The EU will further reinforce its **integrated approach** to conflicts and crises, and strengthen the link between humanitarian assistance, development cooperation, and peace along a “triple nexus”. The EU is also committed to increasing coherence, consistency and continuity amongst its policies and activities. This will include actions to ensure that private sector engagements comply with Business and Human Rights Principles⁴. It will also encompass a strong focus on enhancing the effectiveness of regional coordination and on **regional integration** as an overarching political objective of the EU.

A joint approach to democracy and regional peace and security

10. The respective governments of the countries of the region are accountable to their populations and bear the primary responsibility for addressing their people’s aspirations. The EU will remain committed to supporting **democratic transitions, the rule of law and state-building** and to promoting an open political space.

⁴ [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#)

11. Democratic and transparent governance is necessary to **strengthen the social contract** between the State and its citizens, and between centres and peripheries. The EU stands ready to support such efforts, including possible innovative approaches, such as e-Governance.
12. Corruption is a severe impediment to governance, economic growth and social equity. The EU will put greater emphasis on **combating corruption** and state capture, as well as the outflow of funds gained illicitly, fighting impunity, promoting accountability, transparency and adherence to international financial standards.
13. The EU will strengthen its support to **peace and security**. Despite positive political developments, fragility and insecurity persist with destabilising effects on the whole region. Tensions within and between countries of the region are increasingly worrying and illustrate the need for an effective, multilateral approach to collective security, dialogue and confidence-building. The EU will keep working with the African Union (AU) and with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The EU is ready to work with the leaders of IGAD to assist them in further building IGAD's capacity and making it a more effective multilateral body fostering trust among the countries of the region.
14. While the region must take responsibility for its own peace and security, the EU, jointly with international partners, will continue to support, including through its CSDP missions and operations, the build-up of **regional security capacity**, such as African peace support operations and other security arrangements responding to all security threats, including at sea.
15. The EU will continue supporting **maritime security**, using naval diplomacy as a tool to encourage cooperation and synergies amongst regional actors. In this regard, the mandate of EUNAVFOR - Somalia Operation ATALANTA, a key maritime actor in the region, has been revised and further extended to support EU engagement across the Southern Red Sea and the Western Indian Ocean. While its core task remains to deter, prevent and repress piracy, the Operation will also contribute to fighting other maritime crimes and illegal activities.
16. The EU will also continue to support the **fight against terrorist groups**, operating in and from the region, such as Al-Shabaab and Daesh, and other violent non-state actors. This will include measures to counter violent extremism and to prevent radicalisation.

17. Countries in the region are engaged in internationalised conflicts and borders on land and at sea are contested and remain sources of fragility. Inter-communal conflicts also continue to cause instability. The EU will support and promote mechanisms – especially African-owned – for further effective **prevention, de-escalation and peaceful settlement of disputes and for reconciliation** by encouraging dialogue and mediation as well as increasing capacity to analyse, monitor, prevent, mitigate and resolve emerging conflict issues, including on borders. In this context, it is crucial to take into account the preservation of unity and the principle of territorial integrity of the countries of the HoA.
18. The EU reiterates its support for the promotion and implementation of the United Nations (UN) agenda on **Women, Peace and Security**⁵ to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace and security issues, in line with the EU Action Plan⁶, and the agendas on Youth, Peace and Security⁷, and on the Protection of Civilians⁸, as well as of the principle of the responsibility to protect⁹.
19. The EU will continue to promote the implementation of the **Children and Armed Conflict** (CAAC) agenda in accordance with the EU Guidelines on CAAC, and UN Security Council resolution 1612 and related resolutions on CAAC.

Promoting multilateralism and the rules-based international order

20. The EU will continue to defend and **promote multilateralism and the rules-based international order**, with the UN at its core. It will continue to cooperate closely with African and international partners in order to contribute to a common approach and collective response to stabilisation and development, especially with the AU, IGAD, the UN, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), as well as other key bilateral and regional players. The EU will also seek to deepen its cooperation with the HoA countries and organisations in multilateral fora on issues of mutual interest.

⁵ [UNSC Resolution 1325 \(2000\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace and Security

⁶ [EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security \(WPS\) 2019-2024](#)

⁷ [UNSCR 2250 \(2015\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on Youth, Peace and Security

⁸ [UNSCR 1265 \(1999\)](#) and [UNSCR 1894 \(2009\)](#) on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts

⁹ [UN principle of responsibility to protect](#)

21. To address **cross border criminal activities**, the EU will boost regional efforts in combating all forms of trafficking and illicit financial flows. The EU will make particular efforts to disrupt the funding networks of terrorist groups operating in and from the region. These efforts should be geared towards dismantling existing links between terrorism and transnational organised crime.
22. The EU welcomes the long-standing solidarity and generosity of the region hosting the largest number of refugees and IDPs in Africa. The EU will continue to take the lead in providing principled **humanitarian aid** to the most vulnerable people affected by man-made or natural disasters. The EU commits to promoting an overall increase of the resource base for humanitarian action, both within the EU and more broadly, to respond to growing needs. Equally, promoting compliance with IHL, with International Refugee Law and safeguarding humanitarian space will remain a priority.
23. **Climate change and environmental degradation** already show major impacts in the region, also as a risk multiplier, amplifying pre-existing vulnerabilities, exacerbating conflicts, displacements and competition for scarce natural resources, especially land and water. The EU will contribute to addressing the growing impact of climate change on peace and security. The EU will also deepen cooperation at all levels, notably through supporting ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions, to fight climate change and environmental degradation, promote climate neutrality and protection of biodiversity. The EU will highlight the opportunities this transition brings in terms of investment, job creation and economic development.
24. To reduce fragility, maintain development gains and address root causes of instability and conflict in a comprehensive manner, the EU will continue cooperating at national and regional level, including with the private sector, thereby enhancing **resilience**. Supporting climate mitigation and adaptation capabilities, setting up disaster risk reduction strategies, improving disaster preparedness, building capacities in the green/blue economy, promoting sustainable connectivity, strengthening climate-smart agriculture and inclusive and sustainable agribusiness value-chains, are of vital importance and are areas where the EU can offer unique expertise.

25. In line with the Joint Valletta Action Plan and the Khartoum Process, the EU will pursue a tailor-made, balanced, coherent and comprehensive ‘whole-of-route’ approach to **migration** through dialogues and mutually beneficial partnerships at national and regional level. The EU will support regional and national capacities for effective migration governance and for addressing irregular migration, smuggling and human trafficking, forced displacement and their root causes, as well as reaping the benefits of migration for development within the African continent and the region. It will remain important to keep working jointly with partners in the region on readmission, return, reintegration and legal migration, in line with the EU and Member States’ competences. The EU will remain committed to international protection, to protecting the human rights of migrants, and to supporting host and transit communities. Cooperation with other regions of destination, including Gulf countries, will be encouraged.

Strengthened commitment to social and human development

26. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how local outbreaks of disease can turn into a global threat to human health and economic stability. The EU is committed to strengthening health systems, reinforcing partners’ preparedness and response capacity, and supporting structural reforms of the **health sector**. In line with the Team Europe approach, the EU and its Member States have played a leading role in setting up the COVAX Facility, to which they also are major contributors. The EU will continue working to ensure timely, fair and equitable global access to safe, affordable and effective vaccines for all and supporting the rollout of vaccination campaigns, while exploring possibilities for boosting local manufacturing capacity.

27. **Social and human development** is essential to sustainable and inclusive development. Investing in education and technical and vocational training will remain a priority in the HoA, to provide youth with the skills required for their empowerment and integration in the labour market. An educated and skilled youth will act as a major driver of sustainable development. The EU will continue to support governments’ efforts to increase equitable access to quality education and training.

28. 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 to 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.

Boosting socio-economic recovery, trade and regional integration

29. COVID-19 has critically affected already weak socio-economic structures. The EU will therefore continue to give specific attention to **economic and social recovery** in line with the call to Build Back Better and Greener towards the attainment of the 2030 Agenda. The EU will continue to support the sustainable use and management of natural resources, green technologies, development of local value chains, universal access to safe, secure, sustainable and affordable energy.
30. The HoA region represents a vast and dynamic market with great potential. The EU will continue supporting **entrepreneurship**, the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, microcredit and business networks, digitalisation and trade facilitation. A more open and competitive level playing field for all enterprises is also crucial to boost investments and create decent jobs. The EU will also promote social protection and social responsibility of private companies as well as human rights in the world of work.

31. The EU will continue to **promote regional economic integration and cooperation**, including through furthering international debt relief efforts in a coordinated manner within the relevant multilateral frameworks, supporting the countries in the region seeking membership in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The EU will continue to engage with the East African Community (EAC) and IGAD to promote economic cooperation. This will generate more opportunities for foreign investment and private sector development, including from the EU, and through the region's diaspora. In this vein, the EU will seek ways to strengthen its cooperation on trade and investment, including through the implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the possibility for EAC members to implement the EPA based on the principle of variable geometry.
32. The EU highly values **people-to-people ties**. It will keep developing exchange programmes, such as educational and scientific partnerships and scholarships, and will enable diasporas in the EU countries to contribute to the development of the region. In addition, the EU will strengthen cultural cooperation, in particular the role of culture and cultural heritage as an enabler for peace and development.

Reinforcing regional coherence and efficiency within country contexts

33. In line with the guiding principles and priorities of this strategy, which will be adapted to each specific national and local context, the EU will strengthen its partnership with respective countries in the region, taking into account their diversity and evolution in the medium and long term.
34. With regard to **Kenya**, the EU will give priority to a more strategic relationship, notably on peace and security, democracy, trade and investment, climate change, governance and human rights. Kenya has a strong potential for enhancing regional stability and for a constructive role in peace and security. The EU will support Kenya's greater diplomatic and multilateral engagement in global and regional fora. A strong partnership with neighbouring countries is key for the stability of the region.

35. The EU will continue to support the transitions in Ethiopia and Sudan, whose successes are pivotal for regional stability. **Ethiopia** is a strategic partner for the EU and important regional and multilateral actor. The EU will support the implementation of democratic and economic reforms, as well as reconciliation efforts that will be based on an inclusive and transparent dialogue. The conflict in Tigray and increasing ethnic violence in the country raise serious concerns, and have negative consequences on the region¹⁰. **Sudan**'s transition, supported by the EU from the very outset, is a positive example for the Horn and Africa. The EU will encourage and assist the civilian-led Transitional Government to put in place political and economic reforms, implement the Juba Peace Agreement – and subsequent agreements – as well as to play a constructive role in support of regional stability. Strengthening transitional justice and accountability and achieving debt relief will be particularly relevant as the transition continues.
36. The EU will continue to support critical peace and state building processes. Building on its comprehensive approach and important investment in Somali Peace and State-building, including in security through AMISOM and its CSDP missions, the EU remains committed to continue supporting **Somalia**'s reform and reconciliation agenda, while the federal and regional leaderships must considerably step up efforts in a consensual and inclusive manner. While seeking financial burden-sharing, with the perspective of the reconfiguration of the international security presence in the country and Somalia's full takeover of responsibility in line with the UNSC Resolution 2568¹¹, the EU will continue to support the UN and the AU in their stabilisation efforts. The EU will continue to support the swift and full implementation of the peace agreement in **South Sudan** and to call for a stronger engagement of IGAD and the AU in this context. The fight against corruption and illicit financial flows will remain important priorities there.

¹⁰ [Ethiopia - Council conclusions](#), 11 March 2021

¹¹ [UNSC Resolution 2568](#) (2021)

37. The EU supports **Djibouti**'s positive contribution to peace, security and regional cooperation in the HoA region including on the Red Sea, for example through hosting the logistic hub of Operation ATALANTA and EU Member States' military presence. The EU will continue to work with Djibouti on the promotion of inclusive growth and the opening of democratic space. Equally, the EU welcomes **Uganda**'s important contribution to peace and security in the Horn and the Great Lake regions. The EU will continue to promote inclusive development and democratic governance, notably to address the shrinking of democratic and civil space and increasing tensions.
38. The EU will remain engaged with **Eritrea** insisting on a constructive agenda at regional and national level, including the respect for the rule of law, democratic values, human rights, labour law and IHL, both within Eritrea and externally.

A broader regional approach encompassing the changing regional order

39. More broadly, **the Red Sea region** remains crucial to the EU due to its importance for the stability of the HoA as well as a trade and connectivity artery. Stability and freedom of navigation must be preserved and are of shared interest with the region. The EU will support cooperation, dialogue and peaceful settlement of disputes around the Red Sea and offer privileged relations with regionally-owned initiatives such as the Council of Arab and African States on the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and the IGAD Red Sea Task Force, while promoting more inclusive formats. The EU will explore synergies – on land, air and at sea – in the field of peace and security, climate change, biodiversity, environment, transport and logistics, sustainable economic and social development, migration, and an integrated approach to the Red Sea/HoA region.

40. **The Nile** is of paramount importance to the region. A negotiated solution to the dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam would contribute immensely to the stability of the region and sustainable development in the three countries concerned, i.e. Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt, opening the door for regional integration and foreign investments. The EU will continue to support African engagement and dialogue and cooperation between the parties building trust and reaching an agreement on peaceful, sustainable and effective use of the resources of the Nile. The EU will step up its engagement in water diplomacy in the whole Nile Basin by promoting transboundary water cooperation and integrated water resources management.
41. Expanding on EU's current Red Sea engagement, in line with the Council conclusions on an EU strategy for the Indo-Pacific¹² and in light of developments along the Eastern African littoral, notably northern Mozambique, the EU will further strengthen its integrated approach to the adjacent waters of the **Western Indian Ocean**. The EU will seek to address common challenges and build synergies to help improve political, climate related, security and economic cooperation between littoral states and extra-regional actors, also building on Operation ATALANTA and, as appropriate, on the military presence of EU Member States in the region.
42. The EU will continue and strengthen its action on **ocean governance**, including by promoting sustainable blue economy, fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, reinforcing cooperation under the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements and contributing to maritime trade.

¹² [EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific - Council conclusions](#), 16 April 2021

A comprehensive mobilisation of policies and tools in line with the integrated approach

43. The EU reaffirms its readiness to mobilise the full range of its tools and policies to implement this strategy. A strengthened political dialogue between the EU and its Member States, on the one hand, and the countries of the Horn, on the other, including at the highest level, will allow us to jointly move and take stock of the objectives set. As part of its support for democracy, rule of law, governance and human rights, the EU stands ready to mobilise election missions to accompany national electoral processes. Where appropriate, the EU reserves the right to review its support and to mobilise at any time its regimes of restrictive measures, notably the one related to serious violations of human rights worldwide.
44. **The EU Special Representative (EUSR)**, with a strong regional mandate and focus on regional activities, will be instrumental to enhance the visibility, presence and the engagement of the EU with all the countries in the region and the relevant actors in the HoA and Red Sea region as appropriate. The EUSR will contribute to a strengthened and more effective EU political engagement to advance this strategy, including through increased coordination.
45. The EU will remain a key development partner to the region. In a Team Europe spirit, the upcoming Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (**NDICI**) - Global Europe will allow for a strong support to the overall objectives of long-term development and stability referred to in this Strategy. 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.
46. Furthermore, the mobilisation of the EU's new **innovative financial instruments**, including the European Fund for Sustainable Development +, will also be particularly relevant for the sustainable development of the region – in particular to boost investment, private sector, regional integration and economic growth.

47. The creation of the **European Peace Facility** will allow for capacity-building actions relating to military and defence matters, including in support of the mandates of CSDP missions and operations and state institutions, as well as support military aspects of African peace and security operations.
48. In support to peace and security, **CSDP missions and operations** (EUTM Somalia, EUCAP Somalia and Operation ATALANTA) will enhance further coordination with relevant partners in the region as appropriate. They will remain an essential pillar of EU's integrated approach as well as the response to emerging and on-going crises, in conjunction with other EU instruments. In building and supporting security capacity, adherence to human rights and IHL will receive special attention.

Implementation and ways forward

49. In the **implementation of this new strategy** the EU aims to work in close collaboration with the countries of the region, individually and collectively, as well as with multilateral and regional partners at the political (IGAD, AU, UN), financial (WB, IMF, AfDB and the Paris Club) and thematic (e.g. WHO, WTO, UNEP, UNODC, UNHCR, IMO) levels. The EU will also seek dialogue and collaboration with other relevant countries and international partners in order to foster common approaches, building on shared values and priorities. It will engage closely with the private sector and members of the diasporas, and will promote and strengthen civil society including at the grassroots level.
50. Acknowledging the different situations in the region and the rapid pace of socio-political developments, the EU will make sure that its actions and policies are constantly reviewed according to latest developments and lessons learned. The Council invites the European External Action Service and Commission to ensure that programming and implementation of the EU's development cooperation will be adjusted consequently. Evidence-based analyses will be an important tool in this regard. The EU will continue closely collaborate with local humanitarian and development actors to increase coherence and sustainability.

51. To ensure a regular political follow-up and in line with the mutual accountability approach, the EU will identify **specific priority objectives**, at country and regional level, in consultation with the countries concerned and coordinated and shared with relevant partners. The Council intends to rely on the EU delegations and the accredited representations of its Member States for the monitoring of progress of these objectives and for the identification of concrete actions helping to fulfil them. The Council will regularly consider the progress achieved and invites the High Representative and the Commission to propose concrete modalities to operationalise, monitor and evaluate the strategy.
 52. Public communication about EU's policies, activities and programmes, is key to ensure general awareness of mutual commitments and their impact.
 53. To conclude, the EU reiterates its intention to strengthen and deepen the strategic relationship and partnership with the HoA and its countries. The EU will keep demonstrating through collective action that it is a solid partner of the region.
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