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- Council conclusions (13 May 2019)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the Sahel, as adopted at the 3688th meeting of the Council on 13 May 2019.

Council conclusions on the Sahel

1. The European Union (EU) stands by the authorities and people of the Sahel, who continue to face challenges of various kinds: i) those of a political nature, in particular serious shortcomings in governance, the rule of law and the protection of human rights; ii) challenges relating to security, with the expansion of the terrorist threat, of extremist violence and of organised crime, including human trafficking, with climate change adversely affecting natural resources and fuelling local conflicts; iii) challenges in terms of development, with endemic poverty, strong demographic growth and weak socio-economic cohesion; iv) these factors aggravate food insecurity, increase migratory pressures and worsen the humanitarian situation. Against this background, conflicts between communities have flared up again, in the space of a few months, in several countries in the region. Meeting these challenges and remedying these shortcomings is primarily the responsibility of the Sahel states. The international community supports them in their efforts.

2. The Sahel is a strategic priority for the EU and its Member States, as is evident from the meeting between the foreign affairs and defence ministers of the twenty-eight EU Member States and the five G5 Sahel Member States on the occasion of the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 14 May 2019. Within the framework of an ongoing political dialogue and an integrated approach focused on the security-development nexus, and on the basis of the EU strategy for security and development in the Sahel and its regional action plan, as well as the five pillars of the action plan adopted at the 2015 Valletta Summit, all the EU's external action instruments have been deployed. Accordingly, the EU is providing assistance to each of the five G5 Sahel countries individually and supporting their cooperation efforts. The EU and its Member States are the region's main partners, mobilising more than EUR 8 billion between 2014 and 2020 in development assistance for national and regional programmes, in particular through the Emergency Trust Fund. The EU and its Member States are also supporting security in the Sahel by deploying very substantial human and material resources, in particular through missions carried out under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) - EUTM Mali, EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger -, through their participation in the United Nations MINUSMA mission, through France's Operation Barkhane, supported by other Member States, and through numerous bilateral engagements.
3. The EU reaffirms its commitment, in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2391, to the G5 Sahel and would recall the significant support which it provides for the establishment of its governance structures, for the operationalisation of the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the implementation of the G5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme (PIP) and Emergency Programme, with support from the Sahel Alliance and other donors. The EU welcomes the resumption of operations by the G5 Sahel Joint Force and calls for its efforts to be intensified. One year after the high-level conference on the Sahel held in Brussels on 23 February 2018, the EU and its Member States undertake to continue with the implementation of the EUR 147 million in funding already allocated to the Joint Force.

4. The EU nonetheless remains seriously concerned by the increase in terrorist, and inter-community, violence in Mali and Burkina Faso. It calls on the authorities to initiate or expedite appropriate investigations, including into sexual and gender-based violence, in order to establish the direct or indirect responsibility of all those involved, leaving no room for impunity, and to keep citizens informed of progress made in this regard. It calls on governments to disband and disarm all militias active in their territory and to launch an ambitious and inclusive political process of dialogue and reconciliation for the regions concerned, to resolve the problems of social cohesion and trust, in particular between the population and the Armed Forces. In this connection, it calls for exemplary behaviour by the security and defence forces, respecting human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as for a judicial follow-up of incidents which may constitute violations of those rights and laws. It is imperative to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers and combat this phenomenon, and to ensure that child soldiers are reintegrated into society. The EU encourages the G5 Sahel and each of its Member States to give priority to the most critical areas of instability, without neglecting areas which are stable, and to address the underlying causes of instability in an integrated manner in order to prevent violence and meet the needs and aspirations of the population, including women and young people.

5. The EU emphasises the importance of the major reforms which must be undertaken by the G5 Sahel governments in order to ensure lasting peace, security and prosperity. The inclusive governance of territories at national and local level, genuine decentralisation, in particular the restoration of public services, including access to education, especially for women and girls, the reopening of schools, access to justice for all, and the fight against corruption and good governance are all key elements in these reforms. Moreover, reform of the security sector is also needed, in order to fight more effectively against insecurity and put a stop to the abuses committed against the civilian population. Fairer economic prospects, empowerment of women and girls and respect for their rights, protection and integration of vulnerable groups, and equality in access to public services, including sexual and reproductive health services, must be ensured. Finally, for inclusive and sustainable economic development, it is also necessary to ensure fair access to natural resources, appropriate responses to climate change and ecological changes and a more favourable environment for entrepreneurship and investment. The EU also emphasises the importance of the full participation of young people, women and civil society in peace processes, including conflict prevention, in general and at local level. This is essential for peace and sustainable development in the Sahel region. The EU encourages the G5 Sahel to include a gender perspective in all its actions.

6. The EU calls on the G5 Sahel countries to redouble, accelerate and deepen their efforts in terms of regional cooperation, particularly by giving the permanent secretariat the means to fulfil its task, and to further mobilise resources to make the Joint Force fully operational and implement the PIP immediately in the most vulnerable areas. It underlines once again the need for effective implementation, by the G5 Sahel Joint Force and its member states, of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework, and the necessity of establishing a genuine ‘police’ component to support the Joint Force, with a view to ensuring an effective interface between the Joint Force and the national criminal justice systems. In this regard, the EU welcomes the organisation of the second conference on strengthening links between security, justice and development within the G5 Sahel, held in Niamey on 21 January 2019.

7. Given the deteriorating security situation in the region, exacerbated by instability in neighbouring countries, the EU recalls that all parties - the G5 Sahel, the national governments of its member countries, ECOWAS and neighbouring countries, the African Union and the United Nations - have a responsibility to mobilise their resources in a coherent global approach to stabilisation which will allow security and development to be restored. In this context, the EU commends the work done by governments of Sahel countries and national and international actors, and the coordinating role of the United Nations. It highlights the crucial role of MINUSMA in stability, peace and reconciliation in Mali, including its role in the north and centre of the country, in particular its missions to support the redeployment of the State, protect all civilians without discrimination, support the restoration of basic services and provide good offices for the Malian political process which it is imperative to complete, as well as its ability to interact with other security forces, including through its support of the Joint Force. Consequently, the EU would welcome the adoption by the United Nations Security Council in June of a MINUSMA mandate which is consistent with these challenges.

8. The EU welcomes the progress made in Mali in the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement signed in June 2015, including through the Follow-up Committee, but calls on the parties involved, in particular the new Malian government, to continue their efforts and bring them to a swift conclusion, particularly as regards the effective reintegration of combatants through the process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, security sector reform, progress in decentralisation and the creation of a development zone for the northern Malian regions. It calls on the highest authorities in Mali to conduct the process of revising the constitution in a spirit of inclusivity, so that the constitution will be accepted by the whole of Malian society and be will able to contribute to the restoration of peace in a rebuilt Mali. The EU emphasises the importance of the full inclusion of women, young people and civil society in the implementation of the Agreement.

9. Growing insecurity is contributing to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation. Displacements caused by violence only exacerbate the difficulties arising from recurrent food and nutrition crises, and increase the need for protection of vulnerable people, above all children, women and people with disabilities. As a major humanitarian donor, having allocated more than EUR 250 million over the last two years to help the populations of the G5 Sahel countries, and in a context in which the emergency response remains underfunded, the EU invites the G5 Sahel countries to intensify their efforts in order to prevent more displacement and to ensure that those affected by conflicts and violence have access to basic services. The EU will continue to stand by the population.

10. The EU will continue to prioritise the Sahel region and to take appropriate initiatives, whilst remaining alert to the engagement of its partners and the effectiveness of the action taken. The EU recalls its determination to support the return of the State and of basic services, stabilisation of peripheral areas, the fight against trafficking, for example through the GAR-SI Sahel project, and all initiatives for dialogue and reconciliation. It is also ready to continue supporting the necessary reform of the security and defence forces in the G5 Sahel countries, efforts to develop their capacities, based on local strategies, and their redeployment, in particular by supporting the existing CSDP missions in Mali and Niger, in accordance with their mandates. Furthermore, it stresses that EU support can only be effective if accompanied by a significant effort by the G5 Sahel countries to improve governance, development and security throughout the region. The EU will continue to follow the situation closely and will identify any necessary adjustments in the implementation of ongoing actions, on the basis of actual progress made, particularly with a view to the annual ministerial meeting between the G5 Sahel and the High Representative to be held in Ouagadougou in July 2019.
