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Subject: Council conclusions on the EU's Comprehensive Approach

Delegations will find attached the Council Conclusions on the EU's Comprehensive Approach, as adopted by the Council on 12 May 2014.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE EU'S COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH**Foreign Affairs Council, 12 May 2014**

1. The European Union and its Member States can bring to the international stage the unique ability to combine, in a coherent and consistent manner, policies and tools ranging from diplomacy, security and defence to finance, trade, development and human rights, as well as justice and migration. This contributes greatly to the Union's ability to play a positive and transformative role in its external relations and as a global actor. In December 2013, the European Council called for further steps to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the EU's comprehensive approach. The Council welcomes the presentation of the Joint Communication by the High Representative and the European Commission on "The EU's Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crises"¹ as an important step in this process. In this context, the Council recalls the Council Conclusions of November 2007 on Security and Development², the Council Conclusions of December 2011³ and of November 2013⁴ on CSDP and the Conclusions from the European Council of December 2013.⁵
2. The Council stresses that the comprehensive approach is both a general working method and a set of concrete measures and processes to improve how the EU, based on a common strategic vision and drawing on its wide array of existing tools and instruments, collectively can develop, embed and deliver more coherent and more effective policies, working practices, actions and results. Its fundamental principles are relevant for the broad spectrum of EU external action. The need for such a comprehensive approach is most acute in crisis and conflict situations and in fragile states, enabling a rapid and effective EU response , including through conflict prevention.

¹ JOIN(2013) 30 final

² Doc 15097/07

³ Doc 17991/11

⁴ Doc 15992/13

⁵ Doc EUCO 217/13

3. The Council notes that the operationalization of the principles and proposals of the Joint Communication and these Council Conclusions is a joint undertaking, and a shared responsibility for EU institutions and services as well as for Member States, in capitals and on the ground. In this context, the Council also recalls the provisions in the EU Treaty on consistency in external action and with other policies, and the responsibility of the Council and the European Commission to cooperate to that effect. In this context, the Council stresses the role of the High Representative, who is also one of the Vice Presidents of the European Commission.

4. The Council notes that the starting point for the EU's comprehensive approach must be early, coordinated and shared analysis of each country and/or regional specific context, the conflict dynamics and the root causes of a crisis situation. This early joined-up analysis should in particular build on existing mechanisms and processes and systematically bring together all relevant domains of EU external action, including diplomacy, security, development and, as appropriate, humanitarian assistance, justice and migration, at headquarters and on the ground. EU Delegations, Member States' representations and EU Special Representatives all have a central role in contributing to this joint analysis and making recommendations for EU action, including in the field of conflict prevention. EU Delegations, in particular, have a key role to play, drawing on their expertise on a range of issues, including on security and defence issues where appropriate, and also engaging Member States' representations.

5. The EU's policies and priorities should follow from common strategic objectives and a clear common vision of what the EU collectively wants to achieve in its external relations or in a particular conflict or crisis situation. The Council notes that the regional strategies developed for the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and most recently the Gulf of Guinea have been valuable in framing the EU's engagements across many policy areas. In a similar vein, thematic work on cyber and maritime security is also being taken forward. The Council would welcome the continued proactive preparation of such regional and thematic strategies to frame the EU's comprehensive response to new political developments and challenges, notably concerning the EU's neighbourhood. Similarly, the work on Joint Framework Documents (JFDs), outlining the broad range of EU interests and priorities in specific countries or regions, should be taken forward as soon as possible, including in fragile and conflict-affected states.

6. The Council stresses the key importance of early warning and conflict prevention to reduce the risk of outbreak or recurrence of violent conflict and human suffering, also recalling the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts and the 2011 Council Conclusions on Conflict Prevention. The Council welcomes the progress achieved so far to better integrate the EU's early warning capacities, inter alia through the development of an Early Warning System. It looks forward to a global roll-out of this process before the end of 2014 and encourages the use of the early warning system reporting across the institutions. The step from early warning to early action is pivotal in mitigating the risks of outbreak and recurrence of conflicts, and therefore must be fast and decisive. The Council also recalls the 2009 "Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities" and welcomes the work undertaken by the institutions and Member States in the area of mediation as well as other recent initiatives to strengthen capacity or take forward the EU's engagement in these areas. In addition, the Council takes positive note of the establishment of the European Institute of Peace (EIP) as an additional independent organisation in the field of conflict mediation. The resources offered by the EIP in a flexible manner should further enhance the capacities available to the EU in this field. The Council also encourages closer cooperation and coordination of the various situation and emergency management centres of the Union and Member States.

7. The Council underscores the need for the EU to better, earlier and more systematically link up its political engagement, its CSDP missions and operations, its development cooperation and assistance, and other relevant domains of EU action, in particular in countries or conflict situations where the EU deploys multiple actors, instruments and interventions. The Council stresses that the strategically coherent use of the EU's instruments and policies – simultaneously or in sequence – is necessary to effectively address the root causes of a conflict or crisis. In the context of crisis management, the Council reiterates the important role of CSDP, including through its civilian and military expertise and civilian-military synergies, as an essential element in the EU's comprehensive approach. The Council stresses the need to utilise the full potential of the Political Framework for Crisis Approach (PFCA) in line with the existing Suggestions for Crisis Management Procedures.

A comprehensive approach should also enable rapid EU action as required. The Council also underscores the need to continue to strengthen the ties between CSDP and the areas of Freedom, Security and Justice (FSJ) and more effectively develop synergies between CSDP actions with FSJ actions as well as actions carried out in other EU domains.

8. The Council notes that the impact of CSDP missions and operations is enhanced when part of a broader EU strategy. Information about and analysis of the conflict and crisis context, including on the ongoing overall EU engagement, should feed into the planning, preparation, implementation and review phases of CSDP missions and operations. The Council also stresses the need for earlier and more coordinated planning for a smooth transition from one form of EU engagement to another, in particular regarding transition from short- or medium-term activity to longer-term development cooperation, and from CSDP missions and operations to other forms of EU engagement, to ensure that the achievements of EU action can be sustained. The ongoing work on transition strategies should therefore be taken forward as a matter of priority. In this context, the Council also stresses the key principle of local ownership and the need for sustainable results. Finally, the Council also underlines the importance to make use of lessons learned from previous operations, missions and programmes.
9. The Council underlines that the comprehensive approach applies to all phases of the conflict cycle, including prevention, early warning, crisis management, stabilisation and longer-term peace-building and development cooperation. Its results are often only reached and sustained in the long term. The Council recalls the 2007 Council Conclusions on Security and Development and the importance of peace and security for development, and vice versa. It also notes that fragility and conflict hamper sustainable development and poverty reduction, create or aggravate humanitarian crises, and can provide a fertile breeding ground for instability and may trigger migratory flows.

10. The Council notes that the objectives of EU development cooperation remain those set out in the Lisbon Treaty, the European Consensus on Development and the Agenda for Change. It welcomes the progress made in the context of the EU's programming process for the period 2014-20 to further reinforce synergies between development programming and the EU's overall policies and notes that in fragile or conflict-affected states, programming and joint programming must be conducted in accordance with, inter alia, the principles of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, also building on relevant fragility assessments. It notes the need to further enhance the effectiveness and results of EU development policies and programmes, also in line with the principles of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. The Council also notes the ongoing discussions in the OECD/DAC and in the context of the post-2015 framework on development financing, including on ODA.
11. The Council recalls the Conclusions from the European Council of December 2013 as regards the importance of ensuring the greatest possible coherence between the Union's and Member States' actions to support partner countries and regional organisations, including in the context of security sector reform, through providing training, advice, equipment and resources where appropriate, so that they can increasingly prevent or manage crises by themselves.
12. The Council also reaffirms that humanitarian aid must be provided in accordance with the humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law, solely on the basis of needs of affected populations, in line with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

13. The point of departure for EU policy and action must always be the country or regional context, taking into account country and region-led processes, and the political realities and needs on the ground. This is where we face and deal with security threats, crisis situations and development challenges. EU Delegations together with EU Member States Representations have a key role to play in supporting a coherent, coordinated, comprehensive and effective EU approach, in particular on issues relating to joint analysis, coordinated programme implementation, and the preparation and sharing of political reporting. Co-location of EU actors in the field should also be considered wherever feasible. The progress made in taking forward joint programming in the EU's development cooperation provides a good model for how to link up the efforts of EU institutions and Member States in a comprehensive approach at the country-level.
14. The Council notes that the EU should reinforce its cooperation with others and coordinate its comprehensive approach with the efforts and engagement by key international partners such as the UN, NATO, OSCE, AU, other regional organizations and bilateral partners engaged in a given conflict or crisis situation, with a view to increase operational effectiveness, with due respect to the institutional framework and decision-making autonomy of the EU. The Council stresses the importance of local ownership and local partners. The Council also highlights the value of the knowledge and contributions of civil society, such as NGOs, think tanks and academia, as well as the private sector.
15. For the comprehensive approach to work, these policies and this common strategic vision need to be translated into concrete action, improved working practices across the EU institutions, services and Member States, and tangible results. In the context of the EU's comprehensive approach, the Council therefore commits itself to reinforce its efforts on relevant existing processes and initiatives, including by implementing key actions outlined in the Joint Communication and these Council Conclusions, and calls on the Commission and the EEAS to do likewise.

16. In particular, the Council stresses the need to implement the Resilience Action Plan, address financing gaps between emergency aid and long-term development resources, particularly in protracted crises, conflicts and post-conflict situations, continue to deliver on EU joint programming policy commitments, take forward the initiative to support third states and regional organizations in crisis situations to enable them to increasingly prevent or manage crises by themselves, address challenges relating to the smooth transitioning of CSDP missions and operations, take forward commitments to Policy Coherence for Development (PCD). The Council also calls to further enhance a rights-based approach, encompassing all human rights, reinforce the work on issues relating to the protection of civilians, to women and children in armed conflict and to the fight against sexual violence in armed conflicts, remain engaged in the work towards an ambitious post-2015 framework with an important place for peace and security issues, and build on its Conclusions of December 2013 on the recent EEAS review to continue to improve the way we work, use our resources and deliver together.
17. In this context, the Council also invites the High Representative and the Commission to immediately commence work to present an action plan to Member States before the end of the first quarter of 2015. This action plan should outline how key actions set out in the Joint Communication and these Council Conclusions, in close cooperation with EU Member States, and based on concrete country and regional cases, will be taken forward, implemented and reported, with identified lead structures. This action plan will be regularly reviewed and progress will be assessed with a view to regular progress reports, the first one to be delivered in 2015.
