

Council Conclusions on the Great Lakes Region

Foreign Affairs Council meeting Brussels, 22 July 2014

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1 Recalling its conclusions of 22 July 2013 and 16 December 2013, the European Union (EU) confirms its commitment to promoting stability and development in the Great Lakes Region. Determined and concerted efforts will be required to maintain momentum in the implementation of the Peace Security and Co-operation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Region (the PSC Framework). The EU commends the work of the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General, Mary Robinson, together with the other Envoys on the Great Lakes Region. It calls in particular for greater involvement by the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) alongside the African Union (AU) and implementation by all parties of the Agreement.
2. The EU commends the work of UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, Martin Kobler and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO). The EU welcomes security progress following the defeat of the M23 and the successful joint actions undertaken in the last six months by MONUSCO and the FARDC, in particular against the armed group ADF-Nalu, recognising the sacrifices made by Congolese soldiers. The EU welcomes MONUSCO's resolve to better protect civilians through a more robust and flexible approach. The window of opportunity created by these developments should not be lost and state authority should be restored as quickly as possible to regions where armed groups are no longer active. In this regard the EU fully supports the International Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy (I4S), aimed at stabilisation activities in these areas. Welcoming the proclamation of the amnesty law, the EU urges the DRC, in cooperation with Uganda and Rwanda, to accelerate Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of M23 members paying particular attention to women and children.

3. Building on the first steps which have been taken, the EU confirms the importance of unconditional voluntary disarmament of FDLR forces inside the DRC, and its willingness to support this process. It is essential that this process should include the FDLR leadership, should be conducted within the shortest possible timescale, and should include formal handing over of all vacated territories. The EU recalls that any support to the FDLR is in contravention of existing UN and EU restrictive measures. The EU continues to believe that those accused of perpetrating war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide or gross violation of human rights including sexual violence and the recruitment and use of children, must face justice for their crimes. The EU welcomes the statement of the Government of Rwanda to accept voluntary returnees from the FDLR in the context of the DDR process. Permanent solutions to the disbanding of armed groups are enhanced by regional engagement, and in this context the EU supports the joint involvement of SADC and ICGLR in these processes. In line with the position of the Government of the DRC, the EU recalls that military operations by FARDC in coordination with MONUSCO against the FDLR remain an option should the voluntary process prove unsuccessful.
4. Over 40 other armed groups remain active in DRC, especially in Eastern DRC with dire humanitarian impact on the civilian population and leading to the displacement of 2.6 million people. The EU is particularly concerned by the situation in Province Orientale and the rapidly deteriorating man-made humanitarian crisis in Katanga. The EU reminds all parties, of their obligation to ensure protection of civilians and to respect international law, including human rights and International Humanitarian Law. The severe human rights violations in DRC, in particular the scourge of gender-based violence, sexual violence, and the recruitment and use of children whether conducted by armed groups or other actors must end. It calls on the specific responsibility of the Congolese authorities in this respect and underlines the importance of concerted action to reform the justice sector, including military justice, in DRC.
5. More broadly, it remains vital to address the root causes of violence in the region, taking into account factors such as lack of state control, significant gender inequalities, land issues, outstanding reforms in economic governance, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and illegal exploitation of natural resources. In this context the EU supports all efforts to increase transparency of global mineral supply chains including through the development of an EU initiative to promote responsible sourcing of minerals from conflict affected areas and high risks areas. In addressing the root causes, the implementation of the reform programme pursuant to the PSC Framework Agreement, provides a good opportunity to gather international support around common objectives. Recognising that economic cooperation, expanded trade opportunities as well as job creation could help bring long-term stability and peace to the region, the EU supports the organisation of a Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference under the PSC Framework.
6. The EU reiterates its commitment to ensuring a coherent approach in its partnerships with the countries of the Great Lakes, bearing in mind that political developments and elections, which should respect constitutional provisions, in Burundi, DRC and Rwanda have a direct impact on longer term stability in the region. The EU reiterates the need for close cooperation with the UN and regional organisations.

7. The 2015 elections in Burundi are a crucial opportunity to consolidate recent progress and contribute to a stronger future. The EU welcomes the adoption by consensus of the electoral law and the agreement by all parties on a code of conduct, but is increasingly concerned about the constraints on political space and civil liberties and, as a consequence, the heightening of tension and violence, especially among youth movements linked to political parties. EU support, including to the electoral process can only be considered if the process is inclusive, transparent and peaceful. The EU reiterates its strong support to the role of the UN in Burundi and for the UN-brokered election roadmap which was signed by political actors in 2013.
8. The EU recalls its strong interest in the democratic development of DRC and in particular the upcoming electoral cycle leading to general elections in 2016. The Congolese authorities are responsible for preparing and organising elections in respect of the relevant constitutional provisions and which should be fully budgeted, fully inclusive with a clear calendar, and taking into account the recommendations of the 2011 EU observation mission. The EU recognises the importance of MONUSCO's good offices role in the preparation of elections. It further stresses its commitment to supporting all critical reforms in DRC, notably those in areas such as public financial management, the fight against corruption and the security sector, the promotion of a better business climate, the consolidation of the State structure, the respect for the rule of law, the fight against impunity, the prevention of sexual violence, and the protection of children in armed conflict. The reform of the Security Sector, and in particular of the army, remains of paramount importance and should preserve the gains of EUSEC and EUPOL CSDP missions.

Transparency and accountability to the management of natural resources are key issues for the Congolese people. In this context, the EU welcomes the full membership of the DRC to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).
9. The EU welcomes progress made by Rwanda on a number of structural reforms, especially within the economic sphere and recognises the achievements in reconciliation during the 20 years since the genocide of 1994. However, the EU notes its ongoing concern at constraints faced by political parties, including the shrinking of the political space and by reports of disappearances and actions against human rights defenders and civil society. Looking ahead to the 2017 elections, the EU encourages Rwanda to consistently follow its commitment for democratisation, to further open up the political space, to give more room for independent civil society and in particular Human Rights defenders and to allow greater freedom of expression for civil society and all citizens in order to facilitate fuller democratic participation.
10. The EU has aligned its support to the objectives of the PSC Framework. The recent adoption of the National Indicative Programmes under the 11th European Development Fund for Burundi, the DRC¹ and Rwanda, with a total allocation of more than €1.5 billion, will be complemented by support at regional level and bilateral contributions by EU Member States. The EU continues to believe that a key to capitalising the potential of the Great Lakes is for the countries of the region to work together on productive projects of common interest. The role of civil society, including women's organisations and the need for greater accountability to citizens are also of fundamental importance in achieving durable solutions to conflict and instability in the region.
11. The Council invites the High Representative and the Commission to report on the implementation of these and earlier Council conclusions, and present follow-up proposals where appropriate and agrees to revert before the end of this year."

¹ National Indicative Programmes for Burundi and DRC were signed on 26 June 2014.