

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE EU REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR SYRIA AND IRAQ AS WELL AS THE DA'ESH THREAT

Foreign Affairs Council, 23 May 2016

1. The EU reaffirms the commitment it first made in the EU Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat in March 2015 to achieving lasting peace, stability, security in Syria, Iraq and the wider region, ending the suffering of the people of Syria and Iraq, and preserving the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-confessional character of Syrian and Iraqi societies as well as the rich cultural heritage of the region. In this effort, the EU will mobilise all the political, security and development resources required. The EU is strongly committed to providing humanitarian assistance according to humanitarian principles. Focus will also be on sustained efforts to address the root causes of refugee flows. Since the beginning of the conflict the EU and its Member States have provided €6.4 billion to address its causes and consequences. Combatting Da'esh in the long-term requires addressing the political and socio-economic root causes that have facilitated the spread of terrorism. The EU reiterates its support for the Global Coalition, aimed at further degrading, and ultimately defeating, Da'esh. The EU underlines once more its determination to protect EU citizens from the terrorist threat emanating from Da'esh and other UN-listed terrorist organisations through joint EU and Member State action.

2. The EU has reviewed the implementation so far of the strategy and notes that its objectives remain valid and should continue to be pursued. The EU notes that circumstances have changed since the introduction of the Strategy. In order to respond, implementation of the Strategy should adapt in the ways set out in these Conclusions and in close coordination with activities of Member States in line with the Council Conclusions of February and March 2015. The EU and its Member States will continue to implement this Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat and look forward to the next six monthly report on the implementation of the March 2015 Strategy.

Syria

3. The EU reiterates its commitment to the unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Syrian State and calls on all parties to the conflict to refrain from any action that will lead to disunity or disintegration of the country.

4. The EU believes, therefore, that the political process launched by the International Syria Support Group, endorsed unanimously by the UN Security Council and led by the United Nations, is the only way of putting an end to more than five years of conflict in Syria and will do all in its power to ensure the full implementation of UNSCRs 2254, 2268 and the Geneva Communiqué. A Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition based on the principles of the Geneva Communiqué, is needed to bring a lasting peace to the country, defeat Da'esh in Syria and enable Syrians to return to their homes in safe conditions and to contribute to the reconstruction of the country. The EU calls on all parties to actively support a process that will lead to a credible and inclusive transition. The EU urges the Syrian regime to finally lay out its plan for truly implementing a genuine political transition. There cannot be a lasting peace in Syria under the present leadership and until the legitimate grievances and aspirations of all components of the Syrian society are addressed.

5. The EU welcomes the outcome of the ISSG ministerial meeting of 17 May and insists on the need for all ISSG members to do all possible to swiftly strengthen the implementation and monitoring of the cessation of hostilities, secure country wide humanitarian access, including through air drops and air bridges where needed, and make progress on the issue of detainees in order to prepare for a credible resumption of the intra-Syrian talks. Serious negotiations are required to reach an agreement by 1 August on genuine political transition which would include a broad, inclusive non-sectarian transitional governing body with full executive powers.

6. Therefore, the EU will strengthen its collective work to:

- step up our active support for ongoing inclusive efforts of the UN Special Envoy in facilitating the intra-Syrian negotiations, as an active member of the International Syria Support Group and in assuring that civil society and women actively participate in the process;

- step up support to the Syrian opposition, and in particular the High Negotiations Committee (HNC), as the opposition delegation in the UN-brokered talks in Geneva, including through full use of the Comprehensive Syria Peace Initiative. Encourage the HNC to both continue to elaborate on its vision of a political transition and fully engage in the Geneva process.

- engage the key regional actors to work towards full implementation of the UN roadmap, and urge again all those with influence on the parties, notably the Syrian regime, to use this influence to encourage a constructive role in the process;

- support the efforts of the ISSG taskforce in revitalising and strengthening the cessation of hostilities as well as achieving a broader ceasefire. The cessation of hostilities is essential not only to relieve the suffering of the Syrian people but also for the different parties to regain confidence in the political process. The EU condemns all attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, in particular against medical facilities, schools, markets and IDP camps. The EU strongly condemns these excessive and disproportionate attacks committed by the Syrian regime against its own people. The EU recalls that the Syrian authorities have the primary responsibility to protect the population in Syria;

- enhance its contribution to the the ISSG humanitarian task force, while continuing humanitarian work on the ground, to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to those in need and for the respect of international humanitarian law by all parties. The EU urges the regime and all parties to the conflict to grant full humanitarian access and end the hindering of the rapid and sustained delivery of aid, including medical material. The use of starvation of civilians through the besiegement of populated areas for which the regime bears the greatest responsibility, as a tactic of war, is contrary to international law. The EU calls for the immediate release of any arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and children, and the respect of human rights for all, including for religious and ethnic minorities, by all parties in Syria;

- continue to support the Global Coalition's actions to counter Da'esh in Syria and strongly condemns all indiscriminate attacks and atrocities perpetrated by Da'esh and other UN-listed terrorist groups against the Syrian people.

- enhance its support to Syrian civil society starting in regions held by moderate opposition in areas such as local resilience, delivery of public services and local governance, human rights and accountability, peace building, gender and minority issues, in order to enhance its capacity to participate in the transition and stabilisation of the country;

- seek to increase assistance, combining cross-border assistance with support from inside Syria and will aim at delivering aid as part of a larger effort to address the needs of the population all across Syria and build local resilience.

- step up its preparations for early engagement in the recovery and rehabilitation effort in Syria to rapidly provide support to stabilisation, reconstruction and the return of refugees when a political transition is reached, including through support to the UN Interagency Task Force in their planning and coordination for post agreement stabilisation.

7. Since the beginning of the conflict, the EU and its Member States have supported Syrian refugees, IDPs and their host communities throughout the region. The EU and its Member States made nearly two thirds of the 2016 pledges at the "Supporting Syria and the Region London 2016" Conference, and will work towards the swift implementation of these commitments and in assisting governments in the region to stimulate economic growth, provide livelihoods, education, health and job opportunities for Syrian refugees in order to give people prospects for a future and prepare for the return of refugees to their country. The EU will make best use of all its available instruments, in particular the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis (the "Madad Fund") that has now reached EUR 730 million in combined EU and Member States' funding, in order to address the Syrian crisis and contain the spill over of instability in the region especially to Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The EU calls on other countries to sustain and increase their own contributions in response to the crisis.

8. The EU reiterates its strong support for transitional justice and accountability for all serious human rights abuses and violations of International Humanitarian Law including any which may constitute a war crime committed in Syria by all parties including Da'esh and renews its call to the UN Security Council to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court. The EU welcomes the renewal of the mandate for the Commission of Inquiry and calls for the cooperation of all parties, in particular the Syrian regime to grant necessary access.

Iraq

9. The EU underlines its continued commitment to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq, which are essential for the stability of the country and the region. The EU reiterates its firm support for the government of Iraq and the programme of reforms proposed by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and calls on all parties to maintain and respect the effective functioning of inclusive public institutions in line with the constitution. The EU is very concerned about the internal political situation and the lack of progress on the implementation of reforms and reconciliation, and calls on all parties, at the federal and regional levels, to demonstrate to the Iraqi people that they can put self-interest aside and deliver on the necessary progress that the country and its people urgently want and deserve.

10. The EU also sees an urgent need to boost the functioning of Iraqi public institutions. The EU and its Member States will seek to provide further technical support to the Iraqi Federal Government to improve security and rule of law, fight against widespread corruption, enhance

service delivery to Iraqi citizens and create accountability for the perpetrators of abuses and crimes.

11. The EU remains extremely concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in Iraq. Recognising that the campaigns to liberate additional territories from Da'esh will continue, the EU will step up its humanitarian assistance to all conflict-affected civilians, insisting on the need for parties to the conflict to comply with International Law, including humanitarian and human rights law, both during and, where applicable, after the conduct of hostilities, and to ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access in all areas. Security screening procedures must comply with national and international law, and camps must maintain their humanitarian and civilian character. The EU insists that returns of internally displaced persons to places of origin must be enabled in a safe, informed, voluntary and non-discriminatory way, in line with international protection standards. Moreover, the EU, together with the Iraqi authorities, will address mutual concerns regarding migration through dialogue.

12. In view of the fact that the momentum of the military campaign must continue, the immediate and successful stabilisation of areas liberated from Da'esh is a high priority as a precondition for the voluntary and safe return of internally displaced persons and a basis for reconciliation at local and national level. The EU and its Member States will explore further support to the stabilisation process, in close coordination with the Iraqi Federal Government and local authorities, UNAMI and the Global Coalition, including through the UNDP's Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilisation (FFIS) and Funding Facility for Expanded Stabilisation (FFES). The focus will be on the removal of explosive devices, access to basic services, provision of livelihoods, rule of law and support to the security sector, including police training. The EU will step up coordination and synergies with the activities of Member States in the framework of the Global Coalition. It emphasizes that empowerment and participation of women is a key objective in all efforts for stabilization and development. The Council looks forward to options, which the EEAS will present shortly, for enhanced engagement in support of long term stabilisation, in particular in the areas of rule of law and the security sector, taking into consideration all available instruments, in line with the Council Conclusions of December 2015 and the High Representative's tasking in the Foreign Affairs Council of January 2016. This support will be essential to consolidating the military gains achieved against Da'esh.

13. The EU once more condemns unreservedly the violations of international humanitarian law, the atrocities, killings and human rights abuses that Da'esh has perpetrated in Iraq. These have affected all Iraqis. Whilst the primary victims of these acts have been among Muslims, ethnic and religious minority groups, such as Yazidis, Christians and Turkmens, have been particularly targeted. The EU endeavours to step up its support to the victims of Da'esh as well as to the Government of Iraq in bringing to justice alleged perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity. It will also explore further support to peace building efforts by civil society. The EU reiterates its call on Iraq to accede to the Rome Statute.

14. Given the financial and budgetary difficulties facing Iraq, the EU will explore further means to help the Iraqi Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to recover economic and financial health, in close coordination with the IMF and WB, in particular through support to the reform of public finance and macroeconomic management systems. The Council encourages the EIB to consider viable investment projects in Iraq once the Operational Framework Agreement is in place. In this context, the EU urges the Government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government to set aside their differences,

ensure the transparent and equitable distribution of oil and gas resources, and to step up their efforts to fight corruption.

15. The EU and its Member States will continue to engage with and call on Iraq's neighbours, including Iran, Jordan, Turkey and the Gulf Countries to play a constructive role on stabilisation and reconciliation in Iraq. Regional support to PM Abadi's programme of reform is crucial.

Countering Da'esh

16. Da'esh poses a clear threat to the people of Syria, Iraq and other countries in the region such as Libya, as well as Europe and beyond. The EU and its Member States condemn unreservedly and will, in line with UNSCR 2249, continue to engage in ways to prevent the indiscriminate and targeted attacks, atrocities, killings, human rights abuses and other international humanitarian law violations which are perpetrated by Da'esh and other UN-listed terrorist groups. The EU also stands ready to support international efforts to prevent and combat the damage or destruction, looting, smuggling and illicit trafficking of archaeological cultural heritage. The EU welcomes the Global Coalition's recent successes against Da'esh and acknowledges the potential for further success through continued EU and Member States cooperation. The EU will adapt its actions to the changing nature of the Da'esh threat.

17. The EU and its Member States reiterate their commitment to the efforts of the Global Coalition to counter Da'esh, including through co-chairing and active participation in the Coalition's working groups, as well as to its cooperation with partners in the framework of the Global Counterterrorism Forum.

18. The EU underlines the importance of the comprehensive long-term approach to counter terrorism and preventing violent extremism aiming at the elimination of its root causes. The EU is determined to deprive Da'esh of its sanctuary and of its sources of financing and supply by reinforcing its own tools to fight international terrorism. The EU is also committed to prevent Da'esh and its affiliates from extending their reach in third countries. The EU will further enhance its counter-terrorism action, coordinating the external and internal aspects, in the following ways:

- deepening security and counter-terrorism cooperation through high level engagement with MENA countries, Turkey, Western Balkans and regional and international organisations including the GCC and LAS to stem the spread of Da'esh and the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, funds and weapons, paying full regard to international human rights standards.

- enhancing its contribution to the Global Coalition to counter Da'esh by further supporting, including through its membership of, the Working Groups to reduce foreign fighter flows, stabilise liberated areas, squeeze Da'esh finances and counter Da'esh messages; and support countries in the region in the implementation of all relevant UN Security Council resolutions. In line with UNSCR 1373 that provides guidance for a national approach to counter Da'esh and with UNSCR 2253 (2015) the EU is committed to implement UN and EU autonomous sanctions targeting Da'esh and its affiliates so as to hinder the running of the organisation and to disrupt jihadist networks.

- reinforcing its technical assistance to third countries in the development of national strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism, in line with the UNSG Action Plan, and

supporting the UNSG Action Plan during the revision of the UN Counter Terrorism Strategy in June.

- addressing the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosives related risks in the region by all available means, as well as the illegal trafficking and diversion of arms, in particular small arms and light weapons, in order to contribute to stability and security in the region.

- strengthening its work on counter-radicalisation within the Global Coalition as well as in cooperation with Muslim countries, by sharing best practice, enhancing EU cooperation with Internet operators and social media, promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue with a view to eradicating radicalisation and encouraging tolerance, engaging with youth leaders, and improving strategic communication and outreach, including through the Syria Strategic Communication Advisory Team, the Global Coalition's Communication Cell, the International Institute for Justice and Rule of Law, the Hedayah Center, the Global Community and Engagement Resilience Fund in Geneva, and the Radicalisation Awareness Network.

- enhancing the fight against foreign fighters, in particular through enhanced external border controls via a coordinated and systematic contribution to the appropriate files (Schengen Information System II, Europol, Stolen and Lost Travel Documents).

- strengthening its efforts aimed at disrupting terrorist financing through accelerating the implementation of the EU Action Plan on the fight against terrorist financing, in particular the freezing of terrorists' assets, the fight against money laundering and illicit trade of oil and cultural goods. Deepening support to the region in complying with relevant Financial Action Task Force recommendations and the provision of technical assistance initiatives to financial authorities and regulators in the region.
