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Foreign Affairs

Development issues

Brussels, 12 December 2014

President

Federica Mogherini

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy

P R E S S

Main results of the Council

Post-2015

The Council discussed recent developments, in particular the recently issued synthesis report by the UN Secretary General, and the next steps regarding the post-2015 framework, the new framework for the international community's efforts towards poverty eradication and sustainable development.

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, said: "The principle of the next global framework is not to leave anyone behind, not only in some parts of the world, but in all parts of the world. With the new Council conclusions, the EU will start to speak with one voice on the post-2015 agenda", she added.

The EU and its member states are committed to an ambitious, transformative and inclusive post-2015 agenda. Final negotiations at the UN are about to start to prepare the conference on financing for development in July and the UN summit on the post-2015 development agenda in September 2015. The EU is further developing its position through Council conclusions to be adopted by the General Affairs Council on 16 December, and will continue to do so in the coming months.

Ebola

Over lunch, ministers were briefed by EU Ebola coordinator Christos Stylianides on the crisis and the EU's response to it. They exchanged views on medium to long-term support for reconstruction and recovery in the wake of the epidemic. Collectively, the EU and its member states are the prime donor among the international community to help stem the Ebola outbreak: pledges from the Commission and member states now exceed €1.1 billion.

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

PARTICIPANTS

High Representative

Ms Federica MOGHERINI

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Belgium:

Mr Dirk WOUTERS

Permanent Representative

Bulgaria:

Mr Rumen ALEXANDROV

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Martin TLAPA

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark:

Mr Mogens JENSEN

Minister for Trade and Development

Germany:

Mr Gerd MÜLLER

Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development

Estonia:

Mr Matti MAASIKAS

Permanent Representative

Ireland:

Mr Declan KELLEHER

Permanent Representative

Greece:

Mr Kyriakos GERONTOPOULOS

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr Jesús Manuel GRACIA ALDAZ

State Secretary for International Cooperation and Latin America

France:

Mr Pierre SELLAL

Permanent Representative

Croatia:

Ms Vesna PUSIĆ

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

Italy:

Mr Lapo PISTELLI

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

Cyprus:

Mr Kornelios KORNELIOU

Permanent Representative

Latvia:

Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA

Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Lithuania:

Mr Andrius KRIVAS

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg:

Mr Romain SCHNEIDER

Minister for Social Security, Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs, Minister for Sport

Hungary:

Mr István MIKOLA

Minister of State for Security Policy Cooperation and International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Malta:

Ms Marlene BONNICI

Permanent Representative

Netherlands:

Ms Lilianne PLOUMEN

Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

Austria:

Mr Walter GRAHAMMER

Permanent Representative

Poland:

Mr Marek PRAWDA

Permanent Representative

Portugal:

Mr Luís CAMPOS FERREIRA

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

Romania:

Mr Radu PODGOREAN

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Bogdan BENKO

State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Peter BURIAN

State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Ms Sirpa PAATERO

Minister for International Development

Sweden:

Ms Isabella LÖVIN

Minister for International Development Cooperation

United Kingdom:

Ms Justine GREENING

Secretary of State for International Development

.....

Commission:

Mr Neven MIMICA

Member

Mr Karmenu VELLA

Member

Mr Christos STYLIANIDES

Member

ITEMS DEBATED

Post-2015

The Council discussed recent developments, in particular the recently issued synthesis report by the UN Secretary General, and the next steps regarding the post-2015 framework, the new framework for the international community's efforts towards poverty eradication and sustainable development.

The EU and its member states are committed to an ambitious, transformative and inclusive post-2015 agenda. Final negotiations at the UN are about to start to prepare the conference on financing for development in July and the UN summit on the post-2015 development agenda in September 2015. The EU is further developing its position through Council conclusions to be adopted by the General Affairs Council on 16 December, and will continue to do so in the coming months.

Migration, refugees and development

The Council exchanged views on the inter-related issues of migration, refugees and development. It adopted the following conclusions on migration in EU development cooperation:

"Introduction

1. The Council recalls its Conclusions on the 2013 High level Dialogue on Migration and Development and on broadening the development-migration nexus. Implementation of the specific commitments contained in these Conclusions should be further taken forward. The significance of migration in the context of development cooperation and the resulting need to address migration comprehensively also through a development angle still have to be fully taken into account.
2. While reaffirming the commitment to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration, with full respect for human rights, the Council acknowledges the urgency that arises from conflicts and crises throughout the world and the resulting unprecedented challenges related to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) as well as to host communities and countries. It also highlights that most refugees and IDPs are currently living in protracted situations and recalls its commitment to the implementation of the international protection framework, in particular the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.
3. The Council recalls the progress recently made, notably in relation to the 2013 UN High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development, as well as to the 2014 Global Forum on Migration and Development. In this context, the Council welcomes the inclusion of migration in the Commission Communication "A decent life for all: from vision to collective action" as well as in the outcome document of the Open Working Group. Well managed migration and human mobility should be recognized in the post-2015 agenda as potential development enablers.

4. Maximising the positive impact of well managed migration on development is an important policy priority for the EU, as demonstrated by its dual policy framework in this area. The nexus between migration and development is one of the thematic priorities of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, which provides the overarching framework for the EU external migration policy, and is also integrated into the EU development policy framework, of which the Agenda for Change is the latest building block.
5. The Council recalls the significance of migration as one of the five priority areas under the EU's commitments on Policy Coherence for Development. The Council reaffirms that, in order to enhance the development potential of migration, policy coherence should be pursued within a wide range of internal and external policy areas, including policies in partner countries. In particular, there is a need for a more systematic incorporation of the development dimension in migration policies. The Council also recalls that enhanced coherence and coordination is required between the external dimension of migration policy and the development and external affairs agendas in order to better address the challenges and opportunities presented by migration.
6. The Council recalls the significant contribution that development cooperation can provide to responding to political and economic instability and addressing human rights' violations, fragility, conflict, environment vulnerability, unemployment and extreme poverty, which can be root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement.

Taking full account of the opportunities and challenges of migration in EU development cooperation

7. Migration is a multi-faceted phenomenon with numerous inter-linkages with other areas of intervention - such as employment, health, education, social protection, climate change. Against this background, the Council recommends a more systematic incorporation of migration in the dialogue with partner countries and regions as well as into the programming of development cooperation, both at EU and MS levels, and into national and regional development strategies, wherever relevant.
8. The Council calls upon the Commission, in close cooperation with the EEAS, to provide guidance on how to incorporate and strengthen the migration dimension in both policy dialogue and programming. It underlines the need for continued efforts to strengthen the evidence base by improving migration related data collection and analysis, including on the impact of migration on development, and to reinforce the capacity to use acquired knowledge in policy formulation and implementation.

9. Ensuring effective migration governance and respect of the human rights of migrants is a shared responsibility of countries of origin, transit and destination. In this regard, the Council emphasizes the importance of capacity building initiatives to support our partner countries in dealing with the challenges and opportunities of migration, in particular in the field of diaspora engagement, promotion of legal migration, prevention of irregular migration, fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, including by combating criminal networks, readmission and reintegration of returnees. The Council calls for fostering awareness raising programmes on these issues.
10. Given the importance of South-South migration and low- and middle-income countries as destination countries, the Council underlines the need to pursue dialogue, cooperation and partnerships with and among these countries to build awareness of the impact of migration on economic development, in particular in the context of regional labour mobility, support the definition of integration policies and intercultural dialogue, strengthen mechanisms to address vulnerabilities of migrants, especially women and children. Special focus should be put on the fight against racism and xenophobia.
11. The Council recalls the different forms of contribution, not only economic, but also through transfer of knowledge, experience and technology, as well as in the framework of national reconciliation processes, that diaspora members can offer for the development of their countries of origin. We underline the need to reinforce the capacity of the relevant institutional stakeholders in partner countries, including local authorities, to engage with diaspora and to channel its contribution in line with the national development priorities.
12. Migrants drive development of countries of origin and destination in numerous ways. For example, migrants can play a significant role as entrepreneurs and job creators. In this context it is crucial to stress that good governance and a conducive business environment are key elements for promoting diaspora entrepreneurship and investment. Accompanying measures to foster skills circulation and circular migration may also contribute to economic development.
13. While the efforts undertaken at EU level to decrease the cost of remittance transfers should be maintained, more attention needs to be paid to enhancing transparency and competition in the remittances market and to promoting a widespread use of financial services. Policy dialogue with relevant authorities of partner countries can play an essential role in promoting the necessary reforms of the relevant legislative and regulatory frameworks and thereby maximising the development impact of remittances.

14. The Council underscores that reducing the economic and social costs associated with migration can have a significant impact on development. In this regard, while the attention on remittances needs to be maintained, other costs related to migration and mobility, such as skills shortages due to emigration and labour migrants' recruitment costs, have to be equally addressed.

Ensuring a coordinated development cooperation approach to refugees and IDPs

15. Strengthening the link between humanitarian assistance and development, including through the implementation of the resilience agenda, is crucial in ensuring a coherent and comprehensive EU approach to forced displacement, which also encompasses appropriate funding responses. In that context, the Council acknowledges that refugees, IDPs and other persons in need of international protection, especially in situations of protracted displacement, present significant challenges as well as potential opportunities for host countries and host communities. These should be addressed through long-term development planning from the early stage of a crisis, thus complementing the humanitarian approach.
16. Refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as migrants in a vulnerable situation, are at heightened risk of being subjected to various forms of human rights violations and abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence. The Council emphasises the importance of preventing and reducing such violence, ensuring that survivors of such violence are able to access support services and supporting partner countries in this endeavour.
17. The Council acknowledges the great efforts of host countries and host communities in regions neighbouring conflict areas when accommodating refugees and other migrants. The capacity of partner countries to address the multiple challenges related to refugees and IDPs and to make better use of potential opportunities, including by providing local integration opportunities and access to means of self-reliance, should be significantly reinforced through targeted interventions. The Council welcomes the work of the Commission, in close collaboration with the EEAS, and asks to define a specific strategy to step up commitments in this area, including through elaborating a coherent and coordinated development approach towards refugees and IDP issues and ensuring appropriate funding responses.

The Way Forward

18. The Council calls upon the Commission to ensure that the importance of migration as both an opportunity and a challenge for development is fully taken into account at EU level by integrating the migration dimension into EU development policy and cooperation wherever relevant and by ensuring appropriate funding responses. EU action on migration and development should comprehensively address the full range of positive and negative impacts of migration on sustainable and inclusive economic, social and environmental development in countries of origin and destination.
19. The Council therefore invites the Commission to provide further policy orientations and operational guidance with a focus on all the areas outlined above by adopting a Communication by the end of 2015."

Ebola

Over lunch, ministers exchanged views with EU Ebola coordinator Christos Stylianides on medium to long-term support for reconstruction and recovery in the wake of the Ebola epidemic.

Gender issues

The Council was briefed on ongoing work regarding the EU action plan on gender in development cooperation.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Private sector in development

The Council adopted the following conclusions on a stronger role of the private sector in development cooperation: an action oriented perspective:

"Introduction

1. The Council recalls its previous Conclusions on the role of the private sector in development¹, and in particular its call for a continued discussion on tools and modalities in view of the operationalisation of the actions set out in the Commission Communication on "A Stronger Role of the Private Sector in Achieving Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Developing Countries."²
2. The Council welcomes the discussions which were subsequently convened by the Presidency and the Commission, involving a wide number of stakeholders. Those discussions have confirmed that the private sector is emerging as an increasingly active player in the development field. Interactions of development partners with private sector actors have also become more multifaceted.
3. The Council recalls that the overall objective in this policy context remains poverty eradication through sustainable development. The Council underlines in particular the need to strengthen the role of the private sector in implementing the future Sustainable Development Goals and in contributing to inclusive economic growth, to the creation of decent jobs, to the transition to a green economy, to food and nutrition security, to environment protection, to climate change mitigation and adaptation, to the social and economic empowerment of women and youth, with a particular focus on the poorest and most vulnerable.
4. The Council stresses the key role of the private sector in relation to the new global partnership which is being considered in the context of discussions on the post-2015 agenda.

¹ Doc. 11149/14

² Doc. 9802/14

Principles and Criteria

5. In exploring new ways of working with the private sector in order to harness its expertise and resources for inclusive and sustainable development, the Council recognises the challenges such as how to identify the best approaches and models for collaboration with the private sector in development cooperation, how to ensure effective guidance on and oversight of due diligence in particular with respect to human rights, how to ensure alignment of interests and mutual accountability among different stakeholders, how to mitigate reputational and fiduciary risks in particular for the EU and its Member States or how to assess and measure the development impact of private sector engagement. The Council takes note of the related discussions in the context of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/DAC) on the statistical treatment of private sector instruments and leveraged finance within the post 2015 development finance measurement framework.
6. The Council therefore supports the principles (focus on employment creation, inclusiveness and poverty reduction, differentiation, market-based approach, emphasis on results, Policy Coherence for Development) and criteria (measurable development impact, additionality, neutrality and transparency, shared interest and goals and co-financing, demonstration effect, compliance with labour, social, environmental and fiscal standards including respect for human rights) proposed by the Commission as a framework to address these challenges and raise awareness of the opportunities and conditions for successful partnerships with the private sector.
7. The Council welcomes the Member States' commitment to apply this framework in their support to and engagement with the private sector in development cooperation at bilateral and multilateral level as a basis for a common EU and Member States' approach to achieve effectiveness, development impact and better coordination of actions in support of private sector development and public-private development partnerships. The Council also notes that these principles complement the core aid effectiveness Busan principles of country ownership, including the specific commitment to accelerate efforts to untie aid.
8. The Council notes that the criteria should be used as guidance in assessing the appropriateness of proposals for direct support. The assessment should in particular foresee a differentiated approach to take into account the type and the size of the private sector enterprise involved and the context in which it operates. Consistency with the principles and criteria or a credible trajectory towards them has to be an integral part of the respective partnership and intended programmes. Furthermore, the Council invites the Commission and Member States to continue sharing experience and to define how to apply concretely those principles and criteria.

Actions to catalyse private sector engagement and resources for development

9. The Council recognises that the Commission Communication proposes an ambitious set of actions that has the potential to improve the effectiveness of EU support to private sector development. The Council invites the Commission to ensure that this new strategic framework and related actions are appropriately reflected in the programming of EU development assistance for the period 2014-2020 and invites the Commission to draw on the potential provided by its various instruments in order to ensure that this approach can be applied in a coherent, efficient and complementary manner at the subnational, national, regional and global level.
10. The Council takes the view that the actions proposed in the Commission Communication, which relate to catalysing private sector resources and engagement for development, require the EU and the Member States to further enhance interaction and to take up joint actions building on the expertise and knowledge, including transitional experiences, at global, EU and Member State level: the elements below should thereby be taken into account.

Innovative Financial Instruments and Mechanisms

11. Leveraging funding for development from the private sector remains a challenging task. The Council supports the use of innovative financial instruments to leverage additional financing. These may include solidarity funds, multi-donor mechanisms, micro-donations or impact investment and blending.
12. Blending in particular is an important tool to boost economic growth, innovation and job creation. The Council acknowledges the work and looks forward to the continued efforts of the Commission, Member States and European Financing Institutions (EFIs) in the EU Platform for Blending in External Cooperation (EUBEC) to improve effectiveness by increasing donor coordination, promoting division of labour and reducing transaction costs for partners, and to enhance the developmental impact of blending operations, on the basis of the lessons learnt.
13. The Council looks forward to the implementation by the Commission of the DCI, ENI and EDF blending frameworks, including blending facilities for Latin America, Asia, Central Asia, the Neighbourhood, Caribbean and Pacific regions and countries as well as the setting up of the new Africa blending facility. The use of blending mechanisms should build on the cumulative efforts of European donors and financial institutions and on an efficient division of labour. This could be achieved by encouraging a wider participation in blending activities and by promoting coordination among the different donors and financial institutions involved.

14. Regarding in particular micro, small and medium enterprises, including in the informal sector, as well as social enterprises and cooperatives, the Council encourages the Commission, Member States and EFIs to pay particular attention to local banking systems and to improve their access to capital, long term financing and financial services, to support particularly the financing of women and young entrepreneurs; to promote financing for enterprises in the social economy, vocational training schemes; and to support business-to business contacts and the take-up of best environmental practices. Actions to increase SMEs' access to technology and markets should also be prioritised. Particular attention should be devoted to pro-poor sectors which have a multiplying effect and create jobs matching the policy agenda of the EU such as sustainable agriculture, agribusiness, energy and enterprises which promote a green low carbon and climate resilient economy. The EU-ACP Impact Financing Envelope, a new special window under the ACP Investment Facility managed by EIB, is welcome in this context. By bearing higher risk than permitted under the Investment Facility, it supports projects with higher development impact. Both the higher risk and higher impact need to be appropriately assessed and reported.

Structured Dialogue and Inclusive Business Models: the need for scaling up

15. The Council is fully convinced of the need for a structured dialogue with the private sector that could include governments, local authorities, CSOs, social partners, trade unions and business associations, academia and representatives of the informal sector. This dialogue should be conducted at local, regional and global level and on a sectorial basis. Such dialogues should not duplicate existing dialogues and should, where possible, build on existing mechanisms at international level such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.
16. The Council recognises that public/private dialogue can promote an environment conducive for responsible investment, the creation of decent jobs and sustainable development, and enhance policy effectiveness – it also responds to growing demand from private sector actors to become more involved in economic policy making and in particular in the promotion of a sustainable, transparent and business friendly environment and a sound regulatory framework in partner countries. The Council particularly welcomes the recent adoption of the "Joint ACP-EU Cooperation Framework for Private Sector Development support in ACP Countries" and the establishment of an EU-ACP platform for dialogue including private sector actors.
17. The Council welcomes the Commission's endorsement of the Busan Joint Statement on "Expanding and Enhancing Public and Private Co-operation for Broad-Based, Inclusive and Sustainable Growth", as well as the Commission's more active role in the Partnerships for Prosperity, and the recent interactions between private sector actors/organisations, Civil Society Organisations and Local Actors in the framework of the Policy Forum for Development. The Council considers that such processes may facilitate successful interaction between private sector, civil society organisations and local community level actors.

18. The Council invites the Commission and Member States to work together to support the replication and scaling up of inclusive business models and related private sector multi-stakeholder partnerships, build on existing initiatives, and analyse how synergies could be developed to increase the development impact of EU and Member State actions. The Council encourages in particular the Commission and Member States to share experiences and facilitate access to information about existing initiatives and programmes, which present partnership and funding opportunities for business and other stakeholders interested in partnering for development.
19. Furthermore the Council encourages the Commission to explore innovative ways to develop partnerships with the private sector in development assistance programmes aiming at, inter alia, favouring youth traineeships, open to young Europeans, and promoting local youth employment. The Council calls on the Commission and Member States to explore how to enhance the role of diasporas in the development of the private sector in countries of origin, in particular to promote investment and knowledge transfer.

Corporate Social Responsibility

20. The Council supports the Commission's and Member States' efforts to promote Corporate Social Responsibility, in particular through the implementation of the internationally recognised guidelines and principles, i.e. the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the UN Global Compact, and the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 26000 Guidance Standard on Social Responsibility.
21. The Council underlines that Corporate Social Responsibility, in particular through the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the promotion of freedom to conduct business, as set out in Article 16 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, will be one of the priority areas of EU assistance for the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights in the 2014-2020 period.
22. The Council welcomes the intensified international cooperation aimed at more responsible global value chains and encourage the Commission to be an active partner in this area. The Council underlines the growing recognition that integration of social, environmental, ethical, human rights and consumer concerns and the responsible management of the supply chain into a company's business operations and strategy can contribute to strengthening its competitiveness and sustainability. The Council acknowledges the need for Member States to engage their own industries on responsible value chains in particular if acting in the countries most in need. Public-private development partnerships should inter alia motivate the private sector to go beyond internationally agreed standards in order to develop relevant voluntary approaches that are gaining in importance.

23. In respect to trade and economic relations, where the private sector is a key actor, the Council underlines the importance of referring to internationally recognised guidelines and principles on Corporate Social Responsibility in the ongoing and future negotiations of Economic Partnerships Agreements and other bilateral agreements, and of promoting sustainable development when engaging in investment, outsourcing and trade in and with partner countries. The Council underlines the responsibilities of the private sector to promote human rights, hereunder children's and women's rights.
24. In this context, the Council welcomes the recent revision of the public procurement directives to take better account of environmental and social concerns, and of the Accounting Directive on the disclosure of non-financial information. The Council renews its call for strengthening the external dimension of Corporate Social Responsibility and of the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on business and human rights, notably through the Strategy on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, both currently under review, and through the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.

Enhanced EU coordination in support of Private Sector Development: gaining momentum

25. The Council welcomes the initiative taken by the Commission and Member States to do a mapping of future Private Sector Development and Private Sector interventions at national and regional level. This mapping should be the first step of a more ambitious agenda to increase EU and Member States aid effectiveness in this domain and can be taken forward in joint programming and related division of labour processes. The Council calls upon the Commission and Member States to collaborate further notably in the framework of future multi country/regional interventions in Asia, Caribbean and Pacific, Central Asia, Latin America, the Neighbourhood and in particular Africa.
26. The Council will keep developments in this area under close review and calls on the Commission and the EEAS to report regularly, in the context of the Annual Report, on the implementation of the actions and proposals set out in the Commission Communication as well as in these Conclusions and on cooperation with the private sector more generally, with a view to monitoring the progress achieved in the actions identified."

Action plan on nutrition

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the action plan on nutrition:

- "1. The Council recalls its Conclusions of 28 May 2013, which endorsed the Communication "Enhancing Maternal and Child Nutrition in External Assistance: an EU policy Framework"¹ and invited the Commission to develop an Action Plan setting out how to deliver on its stunting target.

Introduction

2. The Council reemphasises its concern at the persistent levels of malnutrition, especially in developing countries, where States are faced by the triple burden of under-nutrition, overnutrition and micro-nutrient deficiencies. The complex and multidimensional causes of malnutrition require a holistic and human rights-based approach, with a particular focus on women and children. The Council reaffirms the importance of strengthening synergies between humanitarian and development actors and welcomes ongoing efforts in this regard. In particular the Council encourages the adoption of approaches that build resilience at all levels, bearing in mind the Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries 2013-2020 linking the resilience agenda and the piloting of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States.
3. The Council recognises that hunger and malnutrition are both a cause and a consequence of underdevelopment. Malnutrition poses a serious threat to social development and economic growth. On the other hand, investing in nutrition provides positive social, economic and productivity returns. Malnutrition constitutes one of the major current global challenges that the international community faces in its fight against poverty, increasing inequality and social exclusion.
4. The Council therefore calls on the EU and its Member States to support efforts by partner countries facing a high malnutrition burden to place food and nutrition security high on the political agenda. In this regard the Council also calls for particular attention to and comprehensive consideration of food security and improved nutrition in the post-2015 framework, noting the proposals in this regard contained in the report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. Nutrition interventions should seek to address the broader dimension of malnutrition, including overweight and diet related non communicable diseases. The promotion of international standards on safe and secure food should also be prioritised.

¹ Doc. 7521/13

5. The Council encourages all the relevant stakeholders to play their respective role in the effective implementation of the commitments of the Rome Declaration on Nutrition through its associated Framework for Action, adopted at the 2014 Second International Conference on Nutrition. These documents will usefully feed into the discussions in the context of the post 2015 framework. Endorsed by the EU and its Member States, the Framework provides a set of recommended actions conducive to eradicating hunger and preventing all forms of malnutrition worldwide, including the attainment of the global nutrition targets set by the World Health Assembly for 2025.

Commission Staff Working Document "Action Plan on Nutrition"

6. The Council welcomes the presentation by the Commission of the Action Plan on Nutrition,¹ which focuses on undernutrition and sets out how the EU can best support partner countries including in meeting the Commission target of reducing the number of chronic undernourished children under the age of five years by at least 7 million by 2025.
7. The Council recognises that achieving the World Health Assembly (WHA) target of reducing global stunting by 40% by 2025 (i.e. about 70 million children) implies scaling up our efforts significantly. The Council therefore welcomes the emphasis of the Nutrition Action Plan on the need to increase the current annual stunting reduction rate beyond current trends so that the above mentioned WHA target is attained by 2025. In this context the Council also welcomes the pledges of increased investment in nutrition by the Commission and some Member States through the 2013 Nutrition for Growth compact and other fora.
8. The Council emphasises the need to tackle both the underlying and immediate causes of undernutrition, with a particular focus on women and children. In this regard, the Council welcomes the commitment of the Commission and some Member States to implement nutrition-sensitive interventions across all relevant sectors, by integrating nutrition indicators and objectives into, inter alia, agriculture and food security, health, social protection, water and sanitation as well as education programmes, together with nutrition specific programmes which address the immediate causes and consequences of undernutrition.

¹ Doc. 11718/14

9. Under-nutrition is a major factor behind the high prevalence of child morbidity and mortality and an obstacle to the full cognitive and physical development of those children who survive it. The Council therefore welcomes the specific focus of the Nutrition Action Plan on interventions and policies targeted at women and children, notably within the critical 1,000 day window of opportunity, i.e. good nutrition for pregnant women and until the second year of the child, and by prioritising women, children and adolescent girls, especially in poor rural areas and among the most vulnerable groups. The importance of breastfeeding of infants as part of nutrition specific interventions should be highlighted. The Council notes that the specific focus of the Nutrition Action Plan will be: (a) to enhance mobilisation and political commitment to nutrition; (b) to scale up actions at country level and (c) to increase knowledge of nutrition.
10. In this context, the Council welcomes the commitment of the Commission and a number of Member States to scale up actions at country level in the 2014-2020 period. The envisaged interventions should be gender sensitive, especially aiming at women and their empowerment, and should be designed to achieve the highest impact on reducing stunting and addressing its underlying causes; they should build capacity, knowledge and skills, they should reinforce and leverage expertise, investments and contributions from local stakeholders, governments, the private sector, knowledge institutes and NGOs.
11. Actions to strengthen national leadership, governance and ownership of nutrition objectives require EU Delegations and the representations of EU Member States to engage further in policy dialogue and to support national and regional processes. EU Joint programming provides a sound framework for better coordinating nutrition interventions as well as for supporting partner countries to define and implement national nutrition policies, particularly in countries with a high stunting burden, where there is a need and potential for common advocacy and action. The Council welcomes the commitment in the Action Plan to ensure synergy and coherence between country-owned policies and programmes on the one hand, and regional and international initiatives on the other hand.
12. The Council encourages the alignment of Member States interventions to existing national strategies of partner countries and close coordination with the Commission's Nutrition Action Plan and other international initiatives. Existing coordination mechanisms, such as the SUN movement and the Committee on World Food Security, should be reinforced. Consideration should be given to the work of other relevant UN committees such as the Standing Committee on Nutrition. In particular the Council welcomes the fact that 54 countries with high burdens of under-nutrition have now joined the SUN movement and are demonstrating political commitment to improve nutrition.

13. As part of the Action Plan the Council supports the Commission proposal to develop country fiches showing expected outcomes. Nutrition objectives should be consistently incorporated in programme design while nutrition criteria and indicators should be included and monitored. Moreover, the Council supports the Commission intention to strengthen national information management systems for nutrition, providing accountability for and communication of results to assess the impact, also at field level, of the Action Plan. The information generated may also serve to contribute results to the annual Global Nutrition Report. Accurate data at country level will support decision-making, resource allocation and policy development by national authorities in addition to providing accountability for and communication of results arising from the implementation of the Action Plan, at global and country level."

Annual report on the EU's development and external assistance policies

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the annual report on the European Union's development and external assistance policies and their implementation in 2013:

- "1. The Council welcomes the 2014 Annual Report on the European Union's development and external assistance policies and their implementation in 2013.¹ The report represents a key contribution to strengthening accountability and transparency. It serves to communicate and demonstrate the focus on results of the EU development policy.
2. The Council appreciates the comprehensiveness of the report's geographic and thematic overviews, including reporting on fundamental values, and the focus on progress in the achievement of the EU's long-term development objectives as well as on how the principles set out in the Agenda for Change have been translated into development strategies and interventions.
3. The Council notes the important progress made on joint programming that emerges as a core element of the EU's contribution to aid effectiveness agenda, and stresses the need to specifically report on lessons learned in future reports.
4. The Council welcomes the continued efforts in the domain of Policy Coherence for Development (PCD), where a wide range of actions is reported, including at country level, and in particular regarding the strengthening of the evidence base, awareness raising and training.

¹ Doc. 12570/14.

5. The Council shares the emphasis given to reporting on cooperation with non-state actors and local authorities as well as on the role of the private sector and would welcome more extensive reporting on public-private cooperation in the future. The efforts to report on the implementation of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States are positively noted.
6. The Council encourages the Commission to include more specific information in the next annual reports on budget support programmes, including trends in disbursement, share of general budget support and sector budget support programmes in the main financial instruments. Reporting should include how partner country's commitment and record on democracy, human rights and rule of law have been taken into account in decisions to provide budget support. It should also inform on how the need to provide and protect the provision of vital basic services, particularly to the poorest and the most vulnerable, as outlined in the Council Conclusions on budget support of May 2012,¹ was taken into account, and how the three new types of budget support have contributed, in the medium/long term, to poverty reduction, sustainable development and improving governance in these partner countries.
7. The Council calls on the Commission to review progress, in the next annual report, on the achievement of MDGs, drawing lessons for the transition to SDGs.
8. The Council invites the Commission and the EEAS to focus more, in future annual reports, on the prevention and fight against corruption, the comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises and the EU support for sustainable change in transition societies. The Council would also welcome reporting on delegated cooperation.
9. A continued focus should be maintained on the compliance with the commitment to devote at least 20% of EU aid to support social inclusion and human development and 20% of the EU spending on climate-relevant actions, including sustainable energy, building a low-carbon, resource efficient economy, as well as sustainable agriculture, resilience and adaptation.
10. The Council calls on the Commission to strengthen the reporting on gender equality. A spotlight on EU action to unlock the potential of girls and women would be appreciated.
11. The Council firmly reiterates the need to further improve reporting on outcomes and the impact of EU development assistance, for all aid modalities, to better link objectives and results, and is looking forward to improvements that will derive from the EU Development and Cooperation Results Framework for the forthcoming annual reports."

¹ Doc. 9371/12.

Economic partnership agreement with West Africa

The Council authorised, on behalf of the EU, the signature and provisional application of the Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and the West African states, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA).

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

EU - Ukraine relations

The Council established the position of the EU for the first meeting of the EU - Ukraine Association Council.

EU aid volunteers

The Council confirmed that it has no intention to object to a Commission delegated act laying down standards regarding candidate volunteers and EU aid volunteers.
