



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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PRESS RELEASE

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Foreign Affairs

Brussels, 23 January 2012

President

Catherine Ashton

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy

P R E S S

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Main results of the Council

*The Council discussed the **Iranian nuclear programme**, reiterating its serious and deepening concern. Given that Iran continues to refuse to comply with its international obligations and to fully co-operate with the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Council agreed additional restrictive measures, notably a phased embargo of Iranian crude oil imports to the EU and measures in the financial and transport sectors. The Council adopted conclusions on this issue.*

*The Council exchanged views on the situation in **Burma/Myanmar** and welcomed the programme of reforms undertaken by that country. It confirmed that the ongoing reform process has already led to improved relations between the EU and Burma/Myanmar and that further reforms could lead to the easing or lifting of the EU's restrictive measures. As a first step, the Council decided to suspend the visa bans concerning several members of the government.*

*The Council debated events in **Syria** and reiterated its concern about the deteriorating situation and the widespread and systematic human rights violations. In response, the Council reinforced EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime.*

*During lunch, ministers discussed developments in Egypt and with regard to the **Middle East Peace Process**. The Council welcomed the efforts by Jordan to facilitate direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians as part of the Quartet process. The Council also appointed Mr. Andreas Reinicke as EU Special Representative to the Middle East Peace Process.*

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¹ 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

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High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

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Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign, External Trade and European Affairs

Bulgaria:

Mr Dimiter TZANTCHEV

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Karel SCHWARZENBERG

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Denmark:

Mr Villy SØVNDAL

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

Mr Guido WESTERWELLE

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Matti MAASIKAS

Permanent Representation

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Mr Eamon GILMORE

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Greece:

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Minister for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr José Manuel GARCIA-MARGALLO MARFIL

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Vice Chancellor, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Poland:

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Portugal:

Mr Paulo PORTAS

Ministro de Estado, Minister for Foreign Affairs

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Mr Teodor BACONSCI

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Slovenia:

Ms Dragoljuba BENČINA

State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Mikulas DZURINDA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Erkki TUOMIOJA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Sweden:

Mr Carl BILDT

Minister for Foreign Affairs

United Kingdom:

Mr William HAGUE

First Secretary of State, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Mr David LIDINGTON

Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Commission:

Mr Štefan Füle

Member

Mr Andris Piebalgs

Member

Ms Kristalina Georgieva

Member

The government of the acceding state was represented as follows:**Croatia:**

Ms Vesna PUSIĆ

Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

ITEMS DEBATED**Iran**

The Council exchanged views on Iran and its nuclear programme.

It adopted the following conclusions:

1. "Recalling the European Council conclusions of 9 December 2011 and the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions of 1 December, the Council reiterates its serious and deepening concerns over the Iranian nuclear programme and in particular over the findings on Iranian activities relating to the development of military nuclear technology, as reflected in the latest IAEA report. The recent start of operations of enrichment of uranium to a level of up to 20% in the deeply buried underground facility in Fordow near Qom further aggravates concerns about possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme. Iran's acceleration of enrichment activities is in flagrant violation of six UNSC Resolutions and eleven IAEA Board resolutions and contributes to increasing tensions in the region. The Council calls upon Iran to fully cooperate with the IAEA, including in the context of the planned visit by its Deputy Director General for Safeguards.
2. Iran continues to refuse to comply with its international obligations and to fully co-operate with the IAEA to address the concerns on its nuclear programme, and instead continues to violate those obligations. In this context and in accordance with the Council conclusions of 1 December 2011, the Council has agreed additional restrictive measures in the energy sector, including a phased embargo of Iranian crude oil imports to the EU, in the financial sector, including against the Central Bank of Iran, in the transport sector as well as further export restrictions, notably on gold and on sensitive dual-use goods and technology, as well as additional designations of persons and entities, including several controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).
3. The Council again reaffirms the longstanding commitment to work for a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue in accordance with the dual-track approach. The Council stresses that the restrictive measures agreed today are aimed at affecting the funding of Iran's nuclear programme by the Iranian regime and are not aimed at the Iranian people. The Iranian regime itself can act responsibly and bring all sanctions to an end.

4. The Council reaffirms that the objective of the EU remains to achieve a comprehensive and long-term settlement which would build international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme, while respecting Iran's legitimate rights to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in conformity with the NPT. Supporting the ongoing efforts by the EU High Representative and reaffirming the importance of close co-operation with the E3+3, the Council urges Iran to reply positively to the offer for substantial negotiations, as set out in the High Representative's letter of 21 October 2011, by clearly demonstrating its readiness to engage in confidence building measures and, without preconditions, in meaningful talks to seriously address existing concerns on the nuclear issue."

At the same time, the Council adopted a package of restrictive measures targeting the sources of finance for the Iranian nuclear programme. For details, see press release [5457/12](#).

Burma / Myanmar

The Council debated the EU response to the reforms undertaken in Burma/Myanmar.

It adopted the following conclusions:

1. "The Council welcomes the remarkable programme of political reform undertaken by the Government and Parliament in Burma/Myanmar, together with its commitment to economic and social development. These changes are opening up important new prospects for developing the relationship between the European Union and Burma/Myanmar. The EU stands ready to respond accordingly.
2. The EU considers that the recent release of a substantial number of political prisoners marks a crucial step forward and clearly shows the determination of the Government to continue on the path of reform.

The Council also welcomes the Government's efforts to seek peace with ethnic groups; the legislation permitting trade union activity, establishing freedom of assembly and loosening censorship of the media; as well as the creation of a Human Rights Commission. These elements are essential steps towards establishing a democratic state under the rule of law.

3. The Council welcomes the dialogue between President U Thein Sein and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the changes to the Electoral Law adopted by the Parliament. The Council is pleased by the NLD's decision to register as a political party and, together with other parties, contest the by-elections on 1 April. The EU attaches particular importance to the free and fair conduct of these elections.

4. The EU welcomes the resolve by the Government to engage with ethnic groups through an inclusive political process, thus bringing to an end the armed conflicts in the country, including the recently concluded cease-fire with the Karen National Union. The Council underlines the need for all actors concerned to establish a credible and sustained process for handling the difficult issues involved in securing long-term peace and national reconciliation. It stresses the importance of improved humanitarian access, especially to areas affected by ethnic conflicts.
5. The Council notes the commitment by the Government to continue and complete these reforms, notably by the unconditional release of the remaining political prisoners within the next few months and by the free and fair conduct of the by-elections. The Council also welcomes the Government's continued commitment to credibly addressing the ethnic conflicts through an inclusive political process. The Council confirms that the ongoing reform process has already led to improved relations between the EU and Burma/Myanmar and that this, together with meeting the above mentioned expectations, would lead to the further easing or lifting of the restrictive measures, in the Council's Decision by the end of April. The Council decides, as a first step, that restrictive measures (visa ban) concerning the President, the vice-Presidents, cabinet members and the Speakers of the two Houses of Parliament should be suspended and mandates relevant working groups to implement it, and to consider further steps. A further review of the Council's Decision imposing restrictive measures is ongoing.
6. The European Union wishes to assist Burma/Myanmar in advancing reforms. It will promote economic development through increases in assistance to reduce poverty and build capacity, and through strengthened sectoral dialogue with the Government. The EU invites progressive engagement by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to support Burma/Myanmar in developing its strategy. The EU stands ready to back the peace processes with the ethnic groups, for example through financial assistance for the process of the reintegration of returnees. The Council looks forward to a visit by the High Representative to the country. It also reaffirms its full support for her decision to open an EU Office in Yangon and looks forward to its early opening."

Syria

The Council discussed the situation in Syria and adopted the following conclusions:

1. "The European Union remains deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in Syria and the widespread and systematic violations of human rights and calls again for an immediate end to the violence. The EU is particularly concerned by the recent escalation of violence and reiterates its condemnation in the strongest terms of the brutal crackdown by the Syrian government which risks exacerbating even further the spiral of violence, sectarian clashes and militarization. President Assad must step aside immediately to allow for a peaceful and democratic transition.
2. The EU strongly condemns the bombs attacks in Damascus on 23 December 2011 and on 6 January 2012 causing scores of deaths and injuries. Any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation and by whosoever committed. The EU also condemns the attack on 11 January that killed a French journalist and several Syrian civilians, injuring many more people, including a Dutch journalist. The EU calls for light to be shed on this attack. The Syrian authorities have a responsibility to guarantee the safety of journalists in their country. The press must be allowed to carry out its vital role of providing independent information on the events in Syria without fear of violence or repression.
3. The EU welcomes the League of Arab States' resolution of 22 January and its initiative to seek UNSC support for a political solution. The EU is deeply concerned by the Syrian authorities' lack of cooperation and urges them to fully comply with the League of Arab States' Action Plan and their commitments undertaken in that respect, to completely stop acts of violence against civilians, free political detainees, remove troops, tanks and weapons from cities, and allow independent observers and the media, to freely travel in and report on Syria.
4. The EU recalls its support to the League of Arab States' efforts to end the cycle of violence in Syria, and to the deployment of its monitoring mission, including through the setting up of the LAS situation room. The EU welcomes the UN readiness to provide training and assistance to the League's monitors and encourages the League to accept UN assistance to ensure technical support for the mission.
5. The EU welcomes the League of Arab States' decision to extend its observation mission and to reinforce its capacity to report independently on the situation in Syria. The EU takes note of the League of Arab States' decision to appoint a Special Envoy for Syria.

6. The EU condemns in the strongest terms the attacks on the League of Arab States' mission monitors and calls for an impartial and swift investigation into the events. The mission must be able to act safely and with independence and to access all detention facilities.
7. Given the Syrian regime's continued use of violence against civilians, the EU has today designated further 22 individuals and 8 entities to be subject to restrictive measures. The EU will continue its policy of imposing additional measures against the regime, not to the civilian population, as long as repression continues. Following the assessment of EU Member States, the listing of designated persons who have dissociated themselves from the repressive policy of the regime will be reconsidered. The EU calls on the international community to join its efforts to target those responsible for or associated with the violent repression and those who support or benefit from the regime.
8. The EU reiterates its strong support to the Syrian people and encourages the Syrian opposition to make all efforts to strengthen coordination on the way forward in order to realise an orderly transition to a Syria that is democratic, stable, inclusive and that guarantees minority rights. It supports the efforts of the League of Arab States in this respect. The EU will continue to engage with representative members of the Syrian opposition, such as the SNC, which adhere to non violence, inclusiveness and democratic values.
9. The EU reiterates its strong concerns about the deteriorating living conditions of the Syrian people in a great number of localities affected by the unrest. The Syrian authorities must immediately alleviate the suffering of the population living in these areas, respect and protect the wounded and sick, guarantee unhindered access to medical care without any discrimination or reprisal and refrain from intimidation of those providing medical assistance. The Syrian authorities must allow full and unimpeded access of relief personnel from international humanitarian organisations for the timely delivery of humanitarian aid to persons in need of assistance.
10. The EU urges all members of the UN Security Council to uphold their responsibilities to end the violence against the Syrian population and support the Syrian people in their desire for freedom and political rights. The EU welcomes the establishment by the UN Human Rights Council of a Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Syria and urges the Syrian Government to fully cooperate with the Rapporteur. The EU recalls the main findings of the report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry which stated that crimes against humanity may have been committed in the country. The EU looks forward to the next debate of the UN Human Rights Council on Syria on the 12 March 2012."

In response to the continuing human rights violations, the Council reinforced the EU's restrictive measures against the Syrian regime. For details, see press release [5537/12](#).

Serbia / Kosovo

The EU High Representative briefed the Council on the state of play in the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. The Council exchanged views on this topic, ahead of the debate on Serbia's candidate status scheduled for the General Affairs Council on 27 February.

Middle East Peace Process

During lunch, ministers debated the latest events concerning the Middle East Peace Process.

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. "The EU welcomes the efforts by Jordan to facilitate direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians as part of the Quartet process. The EU calls on both parties to come forward with comprehensive proposals on borders and security, as envisaged in the Quartet statement on 23 September. A bold and decisive demonstration of political leadership is needed from both sides to encourage the momentum and ensure real progress.
2. Against the backdrop of worrying developments on the ground in 2011, particularly with regard to settlements, the EU reaffirms its commitment to a two state solution: The legitimacy of the State of Israel and the right of Palestinians to achieve statehood must never be called into question. The viability of the two state solution must be preserved. The EU will continue to reinforce efforts towards resolving the conflict through its contribution to the Quartet, its continued partnership with Israel, and its support for the Palestinian Authority's state-building efforts. The EU reaffirms its clear positions on negotiations, with regard to parameters, principles and issues, including the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council in December 2009, December 2010, May, July and October 2011 as well as the statement delivered on behalf of the EU at the UN Security Council on 21 April 2011.
3. The EU stresses the central role of the Quartet and backs the Quartet process to reach an agreement between the parties not later than by the end of 2012. The EU fully supports the High Representative in her continued efforts to create a credible perspective for the re-launching of the peace process. The EU reiterates its support to the Arab Peace Initiative.
4. The EU calls on the parties to demonstrate their commitment to a peaceful solution and to the Quartet process by actions that can build confidence and create an environment of trust necessary to ensure meaningful negotiations, leading to a comprehensive and lasting peace.
5. The EU welcomes the appointment of the new EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process."

Belarus

The Council exchanged views on the situation in Belarus.

It adopted a decision broadening the criteria for subjecting persons and entities to restrictive measures. This paves the way for future designations of those responsible for serious human rights violations or the repression of civil society and the democratic opposition or supporting or benefiting from the Lukashenka regime. Decisions to add persons and entities to the list of those targeted can be taken in the wake of this Council session.

Sudan and South Sudan

The Council debated the situation in Sudan and South Sudan and adopted the following conclusions:

1. "The EU reaffirms its commitment to support both Sudan and South Sudan in their objective of achieving peace and development and will continue to pursue a comprehensive approach to both Sudans as agreed by the Council in June 2011. It recognises the courageous efforts made by both parties leading up to and including the secession of South Sudan in July 2011. The EU remains convinced that the stability and prosperity of Sudan and South Sudan are intertwined and looks to both Presidents to show the same degree of leadership in this critical period.
2. The EU is deeply concerned at increasing tensions between and within Sudan and South Sudan, most recently the conflicts in Jonglei, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States, and the lack of progress in resolving key outstanding issues in the post-secession negotiations. It urges both Governments to show restraint and to avoid any unilateral action detrimental to the negotiations.
3. The EU urges the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan to reach a negotiated settlement on all outstanding Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and post-secession issues under the auspices of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) and to show the necessary flexibility to overcome their differences. It also calls for the full, unconditional and immediate withdrawal of forces from the Abyei Area by Sudan and South Sudan as agreed on 20 June 2011 and for full cooperation with the UN including the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). In addition, the EU underlines the importance of implementing all previous commitments on border issues.

4. The EU is gravely concerned about the ongoing violence in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States. It calls for an immediate cessation of fighting and the resumption of political talks based on the principles of the Framework Agreement signed by the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/North in Addis Ababa on 28 June 2011. The EU recalls the responsibility of the Government of Sudan to protect all civilians in its territory and recalls the importance of accountability for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.
5. The EU urges the Government of Sudan to allow safe and unhindered access for international humanitarian actors to all civilians and reiterates its readiness to provide humanitarian assistance to all those in need.
6. The EU welcomes the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) as a significant step forward towards achieving peace in Darfur and recent steps to take forward its implementation. If fully implemented in a timely manner the DDPD could significantly improve the lives of Darfuris. The EU is ready to increase its support for early recovery activity and sustainable livelihoods where security conditions permit and a conducive operating environment is available for international organisations. A lasting and comprehensive peace settlement will only be achieved with the participation of all movements and Darfuri stakeholders. The EU urges non-signatory movements to join the process and calls on the Government of Sudan to keep the door open for peace. The EU reiterates its support for the UN - African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID).
7. The EU stresses the importance of accountability for serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Darfur and recalls the obligation of the Government of Sudan and all UN member states and regional organisations to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Court pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1593.
8. The EU remains committed to the development of its relations with Sudan. It welcomes the commitment of the Government of Sudan to hold an inclusive national constitutional review process which should involve comprehensive dialogue with all political forces and sectors of Sudanese society, including those in the peripheral areas. The ongoing conflicts in Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur remain obstacles to moving forward with the full range of support that the EU would like to provide to Sudan. Tangible political progress would allow the EU to move forward on issues such as debt relief and further assistance to economic diversification.
9. The EU also urges the Government of Sudan to lift restrictions on freedom of expression, including the confiscation and closure of newspapers and detention of journalists and political opponents without charge. It welcomes the setting up of the National Human Rights Commission and notes the recent appointment of its members. It is essential that the Commission operates in an independent manner, in full compliance with the "Paris Principles".

10. The EU is alarmed at the serious inter-communal clashes in South Sudan, particularly in Jonglei State, which have caused large-scale death and displacement and recalls the responsibility of the Government of South Sudan to protect all civilians in its territory. The EU urges the Government of South Sudan, with the assistance of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), to intensify its efforts to address the root causes of inter-communal conflicts, to promote reconciliation, to advance Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and address the issue of small arms and light weapons.
11. The EU is concerned about the human rights situation in South Sudan including reports of human rights violations perpetrated by South Sudan's security forces. It welcomes the Government of South Sudan's willingness to work with the UN Human Rights Council to address these issues and encourages it to do so without delay.
12. Since independence, South Sudan has made some progress in its efforts to build the foundations of a functioning state but many complex challenges remain which must be addressed in a timely and comprehensive manner by the Government of South Sudan. The EU reiterates its commitment to work with the Government of South Sudan and international partners, in particular UNMISS, to assist their efforts in consolidating democracy, respect for human rights and rule of law, good governance, fighting corruption, building a conducive environment for foreign investment and ensuring transparency and accountability. In this context, it welcomes the concrete measures announced recently by President Kiir to combat corruption and looks forward to their timely and effective implementation. The EU also attaches importance to a fully inclusive national constitutional review process.
13. The Council welcomes the joint programming in Juba of EU and its Member States development assistance through the EU Single Country Strategy for South Sudan 2011-2013 which is expected to provide almost €700 million for that period. The EU is also moving forward with preparations for a possible CSDP mission to strengthen security at Juba International Airport and in this context the Council today approved a Crisis Management Concept for a possible mission. The EU reconfirms its commitment to continue cooperation with South Sudan on trade matters with a view to granting duty free, quota free access under the "Everything But Arms" arrangement as soon as the conditions are met."

The Council also adopted the crisis management concept for a Common Security and Defence Policy action to support security at the Juba international airport in South Sudan. This will kick off operational planning for the new mission.

MEETINGS IN THE MARGINS OF THE COUNCIL**Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

The eighth meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the EU was held in the margins of the Council. For details, see press release [1453/12](#).

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Relations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The Council approved the EU's common position for the eighth meeting of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council.

EU Special Representative to the Middle East Peace Process

The Council appointed Mr Andreas Reinicke as EU Special Representative to the Middle East Peace Process. For more details, see press release [18763/11](#).

EU-Pakistan relations

The Council adopted the EU-Pakistan 5-year engagement plan, with the aim of building a strategic relationship by forging a partnership for peace and development rooted in shared values, principles and commitments. The 5-year plan is an expression of the EU's engagement to support Pakistan's institutions and civil society. Pakistan should complete its transition to a stable democracy, and should play a key role in fostering peace and stability in southern Asia. The EU will continue to work closely with Pakistan as it seeks to address its economic and development challenges and provide security for its people, and the High Representative will inaugurate a strategic dialogue, based on the engagement plan, during her upcoming visit to Pakistan.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

CSDP mission in South Sudan

The Council approved the crisis management concept for a Common Security and Defence Policy mission to support airport security at the Juba international airport. This kicks off operational planning for the mission. The actual start of operations is subject to a separate Council decision.

EU Military Committee

The Council appointed General Patrick de Rousiers (France) as chairman of the EU Military Committee for three years starting on 6 November 2012. The Council also appointed Rear Admiral Klaus-Michael Nelte from Germany as the next chairman of the EU Military Committee working group for three years as from 1 October 2012. For details, see press release [5376/12](#).

Activation of the EU Operations Centre for the Horn of Africa

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. In the context of the Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa, the EU is conducting two military operations – EUNAVFOR Atalanta and EUTM Somalia – and has commenced operational planning to launch a civilian mission to strengthen regional maritime capacities in Somalia and in the wider Horn of Africa region. The simultaneous conduct of three CSDP actions in the region will require an enhanced level of coordination and interaction, including between military and civilian actors. In this regard, the activation of the Operations Centre will contribute to reinforcing the EU's comprehensive approach that mobilizes the different tools at the EU's disposal and to improving the performance of the existing EU CSDP structures and of its missions and operations.
 2. To this end, and recalling its Conclusions of 1 December 2011, the Council agrees to activate the EU Operations Centre, in accordance with its Terms of Reference, for the Horn of Africa operations, subject to a Council decision to be adopted as soon as possible. The Operations Centre will inter alia provide direct support to the Civilian Operations Commander for the operational planning and conduct of the RMCB mission; provide support to the EUTM mission commander and enhance strategic coordination between the mission and other CSDP actions in the Horn of Africa; strengthen civ-mil synergies; liaise with Operation Atalanta; and facilitate interaction between the mission/operations and the Brussels-based structures. The Council welcomes the intention of the member states to provide personnel to the Operations Centre including for its leadership.
 3. The Council calls for the PSC to keep under regular review all relevant aspects of the Operations Centre."
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