



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



7764/14

(OR. en)

PRESSE 153
PR CO 17

PRESS RELEASE

3304th Council meeting

Foreign Affairs

Brussels, 17 March 2014

President

Catherine Ashton

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy

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Main results of the Council

Ukraine

The Council focused on the situation in Ukraine. It strongly condemned the holding on 16 March of an illegal "referendum" in Crimea on joining the Russian Federation, in clear breach of the Ukrainian Constitution. The EU does not recognise the illegal "referendum" and its outcome.

Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said: *"We want to underline very clearly that there is still time to avoid a negative spiral and to reverse current developments. We call on the Russian leadership not to take steps to annex Crimea and instead to take steps to deescalate this crisis."* The European Union remains ready to support facilitating dialogue between Ukraine and Russia.

In the absence of positive steps and in line with the statement of the EU Heads of State or Government of 6 March, the Council decided to impose travel restrictions and an asset freeze against 21 persons responsible for actions which undermine or threaten the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

In addition, the Council approved the arrangements for the signing of the political provisions of the Association Agreement on 21 March in Brussels. *"This is a strong signal of our political support,"* the High Representative said. The Council also confirmed the EU's commitment to proceed to the signature and conclusion of the remaining parts of the agreement, which together with the political provisions constitute a single instrument.

EU strategy on the Gulf of Guinea

The Council adopted an EU strategy on the Gulf of Guinea, to support the efforts of the region and its coastal states to address the many challenges of maritime insecurity and organised crime.

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 - Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
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Mr Günther OETTINGER

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Mr Štefan FÜLE

Member

ITEMS DEBATED**Eastern Partnership/Ukraine**

The Council held an in-depth discussion on the situation in Ukraine. It adopted the following conclusions:

1. "The Council strongly condemns the holding of an illegal referendum in Crimea on joining the Russian Federation on 16 March, in clear breach of the Ukrainian Constitution. The EU does not recognise the illegal "referendum" and its outcome. It also takes note of the draft opinion of the Venice Commission on this "referendum". It was held in the visible presence of armed soldiers under conditions of intimidation of civic activists and journalists, blacking out of Ukrainian television channels and obstruction of civilian traffic in and out of Crimea. Furthermore, there have been clear signs of increasing Russian military build-up in Crimea as well as denial of access to the peninsula to UN and OSCE representatives and missions invited by the government of Ukraine. The EU deplors these further negative developments, which are in clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
2. The Council recalls the statement of the EU Heads of State and Government of 6 March which set out that negotiations between Ukraine and Russia needed to start within a few days, including through multilateral mechanisms, and produce results within a limited timeframe. In light of the developments of last week, and in the absence of any such results, the Council has decided to introduce additional measures, including travel restrictions and an asset freeze against persons responsible for actions which undermine or threaten the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, including actions on the future status of any part of the territory which are contrary to the Ukrainian Constitution, and persons, and entities associated with them.
3. The European Union remains ready to support facilitating dialogue between Ukraine and Russia. We urge Russia to take steps to de-escalate the crisis, immediately withdraw its forces back to their pre-crisis numbers and garrisons in line with its international commitments, begin direct discussions with the government of Ukraine and avail itself of all relevant international mechanisms to find a peaceful and negotiated solution, in full respect of its bilateral and multilateral commitments to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this respect, the EU regrets that the UNSC was not able to adopt a resolution, owing to a veto by the Russian Federation.
4. There is still time to reverse current developments. Opportunities exist to avoid a negative spiral. The EU is ready for a constructive dialogue with all sides. The EU remains committed to the objective of developing the EU-Russia relationship, based on mutual interest and respect for international law. The Council regrets that Russia's actions contradict these objectives. The Council urges the Russian Federation not to take steps to annex Crimea in violation of international law.

Any further steps by the Russian Federation to destabilise the situation in Ukraine would lead to additional and far-reaching consequences for relations in a broad range of economic areas between the European Union and its Member States, on the one hand, and the Russian Federation, on the other hand. The European Union calls on Russia to return to developing a strategic partnership with the EU instead of isolating itself further diplomatically and economically.

5. The Council considers that there is an urgent need for an international presence on the ground throughout Ukraine, including in Crimea. The Council supports the swift deployment of an OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.
6. The Council welcomes the Commission's proposal for temporarily removing customs duties on Ukrainian exports to the EU and looks forward to its swift adoption. It furthermore looks forward to the signing of the political provisions of the Association Agreement on 21 March in Brussels and confirms its commitment to proceed to the signature and conclusion of the remaining parts of the Agreement which together with the political provisions constitute a single instrument. These steps will confirm Ukraine's free and sovereign decision to pursue Ukraine's political association and economic integration with the European Union.
7. The European Union is ready to stand by Ukraine and committed to provide strong financial support to its economic and financial stabilisation, as presented by the European Commission in its assistance package to Ukraine which we are committed to implement rapidly. The Council encourages the EIB to continue its operations in Ukraine. IMF support will be critical to enabling assistance from the European Union as the immediate priority is to restore macroeconomic stability through sound fiscal, monetary and exchange rate policies. At the same time, we reiterate our call on the Ukrainian government to launch urgently an ambitious set of structural reforms, including notably the fight against corruption and enhancing transparency of fiscal expenditure.
8. The EU also confirmed its readiness to continue to assist Ukraine in securing its energy supply through further diversification, enhanced energy efficiency, and effective interconnections with the European Union.

9. The European Union commends the measured response shown so far by Ukraine. The EU again encourages the Ukrainian authorities to implement an inclusive process, to pursue their efforts to ensure free and fair elections and to advance constitutional reform. All human rights violations and acts of violence need to be properly investigated and measures need to be stepped up to combat impunity. In this context, the EU looks forward to the early establishment of the Council of Europe International Advisory Panel. The EU also calls on the Ukrainian authorities to continue to reach out to all Ukrainian regions and population groups and to ensure the full protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, drawing on the expertise of the Council of Europe and the OSCE. It also supports the Council of Europe tasking of its Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities to review the situation of national minorities in Ukraine.
10. The Council reiterates the EU's commitment to enhance people-to-people contacts between the citizens of the European Union and Ukraine, i.e. through the visa liberalisation process, in line with agreed conditions in the framework of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan."

The Council also adopted restrictive measures in response to actions threatening the territorial integrity of Ukraine, see [press release](#).

In addition, the Council approved a decision on the signing and provisional application of the Association Agreement with Ukraine as well as a final act concerning this agreement.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The High Representative briefed ministers on her recent trip to Sarajevo where she had discussed the situation with politicians and members of civil society.

Middle East peace process

The High Representative briefed ministers on possible steps to support the on-going efforts on the Middle East peace process.

Syrian conflict and regional context

The High Representative briefly updated ministers on the latest developments in the Syrian conflict.

EU-Africa summit

The Council was briefed on preparations for the fourth EU-Africa summit, which is to take place in Brussels on 2-3 April under the theme "Investing in people, prosperity and peace".

Energy diplomacy

Over lunch, ministers exchanged views on EU energy diplomacy, in the presence of Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger. Ministers discussed the foreign policy implications of strategic choices made in the field of energy by relevant partners.

The shift in the global energy landscape creates new challenges and opportunities for EU foreign and security policy. The shale gas revolution in the US, the growing demand for energy in India due to its increasing population and the rise of gas as an energy source in China might have far-reaching political and economic consequences.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****Gulf of Guinea strategy**

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the Gulf of Guinea:

- "1. Recognising the importance of its relations with West and Central Africa, the Council has today adopted a Strategy on the Gulf of Guinea, drawing on a Joint Communication¹ of the Commission and the High Representative, to support the efforts of the region and its coastal states to address the many challenges of maritime insecurity and organised crime. The adoption of a strategy on the Gulf of Guinea underlines, in a timely manner ahead of the EU-Africa Summit in April 2014, the importance which the EU attaches to close and comprehensive cooperation with its African partners.
2. The EU's comprehensive approach to West and Central Africa is based on the region's geo-strategic importance and the EU's long-standing determination to support its efforts to overcome poverty and attain lasting stability and prosperity. Piracy, Armed Robbery At Sea, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU) including environmental degradation and challenges to food security and organised crime including smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings, drugs and arms in the Gulf of Guinea pose serious challenges to human security and human rights, economic activity and trade both at sea and on land. Furthermore, links to transnational organised criminal and terrorist networks threaten stability in the wider sub-region and impact the security of Europe and its citizens.
3. The EU Strategy builds upon the momentum which was created by the Heads of State of the region at their Summit in Yaoundé, Cameroon in June 2013, and aims to provide the support of the EU particularly to the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC). This regional ownership is essential to achieve lasting peace, security, justice and good governance based on the democratic principles of inclusion, the rule of law and respect for human rights. The Strategy also recognises the need to protect both the populations in the Gulf of Guinea region and European citizens from the threats that emanate from the region, including piracy, terrorism, smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings, drugs, and arms.

¹ doc. 18099/13.

4. The EU recognises the importance of addressing the underlying causes and contributing factors, including poverty and weak governance. Although circumstances vary from region to region, the EU's experience in dealing with insecurity in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, and the Great Lakes, indicates the appropriateness and effectiveness of preventive action in close coordination with other international partners and in support of the efforts of the countries of the region and African regional bodies. It particularly shows the value of integrating all EU means and instruments - political, security, sustainable development and fisheries, good governance and anti-corruption - in a comprehensive approach for greater impact.
5. The EU will advance work to seek to enhance the capacity of the regional organisations and coastal states to build a common understanding of the threats, strengthen their institutions to ensure security and the rule of law, human rights, and accelerate development including job creation, and build cooperation structures to take the necessary actions at sea and on land. This strategic approach should also increase the level of coordination among the EU and its Member States in the region.
6. The Strategy, in Annex, sets out the EU's strategic approach, in partnership with the region itself and in close cooperation with key international partners. The Council invites the EEAS and the Commission in consultation with Member States to develop an Action Plan to deliver the Strategy, in synergy with the future EU Maritime Security Strategy and mindful of the principles of the EU comprehensive approach, and to report back annually on progress with its implementation. It also invites the High Representative to appoint a Senior Coordinator for the Gulf of Guinea who will oversee the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan."

To read the full EU strategy for the Gulf of Guinea, see [here](#).

EU strategy for security and development in the Sahel

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the implementation of the EU strategy for security and development in the Sahel:

- "1. The European Union (EU) remains deeply concerned by the crisis in the Sahel region. It reiterates its determination to support partners in addressing the region's key security and development challenges.

2. The Council welcomes the progress made in implementing the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel and encourages its enhanced implementation in coordination with the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Sahel. The objectives of the EU Strategy in the fields of security, peace-building, conflict prevention, countering radicalisation and development remain valid and the link between security and development will remain at the heart of EU policies and operations in the region. Responding in a dynamic manner to the evolution of the situation in the region is key to ensure the efficacy of the EU comprehensive approach. In this context, the Council invites the EEAS, the EUSR for the Sahel and the Commission to develop a new regional action plan covering the next steps of implementation of the Sahel Strategy.
3. The Council invites the EEAS, the EUSR for the Sahel and the Commission to extend the implementation of the Strategy to Burkina Faso and Chad while intensifying relevant activities in Mali, Mauritania and Niger. Political dialogue on conflict prevention and security issues in the Sahel region will be stepped up also in relevant West African and neighbouring countries including Senegal, Nigeria and Cameroon as well as countries of the Maghreb.
4. International support to the Sahel region needs to be accompanied by sustained efforts to find a lasting solution to the roots of the ongoing crises in the north of Mali and the wider region. Security and development in the Sahel region is also strongly linked to stability in Libya. In Mali, the EU fully supports the work of the United Nations stabilisation mission MINUSMA to help create conditions conducive to the full restoration of State authority, order and security in the north of Mali. The EU strongly urges all Malian parties to begin credible and inclusive consultations open to all communities and to all non-terrorist armed groups of northern Mali with the aim of achieving broadly founded and lasting peace through a sustainable political solution. The EU will also continue to support the implementation of the plan for the sustainable recovery of Mali.
5. In line with the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity, the EU will also continue to provide humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable people, on the basis of needs, especially this coming months to ensure a coordinated and effective response to the current food crisis in the Sahel region and to link relief, rehabilitation, and development wherever conditions allow it. In that perspective, the EU will continue to foster resilience building and relevant coordination efforts by Western Africa regional organisations and partners in the framework of the Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative (AGIR).

6. With regard to development in the Sahel, the EU will continue to support sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development and regional integration, drawing lessons from the past. The Council commends the progress made towards the implementation of an Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and West Africa. The EU will provide specific support to regional infrastructures that bring the periphery closer to the centre, sustainable social services especially health and education, and sustainable agriculture, food and nutrition security. The EU will encourage in particular local and national development policies addressing the specific socioeconomic and human security needs of border areas as a way to improve territorial control and state authority throughout territories. Due attention will be paid to trading, trafficking and migratory flows including return and readmission and the synergies between migration and development. The EU will continue to promote democracy, human rights, decentralisation policies, good governance including an independent and fair justice system at local and regional levels, and it will encourage the fight against corruption as well as counter-radicalisation projects as a means of conflict prevention, building on local and national initiatives where possible. The EU will continue to implement joint programming within the Sahel countries in order to further increase the effectiveness of EU development cooperation.

7. In the field of security, the EU will continue to provide support to national and regional endeavours related to security sector reform and integrated border management and to national efforts in the fight against terrorism and organised crime, including smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings, notably through the ongoing CSDP missions in Libya, Mali and Niger as well as the future civilian mission in Mali. The EU will promote synergies between those missions while integrating lessons learnt from previous missions. The EU welcomes the efforts of the African Union and other regional actors to promote enhanced coordination in the field of intelligence and counter-terrorism as well as optimal allocation of national assets and capacities."

South Sudan

The Council adopted the following conclusions on South Sudan:

- "1. The European Union (EU) expresses its deep concern about the ongoing crisis in South Sudan, the grave human suffering it causes and its regional implications. It is seriously concerned about the violations of the Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) agreement signed on 23 January 2014 in Addis Ababa and calls on all parties to immediately stop the violence and honour the CoH. It urges all political and military leaders to protect the people of South Sudan and to act in the interest of the South Sudanese population as whole. The EU supports efforts to operationalize the agreed Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM) and calls on all actors involved to expedite this process. The EU recognises the essential role that the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) is playing in protecting civilians and monitoring and reporting on human rights. The EU condemns all threats against the Mission's personnel and calls upon all parties to cooperate fully with UNMISS.

2. The EU firmly supports the mediation led by the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and commends IGAD's relentless efforts to open the way for an inclusive political dialogue. In this regard the EU welcomes the release of seven detained political leaders and their involvement in the peace process, and calls on the Government of South Sudan to take the necessary measures to release the four remaining detainees and allow them to take part in this process too. The EU looks forward to the resumption of talks in Addis Ababa on 20 March 2014. In this context, it urges all parties to negotiate in good faith towards a peaceful, comprehensive and sustainable solution to rapidly put an end to this conflict by addressing its underlying causes. The EU stresses the importance of inclusive dialogue and national reconciliation and underlines the role of civil society in this respect. The EU has provided support for the IGAD-led negotiations and stands ready to support their eventual outcome. The EU invites the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa to remain actively engaged in addressing this crisis in coordination with the "Troika" and other international actors.
3. The EU expresses concerns about any external intervention that could exacerbate the political and military tensions in South Sudan. It recalls the engagement of the parties to redeploy or progressively withdraw allied forces invited by either side. The EU encourages regional leaders to continue their cooperation under the aegis of IGAD.
4. The EU is deeply concerned at ongoing reports of widespread human rights violations and other abuses as also documented in an interim report by UNMISS issued on 21 February 2014. The EU welcomes further investigations by the UN into the role of different actors in instigating and committing the gross violations documented in the report: extrajudicial and mass killings; the deliberate targeting of civilians, arbitrary arrests and detention; enforced disappearances; ill-treatment and torture; recruitment and use of children; sexual violence; and widespread looting and destruction of property. The EU welcomes the establishment of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on 7 March 2014. It urges the Commission to begin its work as soon as possible and to cooperate with the UN and other relevant actors including in establishing the immediate and root causes of the conflict, in investigating crimes committed and proposing accountability and reconciliation measures. All those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law must be held accountable.

5. The EU is alarmed by the increasingly desperate humanitarian situation, including a significant risk of famine. Since the outbreak of the conflict in mid-December 2013, more than 900 000 have been forced from their homes. Around 3.7 million people are severely food insecure. The EU welcomes the role of the UN in coordinating the humanitarian response. It urges all partners to contribute both generously and swiftly to the South Sudan Crisis Response Plan and in particular to align their efforts to address the increasing food insecurity and to strengthen the resilience of the population. The EU and its Member States have so far pledged support to the tune of € 110 million. The EU condemns continued restrictions on humanitarian activities and calls on all parties to allow rapid, full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all populations in need, in accordance with international humanitarian law and principles.
6. The EU reiterates that it stands ready to consider targeted restrictive measures against individuals obstructing the political process, in support of AU and IGAD efforts and in close coordination with international partners."

Central African Republic

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the Central African Republic:

- "1. The security and humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) remains a matter of deep concern, despite the relative stabilisation of the situation in Bangui and in the areas in which the international forces are deployed. The European Union (EU) reaffirms the concerns it expressed in previous Council conclusions on 20 January and 10 February 2014. It remains concerned about the risk of the Central African conflict having an effect on the neighbouring countries and calls for the integrity of the country to be respected. The EU intends to maintain its mobilisation, in coordination and cooperation with other international actors, in relation to all dimensions of the crisis, within the framework of an overall approach comprising actions in the humanitarian (respecting the principles of humanitarian action), political and stabilisation spheres and actions to promote development.
2. The EU remains extremely concerned about the humanitarian impact of the crisis in the Central African Republic, which persists despite the regional and international efforts deployed on the ground. The survival conditions of the population remain precarious, particularly in the interior of the country where humanitarian access remains difficult. The EU is particularly concerned about the security threats to the civil population and about the consequences, in particular humanitarian, of mass forced departures of Central Africans and migrants, in particular Muslims, mainly towards Chad, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo. The EU reaffirms its commitment to the CAR and calls on the international community to increase its funding for the populations affected by the crisis, both within the CAR and in the neighbouring countries.

3. The EU encourages the Central African transitional authorities to continue the political transition process and carry on with the preparation of elections. In particular, it urges the authorities to focus their efforts on combating impunity and recalls that the perpetrators of violations must answer for their crimes in court. The EU welcomes the decision of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to initiate a preliminary examination of the situation in the CAR, which is a party to the Rome Statute, as well as the work of the International Commission of Inquiry established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2127 (2013). The EU calls on the transitional authorities to continue their efforts to restore the rule of law. To achieve that objective, it is essential to restore security, re-establish the administration and introduce rules for economic good governance; interfaith dialogue and inter-community mediation are also vital. The EU reiterates its commitment to accompany the transitional authorities along this path, in cooperation with other international partners. It welcomes in particular the commitment to stabilising the country made by the African Union and neighbouring countries at the military, humanitarian, political and financial levels.
4. Following the adoption of the Decision of the Council of the European Union of 10 February 2014 authorising the establishment of the CSDP military operation EUFOR RCA as laid down in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2134, the Council approves the Operations Plan and the Rules of Engagement. The Council stresses the need to speed up work on the preparation of the CSDP-EUFOR CAR operation so that it can be launched quickly in accordance with the commitments undertaken by the European Union.
5. By providing temporary support for a maximum period of six months, this transitional military operation will contribute to providing a secure environment in the Bangui area, with a view to handing over to MISCA, the African Union operation, or to a UN peacekeeping mission.
6. The EU welcomes the report by the United Nations Secretary-General of 3 March 2014 (S/2014/142), notably the recommendation to authorise as soon as possible the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation, following a request to that end from the Central African authorities, the aim being, in particular, to enhance the protection of the civilian population, to accompany the transition process, including the holding of elections by February 2015 at the latest, to support the protection of human rights and international humanitarian rights and the fight against impunity and to contribute to restoring the essential functions of the State. The EU underlines the importance of maintaining financial and logistical support for MISCA until the possible deployment of a United Nations mission. In this context, it reaffirms its commitment, financial and otherwise, to MISCA and calls for the urgent mobilisation of the resources announced at the donors' conference to support MISCA, organised by the African Union on 1 February 2014.

7. The EU recalls its commitment to examine the conditions for a future engagement in the area of the rule of law and security sector reform. In this regard, it invites the High Representative to consider the different options that might be implemented in the area of security sector reform.
8. The Council takes note of the Commission's intention to provide the CAR with aid exceeding EUR 100 million, in particular for the restoration of the State and the re-establishment of social services (education, health and food security/nutrition) and the preparation of elections."

In addition, the Council approved the operations plan for the EU military operation in the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA).

Euro-Mediterranean agreements - Originating products and administrative cooperation

The Council adopted a decision establishing the position to be taken by the EU within the Association Councils established under its association agreements with various Mediterranean partners on the amendment of a specific protocol to each agreement as concerns the concept of "originating products" and methods of administrative cooperation.

The decision concerns the Euro-Mediterranean association agreements with Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority and Tunisia.

Common military list

The Council updated the EU's common military list, which defines the scope of EU rules on arms exports as set out in common position 2008/944/CFSP defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment.

EU Special Representatives

The Council approved revised guidelines on the appointment, mandate and financing of EU Special Representatives. The guidelines were updated and developed to take account of the Lisbon Treaty.

Democratic Republic of the Congo - restrictive measures

The Council amended the restrictive measures against the Democratic Republic of the Congo so as to implement changes decided in UN Security Council resolution 2136 (2014) of 30 January 2014.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY

Support for the internal security forces in Mali

The Council adopted a crisis management concept for a civilian mission under the Common Security and Defence Policy to assist the internal security forces in Mali (EUCAP Mali) so as to enable the Malian state to ensure law and order and fight against terrorists, organised crime and cross-border trafficking. Once established, EUCAP Mali would deliver strategic advice and training for managers of the three internal security forces in Mali, i.e. the police, *gendarmerie* and *garde nationale*.

EUBAM LIBYA

The Council authorised the opening of negotiations for an agreement on the participation of the Swiss Confederation in the EU integrated border management assistance mission in Libya (EUBAM LIBYA).

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

West Africa's Economic Partnership Agreement development programme

The Council approved conclusions on West Africa's Economic Partnership Agreement development programme, as set out in [7736/14](#).

EU common position for the first high-level meeting of the global partnership for effective development cooperation

The Council adopted the conclusions on the EU common position for the first high-level meeting of the global partnership for effective development cooperation, which will take place in Mexico City on 15/16 April 2014, as set out in [7805/14](#).

EU support for governance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Council adopted conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' special report No 9/2013 on EU support for governance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as set out in [7808/14](#).