

Council conclusions on Ebola

Foreign Affairs Council meeting Brussels, 17 November 2014

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The European Union (EU) remains deeply concerned about the spread of the Ebola virus that is continuing to take lives in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, and having profound effects across the West Africa region and beyond. It also expresses its concern about the new confirmed cases in Mali. It acknowledges the unprecedented comprehensive national, regional and international effort aimed at fighting the disease and reaffirms its strong commitment to step up even further its response in containing, combatting and eventually controlling the epidemic.
2. The EU recognises the heroic efforts of both national and international health responders, pays tribute to those who have sacrificed their lives in the effort to stem the disease and underlines the importance of avoiding stigmatisation of returning health personnel. The Council stresses that health responders have to be supported at all levels, by public institutions, societies and private entities, to make sure they can operate effectively in the affected countries and upon their return.
3. The Council continues to recognise that a united, coordinated and increased effort is needed in order to contain the outbreak and provide the necessary and appropriate assistance to the countries affected and the neighbouring countries.
4. The European Union fully supports the Governments of the countries concerned, as well as the overall co-ordinating role of the United Nations (UN) with regard to international assistance in response to the Ebola crisis, including the role of France, the United Kingdom and the United States for the three countries most affected. It also welcomes the growing mobilisation of African countries and organisations. The EU welcomes the endorsement by Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) Regional Integrated Operational Plan for Response to the Ebola Virus Disease during the Extraordinary Summit held in Accra on 6 November. The EU looks forward to its early implementation and stands ready to support an enhanced role of the region in the fight against the epidemic by reinforcing its coordination with ECOWAS and its member states, under the wider UN led effort. It also welcomes the renewed efforts by the African Union to deal with the crisis. In this respect, the EU welcomes the G20 Brisbane Statement on Ebola.

5. The Council recalls its conclusions and the European Council conclusions of August and October 2014, and in light of the continued deterioration of the Ebola epidemic, the October European Council appointed Commissioner Stylianides as EU Ebola Coordinator, pledged to provide 1 billion euro for short and medium term efforts, and to increase the number of international health responders assisting the countries of the region in tackling the virus. In this respect, the Council takes note of progress achieved in response to these commitments and the implementation of the Comprehensive Response Framework.
6. The Council welcomes in particular the rapid increase in the total pledges for funding from the European Union and its Member States and the swift attainment of the 1 billion euro target set by the European Council, now collectively placing the European Union as the prime donor amongst the international community. The Council welcomes the offers of key capabilities and in-kind donations, including the ongoing joint effort of the EU and Member States to secure delivery of support by maritime means. It recalls the need to continue providing such support to the Ebola response, including strategic airlift capacities, and encourages Member States to use existing mechanisms in this regard.
7. The Council applauds the increasing number of European health workers arriving in the field. It reaffirms the importance of additional and rapid deployment of appropriately qualified, trained and experienced medical and support staff to the region. It also underlines the need for coordinating approaches regarding the mobilisation of volunteers on the basis of best practices. It invites Member States, in direct cooperation with the EU Ebola Coordinator, and with the support of services concerned, to take all appropriate steps in securing the rapid deployment of such staff on a voluntary basis and to use the Emergency Response Coordination Centre as the clearing house.
8. The Council invites the Commission, together with Member States, to further explore the establishment of a reserve pool of health experts from Member States on a voluntary basis for rapid and targeted deployment taking into account the experience of the current crisis and taking note of efforts by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Detailed work should start once the acute phase of the crisis has been overcome.
9. Recalling its conclusions from October, the Council stresses the need to fully implement the guarantee of appropriate care for international health responders, within available resources in order to ensure their treatment on the most appropriate basis. It recalls the importance of further enhancing the existing capabilities for medical evacuation of international health responders at the European Union and, on a case by case basis, at the Member States' level. The Council welcomes the first commitments announced by Member States in this regard.
10. The Council further welcomes the reinforcement of preparedness in the EU, and the improvement of internal EU coordination in the formulation of medical evacuation related procedures. It also welcomes the additional support being provided by the Commission and Member States to develop new vaccines and treatments, including the 280 million euro investment announced on 6 November for a joint EU-pharmaceutical industry initiative to boost research into Ebola and protocols for hospital infection control.
11. The Council agrees to strengthen coordination and information sharing on regional preparedness gaps via existing platforms to prioritise key risks, in close coordination with WHO and other international actors.

12. The Council takes note of the work undertaken by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission in identifying and filling gaps in our response and in assessing the wider political, security and economic implications of Ebola. In this respect, it underlines the importance of urgent support in rebuilding the health systems of these countries.
 13. Furthermore, the Council stresses the importance to address longer term issues regarding resilience, poverty reduction, social impact, capacity in the education sector, the broader peace building agenda, as well as the need to implement the International Health Regulations (IHR).
 14. The Council welcomes the determination shown by the EU Ebola Coordinator, to strengthen the European Union's collective response and coordination and facilitate the close cooperation with the United Nations, regional organisations and other key partners. It takes note of his priorities, as presented to the Council, and the findings and recommendations of the situation on the ground following the mission of the EU Ebola Coordinator Stylianides and of the Health Commissioner Andriukaitis to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, from 12 to 16 November, notably the urgent need to deploy additional medical and epidemiological personnel, to adapt the response flexibly to the changing dynamic of the epidemic in some parts of the region, and to ensure efficient operational coordination among key actors at country level. It also takes note of the Coordinator's willingness to take forward preparatory work for a high-level international meeting, involving the UN, prepared together by the concerned Commission and EEAS services as well as Member States.
 15. The Council invites the EU Ebola Coordinator to report back and to present further recommendations at its next meeting, in preparation for the discussion at the December European Council."
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