



Council of the
European Union

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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	European Council meeting (21 and 22 March 2024) – Draft conclusions

In accordance with Article 3(1) of the Rules of Procedure of the European Council, delegations will find attached the draft conclusions prepared by the President of the European Council, in close cooperation with the member of the European Council representing the Member State holding the six-monthly Presidency of the Council and with the President of the Commission.

The European Council held an exchange of views with the UN Secretary-General António Guterres on the geopolitical situation and key global challenges.

The European Council marked the 30th anniversary of the EEA Agreement with the Prime Ministers of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

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I. UKRAINE

1. Two years into the war of aggression that Russia launched against Ukraine, and ten years after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, in manifest violation of its obligations under the UN Charter and international law, the European Council is ever more steadfast in its support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. Russia must not prevail.

Given the urgency of the situation, the European Union is determined to continue providing Ukraine and its people all the necessary political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support for as long as it takes and as intensely as needed. The European Council invites allies and partners across the world to join in this endeavour.

2. As it exercises its inherent right to self-defence, Ukraine urgently needs air defence systems, ammunition and missiles. At this critical moment, the European Union and its Member States will speed up and intensify the delivery of all the necessary military assistance. The European Council welcomes the recent initiative launched to urgently procure ammunition for Ukraine, which will enable the swift fulfilment of the commitment to provide Ukraine with one million rounds of artillery ammunition.

3. The European Council welcomes the bilateral agreements on security commitments concluded with Ukraine by several Member States and partners. It [reviewed progress on / endorsed] the EU's contribution to the security commitments to Ukraine which will help Ukraine to defend itself, resist destabilisation efforts and deter acts of aggression in the future. The European Council welcomes the [adoption of the] Council Decision regarding a Ukraine Assistance Fund which ensures the continuation of military support for Ukraine under the European Peace Facility. It also welcomes the increased capacity of the EU Military Assistance Mission.

Military support and EU security commitments will be provided in full respect of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and taking into account the security and defence interests of all Member States.

4. The European Council welcomes the adoption of the 13th package of sanctions. It calls for further steps to weaken Russia's ability to continue waging its war of aggression. Full and effective implementation of sanctions across the whole Union is essential. This includes preventing their circumvention, and ensuring their enforcement, including as concerns subsidiaries of EU companies abroad. The European Council is determined to strengthen implementation and close all loopholes. Russia's access to sensitive items and technologies with battlefield relevance must continue to be restricted to the extent possible, including by targeting entities in third countries enabling this illicit trade. The European Council also calls on the High Representative and the Commission to prepare further sanctions against Belarus, North Korea and Iran.
5. The European Council calls on third parties to immediately cease providing material support to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Reports that Iran may transfer ballistic missiles and related technology to Russia for use against Ukraine are very concerning. The European Union is prepared to respond swiftly and in coordination with international partners, including with new and significant measures against Iran.

6. The European Council reviewed progress on the next concrete steps towards directing extraordinary revenues stemming from Russia's immobilised assets for the benefit of Ukraine, including for funding of military support. [It invites the High Representative and the Commission to swiftly proceed with the next steps in order to take work forward.]
7. The European Council strongly condemns Russia's continuous human rights violations in the occupied Ukrainian territories. It firmly rejects the illegal so-called 'elections' organised by Russia in the occupied Ukrainian regions of Crimea, Sevastopol, Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. The European Union will never recognise them, nor their results.
8. Russia and its leadership must be held fully accountable for the crime of waging a war of aggression against Ukraine and for other most serious crimes under international law, as well as for the massive damage caused. The European Council supports ongoing efforts, including in the Core Group, to establish a tribunal for the prosecution of the crime of aggression against Ukraine that would enjoy the broadest cross-regional support and legitimacy, and a future compensation mechanism.
9. The European Union remains committed to supporting Ukraine's repair, recovery and reconstruction, in coordination with international partners. The European Council welcomes the recent strengthening of EUAM Ukraine which will allow to scale up support to Ukrainian law enforcement agencies in Ukraine's liberated and adjacent territories, and to the reforms in the context of its EU accession process. The European Council calls for further support for psychological and psychosocial rehabilitation and demining assistance.
10. The European Union and its Member States will continue their intensive global outreach efforts to ensure the widest possible international support for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace and the key principles and objectives of Ukraine's Peace Formula, with a view to a future Global Peace Summit.

11. The European Union will continue to provide all relevant support to the Republic of Moldova in addressing the challenges it faces as a consequence of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and to strengthen the country's resilience, security and stability in the face of destabilising activities by Russia. The European Council welcomes Member States' bilateral commitments to support the EU partnership mission EUPM Moldova in order to enhance the resilience of the security sector.

II. **SECURITY AND DEFENCE**

12. The European Union is committed to increasing its overall defence readiness and capabilities to match its needs and ambition. The European defence technological and industrial base should be strengthened across the Union. Increasing defence readiness will contribute to enhancing the Union's sovereignty and will require additional efforts to:
 - a) fulfil the shared commitment to substantially increase defence expenditure, and invest better and faster together;
 - b) improve the European defence industry's access to public and private finance, including through the European Investment Bank by inter alia reconsidering the definition of dual use goods and the defence industry lending policy;
 - c) enhance cooperative/joint defence investment, from the Research & Development to the planning stage, to industrialisation and joint acquisition, and improve predictability, e.g. through multi-year fixed contracts;
 - d) increase the resilience of the European defence industry, its flexibility, interoperability and its capacity and autonomy to develop innovative defence products, ensuring the availability of defence products to its Member States;

- e) incentivise further integration of the European defence market, including for SMEs and mid-cap companies and by reducing red tape;
 - f) enhance rapid response and timely identification of bottlenecks in supply chains for the defence market and ensure that EU regulation on non-defence goods is not an impediment to the development of the European defence industry;
 - g) support initiatives to continue investing in skilled labour to address prevailing labour and skills shortages in the defence industry.
13. The European Council invites, the High Representative and the Commission to swiftly implement the Joint Communication on a European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) and the Council to take work forward without delay on the accompanying proposal for a European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP)[, including options to mobilise funding from additional sources].
14. The implementation of the Strategic Compass remains a key element in increasing Europe's defence readiness and should be accelerated. The EU Rapid Deployment Capacity, military mobility, live exercises, enhancing space security, countering cyber and hybrid threats and addressing foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) are of particular importance in that respect.
15. In addition, the European Council underlines the imperative need for enhanced military and civilian preparedness and strategic crisis management in the context of the evolving threat landscape. It invites the Council to take work forward and the Commission together with the High Representative to propose actions to strengthen preparedness and crisis response at EU level in an all-hazards and whole-of-society approach with a view to a future preparedness strategy.
16. A stronger and more capable European pillar within NATO will further support European security and will contribute to the collective defence of NATO members.

III. MIDDLE EAST

17. The European Council discussed the latest developments in the Middle East. It deplores the unprecedented loss of civilian lives.
18. The European Council is deeply concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza and its disproportionate effect on children, as well as the imminent risk of famine. Full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access into and throughout the Gaza Strip is essential to provide the civilian population with life-saving assistance and basic services at scale. The European Council welcomes the opening of a maritime route for emergency assistance from Cyprus to Gaza. Immediate measures should be taken to prevent any further population displacement and provide safe shelter to the population. The European Council urges the Israeli government to refrain from a ground operation in Rafah, where well over a million Palestinians are currently seeking safety from the fighting and access to humanitarian assistance.
19. It recalls its previous conclusions condemning Hamas in the strongest possible terms for its brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks across Israel on 7 October 2023, recognising Israel's right to defend itself in line with international law and international humanitarian law, and calling for the immediate release of all hostages without any precondition.
20. The European Council calls for an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire.
21. All parties must respect international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The European Council stresses the importance of respecting and implementing the 26 January 2024 order of the International Court of Justice, which is legally binding. Violations of international humanitarian law need to be thoroughly and independently investigated and accountability ensured.

22. The European Council stresses that the services UNRWA provides across the region are indispensable and welcomes the recent EU financial support provided. It welcomes the swift launch by the UN of an internal investigation and external review following the serious allegations against 12 UNRWA staff about their alleged participation in the 7 October terrorist attacks.
23. The European Council calls for restraint in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It strongly condemns extremist settler violence. Perpetrators must be held to account. The European Council calls on the Council to accelerate work on the adoption of relevant restrictive measures.
24. The European Union will continue to work intensely with regional and international partners to prevent further regional escalation, notably in Lebanon and the Red Sea. The European Council calls on all actors to refrain from escalatory actions. It welcomes the launch of EU Operation ASPIDES to safeguard freedom of navigation and the security of seafarers in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.
25. The European Union remains firmly committed to a lasting and sustainable peace based on the two-state solution. Palestinians and Israelis have an equal right to live in safety, dignity and peace. The European Council condemns Israeli Government decisions to further expand illegal settlements across the occupied West Bank. It urges Israel to reverse these decisions. The European Council calls on all parties to refrain from actions that undermine the principle of the two-state solution and the viability of a future Palestinian state. It recalls that the two CSDP missions EUPOL COPPS and EUBAM Rafah can play an important role based on this principle in support of a future Palestinian state. The European Union stands ready to work with regional and international parties to contribute to reviving a political process, including through a Peace Conference and the Peace Day initiative and to support the Palestinian Authority as it undertakes the necessary reform. It supports a coordinated international effort to rebuild Gaza.

IV. ENLARGEMENT

p.m. Commission report on Bosnia and Herzegovina

26. [Further to the submission of the draft negotiating frameworks for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, the European Council invites the Council to take work forward. It took note of Georgia's ongoing efforts and encouraged the country to advance on the outstanding priority reforms.]

V. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

27. The European Council calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Russia and an end to the persecution of the political opposition. It calls for an independent and transparent international investigation into the circumstances of the death of Alexei Navalny. The ultimate responsibility for his death lies with the Russian authorities. The European Council welcomes [the adoption of] new restrictive measures against those responsible for serious human rights violations and abuse and calls for work to be taken forward in the Council to establish a new sanctions regime in view of the situation in Russia.
28. The European Council is deeply concerned by the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus. Repression, human rights violations and restrictions on political participation and access to independent media in Belarus reached unprecedented levels in the build-up to the parliamentary and local elections on 25 February, which failed to meet basic democratic standards. The European Council calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners.

VI. MIGRATION

29. The European Council reviewed the state of play on migration [*p.m. Commission input*].

VII. AGRICULTURE

30. The European Council underlines the importance of a strong and sustainable agricultural sector for food security and the Union's strategic autonomy, the value of vibrant rural communities, and the essential role of the Common Agricultural Policy in that regard.

31. The European Council reverted to the current challenges in the agricultural sector and concerns raised by farmers. It invites the Commission and the Council to take work forward without delay, notably on:

- a) all possible short-term measures, including those to reduce the administrative burden and achieve simplification for farmers;
- b) strengthening the position of farmers in the food supply chain, in particular to ensure a fair income;
- c) ensuring fair competition globally and in the internal market;
- d) addressing issues related to the Autonomous Trade Measures for Ukraine in a fair and balanced way.

32. The European Council will keep the situation under review.

VIII. EUROPEAN SEMESTER

33. The European Council endorses the policy priorities of the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey and invites the Member States to take them into account. It also endorses the draft Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area.

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The European Council took stock of preparations for the new Strategic Agenda and internal reforms, including in the context of enlargement.
