European External Action Service (EEAS)

EU Statement – United Nations Security Council: Open debate on Maintenance of international peace and security: Challenges to peace and security in the Middle East

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20 August 2019, New York - Statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States delivered by H.E. Mr. Silvio Gonzato, Deputy Head of Delegation, Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations at the Security Council Open Debate on "Maintenance of international peace and security: Challenges to peace and security in the Middle East"

Madame President,

Members of the Security Council,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries, the Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro* and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, align themselves with this statement.

Conflict resolution for the Middle East followed by post-crisis management is one of the most difficult tasks international diplomacy is currently facing.

The EU fully supports the United Nations, and in particular the Security Council as the key actor for upholding respect for and compliance with international law such as the UN Security Council Resolutions relevant to the situation in the Middle East. Only if all sides comply with their obligations under international law, including adherence to all resolutions of the Security Council, can a credible peace take root. Otherwise, sustainable peace is at stake. A key challenge to peace and security in the Middle East is terrorism fuelled by radicalisation and violent extremism. Even if Da’esh has been territorially defeated in Syria and Iraq, it continues to pose a serious threat. Terrorist threats also exist elsewhere, including in Yemen and Gaza. Indeed, while there is a concentration of such activity in this region, terrorism can strike in all parts of the world.

Another element to consider is the lack of trust among key parties, and the absence of a political horizon for many citizens. Many countries in the Middle East are witnessing an erosion of social contracts, which is posing serious strains on social cohesion and territorial

integrity. This has led to a fragmentation of societies and the multiplication of sub-national armed actors with narrow interests. Without trust and inclusiveness, no political solution can be successful.

Mister President,

Let me explain how we see all these factors in relation to the situation across the Middle East.

The EU is extremely concerned by the measures taken by Iran since the beginning of July, inconsistent with its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPoA. We call upon Iran to reverse these steps immediately, to refrain from any further escalatory steps, and to come back into compliance with its obligations.

We recall our firm commitments under the agreement, including as regards sanctions-lifting for the benefit of the Iranian people. In this regard, we regret the re-imposition of sanctions by the United States, following its withdrawal from the JCPoA. Our support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA), endorsed unanimously by UN Security Council Resolution 2231, goes hand in hand with our efforts to promote stability in the region. We remain committed to the preservation and full implementation of the JCPOA: a key element of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime - which is in the security interest of all. And we are determined to work with the international community to achieve these goals.

We are also gravely concerned by Iran's ballistic missile activity and transfers of missiles and relevant technologies to State and non-States actors in the region. We call upon Iran to refrain from any activity inconsistent with relevant UN Security Council resolutions. The EU supports a balanced, comprehensive approach with Iran, including dialogue, with a view to addressing all issues of concern, critical when there are divergences and cooperative when there is mutual interest. We are determined to continue pursuing efforts to enable the continuation of legitimate trade with Iran, including through the initiative by France, Germany and the United Kingdom to operationalise the special purpose vehicle INSTEX, which was registered as a private entity and which will support European economic operators engaged in legitimate trade with Iran, in accordance with EU law and with UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

The freedom and security of maritime navigation in the Gulf is currently at stake. The European Union always supports the freedom of navigation, which is essential to all our economies. Everybody must fully respect international law, including notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) that is rightly recognized widely as the constitution of the oceans, reflecting customary international law. The EU has called upon all actors in the Gulf region to exercise restraint. Prompt de-escalation is necessary to minimise the risk of miscalculation, which still remains high.

Also with respect to Iran, de-escalation and restraint are of fundamental importance. In recent high-level meetings in Iran, in Kuwait and other countries in the region, we underlined our concerns about the prevailing situation, and in turn, our partners have expressed their own determination to work to promote calm and stability.

The EU continues to insist on the full respect of international humanitarian law and human rights Law in Yemen. This includes respecting and protecting civilian lives as well as respecting the work of humanitarian aid workers. Furthermore, the European Union remains fully committed to the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen. The EU urges all parties to cease violence, and to engage in dialogue immediately, in particular by fulfilling their commitments to the UN-led process in an inclusive and sustainable political process.

The same must be said of the Syrian conflict and the protracted violent repression against the civilian population in Syria that has continued to take innocent lives for well over eight years. Successive ceasefire agreements have been violated. The EU has repeatedly expressed its grave concerns about the escalation of violence in Idlib, caused primarily by the Syrian regime and Russia and which threatens the safety and security of three million people. The EU reiterates its call for a durable ceasefire to be ensured in terms agreed upon in the Sochi memorandum, as well as the need to ensure unhindered, safe and sustainable humanitarian access.

The EU insists there can be no military solution and that only a political solution in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 can bring sustainable peace and stability. The EU fully supports the work of the UN Special Envoy, including efforts towards the creation of a balanced and inclusive Constitutional Committee that would allow progress of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva for a credible, negotiated, Syrian-owned political solution to the conflict.

The European Union stresses that in view of finding sustainable solutions it is also key to pave the way for free and fair elections, to support Syrian civil society, including women and their equitable and meaningful engagement in the political process and to identify confidence-building measures between parties to the conflict, including on the issue of detainees and missing persons.

The EU is ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties in the conflict on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué, is firmly under way.

The European Union considers accountability and justice as prerequisites for sustainable peace in the region and, given the lack of jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, will continue to support the work of the IIIM and the Independent Commission of Inquiry. We will continue to provide funding for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in order to identify and hold accountable the perpetrators of chemical attacks in

Syria. The promotion of accountability and justice is a key element of reconciliation for the post-crisis management not just in Syria, but also in Iraq where we support the evidence gathering work being carried out by the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh (UNITAD).

With regard to the Middle East peace process, let me begin by reaffirming the EU's commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli Palestinian conflict through a two-state solution and an agreement that ends the occupation which began in 1967, ending all claims and fulfilling the aspirations of both parties, including Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, on the basis of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. The EU's firm and united position on these Resolutions and parameters has been set out in detail on numerous occasions. We reaffirm our readiness to work with both parties and our partners in the region and the international community towards the resumption of meaningful negotiations to resolve all final status issues and to achieve a just and lasting peace.

Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law and constitute a significant obstacle to peace, as reaffirmed in UN Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016). The ongoing Israeli settlement policy threatens the prospects for a two-state solution.

Recent and increasing violence in Gaza, including firing of rockets into Israel, as well as in the West Bank, remind us that restoring a political horizon for peace between Israelis and Palestinians is essential to reduce violence and contain extremism in the region

In light of recent tensions, which threaten exacerbating the risk to the whole region, the EU recalls the special significance of the holy sites in Jerusalem and calls for upholding the status quo put in place in 1967 for the Temple Mount / al-Haram al-Sharif in line with previous understandings and with respect to Jordan's special role.

As regards Lebanon the EU stresses the importance for progress on the structural and economic reform commitments undertaken at the CEDRE conference in Paris, as well as reforms related to the security sector, as pledged at the Rome II meeting in March 2018. Moreover, the EU is a strong supporter of UNIFIL and reiterates the crucial role of UNIFIL in maintaining peace and stability in the South of Lebanon as well as in the region. As such, the EU emphasises the importance of UNIFIL being able to deliver its mandate in full. The EU also insists on the full respect and implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701 by all parties, including the call for the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon.

On counterterrorism, the European Union maintains its firm commitment to assist and work closely together with our partners in the region. Besides Da'esh, the reappearance of Al-Qaida in the region continues to provide fertile ground for violent extremism and radicalisation

leading to terrorism, as do other terrorist organisations sanctioned by the EU, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

The regular counterterrorism dialogues with our regional partners, including, among others, Israel, Egypt and Jordan provide the framework for enhanced joint efforts aimed at diminishing the terrorist propaganda from the internet, halt the resources of terrorism financing and ensure due accountability for terrorist atrocities that equal to grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, war crimes and crimes against humanity. We are pleased that the Global Coalition Against Da'esh is pursuing these objectives.

Another key challenge to bring about peace and security in the Middle East is the lack of trust and the need to create conditions for peace amongst the population. Strengthening democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is an essential strategy in order to build trust between different groups in societies and between the government and its citizens. It is important to act against any form of incitement for hatred and violence, including by using the education system to promote mutual tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Mister President,

This analysis leads to the conclusion that sustainable solutions to the conflicts in the Middle East can only be found through multilateral cooperation, i.e. through policy and actions coordinated by the international community, some of which are translated into international law, in other words by means of a rules-based international order, to which the parties on the ground and international actors shall commit themselves. And let me underline that international law includes international humanitarian law and human rights law. Only a few days ago we celebrated 70 years of the Geneva Conventions. The EU's support for international law is one of the key building blocks of the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Our clear policy is in favour of the full implementation of international humanitarian law, at all times, everywhere - in Syria and Yemen, and equally in the occupied Palestinian territory. Our commitment to the fight against terrorism and our work with partners on the ground to build confidence, exemplify our commitment to the multilateral approach. Many actions have been agreed upon at international or multilateral level of which I mentioned several. Most are UN-led. The EU for its part will continue to support peace and security in the Middle East, including through the UN.

Lack of implementation of agreed policies and enforcement of international law is the real challenge to bring about peace and security in the Middle East. It has almost become fashionable simply not to agree on a course of action and not to follow agreements. Narrow interests often prevail over the international need for compromise and mutual gain. The international community must therefore seek methods to make agreed policies implementable and to ensure full respect for international law.

Thank you.

* The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

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