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European Union

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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
On: 11 March 2021
To: Delegations

Subject: Ethiopia
- Council Conclusions (11 March)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council Conclusions on Ethiopia, approved by written procedure on 11 March 2021.

Council Conclusions on Ethiopia

1. Ethiopia is a strategic partner for the EU in the Horn of Africa and in the wider region as well as an important multilateral actor. The EU appreciates the longstanding close cooperation and dialogue with the Ethiopian Government on a wide range of issues.
2. As part of this dialogue, the EU welcomes the visit of Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto on behalf of the High Representative to Ethiopia and Sudan on 7-10 February 2021, where he met with Ethiopian, Sudanese and African Union authorities and other relevant stakeholders, including from civil society.
3. Today, Ethiopia is in a complex domestic situation with major implications for the greater region. Ethiopia's ongoing reform process and recent developments have revealed uncertainty and underlying frictions. The armed conflict in Tigray region sparked by the attack on military bases exacerbates tensions in the Horn of Africa. It has led to a grave humanitarian crisis. The EU finds it important to draw the following conclusions while reiterating its readiness to build on a longstanding relationship.

On the situation in Tigray

4. The EU remains extremely concerned by the conflict. A large part of the Tigray population, including those displaced within the region, remains cut off from basic services and communications, as well as humanitarian assistance since the beginning of the crisis. In a region with needs already high and resources scarce, especially in rural areas, the situation is increasingly critical.

5. The EU urges all parties to immediately end violence, and to respect International Human Rights Law, International Humanitarian Law and International Refugee Law. Full, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access to all people in need must be ensured in all areas. Humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence must be guaranteed for a scaled up humanitarian response. The EU calls for the protection of internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees and reminds that the international principle of ‘non-refoulement’ must be respected.
6. While acknowledging the work of the Ethiopian Government to address some of the needs of the population, the EU stresses the necessity to increase these efforts. Full co-operation is needed with the UN and all humanitarian organisations on the ground.
7. The EU welcomes the announcement by the Ethiopian Government of unfettered access, unhindered mobility of humanitarian agencies based on a simple notification system and calls for its immediate and full implementation. Procedures for the importation of humanitarian aid and communication equipment need to be expedited.
8. Basic services, including water, sanitation, health, education, telecommunication and banking services, must be swiftly and fully restored. Civilians, including IDPs and refugees, should be able to move safely and freely. The EU acknowledges progress made regarding access for some media and civil society organizations, however it remains crucial that access is granted for all of them, their protection ensured and their access to all areas of Tigray unhindered.
9. The EU remains extremely concerned by the numerous testimonies and reports that substantiate allegations indicating involvement of multiple actors and possibly amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, extra-judicial killings, mass executions, sexual and gender-based violence including rape, forced returns of refugees, other human rights violations and abuses, looting of property, destruction of infrastructure and religious sites. Those acts must cease immediately.

10. The EU also notes with concern the reports of targeted ethnic violence, hate speech and discrimination, in Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia. This dangerous pattern could lead to an escalation of violence across the country and undermine the possibilities for peace and reconciliation.
11. The EU welcomes the commitments of the Ethiopian authorities to bring all perpetrators to justice and to accept international technical assistance to undertake the investigations. The EU will follow up closely on progress in this regard, as all allegations of violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law need to be impartially investigated and accountability ensured. The EU also supports the important work of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) that provides detailed documentation as well as recommendations for action, and stands ready to support additional national efforts. The EU welcomes as a first step the announcement of the Ethiopian Government to set up a task force to investigate sexual and gender-based violence. More efforts are needed.
12. The EU encourages on the ground monitoring of the EHRC to be extended to the whole region. Staff of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights should also be granted full access to the region.
13. The EU encourages the African Union to continue to engage politically with the Ethiopian Government, so that hostilities cease, humanitarian access to all areas of Tigray is ensured and a political solution to the conflict found.
14. The EU wishes to pursue the constructive dialogue with the Ethiopian Government on these issues. It remains ready to support any action aimed at easing tensions and providing relief to those in need.

On related regional issues

15. The regional implications of the situation in the Ethiopian region of Tigray, as well as the risk of further spill over in an already fragile region, are of great concern. Further military escalation and long term instability in Ethiopia and in the wider region must be avoided.

16. The EU joins the call of the international community for the immediate withdrawal of Eritrean troops as they aggravate the situation, as reported by multiple sources. The EU is also extremely concerned by allegations of actions that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by Eritrean troops. The EU calls for thorough and independent investigations, and will monitor closely future developments in this regard.
17. The EU is also worried by the increased tensions at the border between Ethiopia and Sudan, and calls on both sides to spare no efforts to ease the situation, rebuild trust and find a negotiated and peaceful settlement. The EU encourages both parties to resume dialogue as soon as possible and stands ready to support all political efforts to advance a sustainable solution.
18. The EU also encourages Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt to resume negotiations on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in order to find a durable and mutually beneficial solution. The EU has been an observer in the negotiations, and remains ready to support further this process as considered appropriate by all parties.
19. The EU encourages the Ethiopian Government to enhance its cooperation with the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and regional partners in order to take peaceful and concerted decisions to preserve the stability of the whole region.

On the transition in Ethiopia

20. Ethiopia is undergoing a far reaching democratic transition process, with important political and economic reforms being implemented. The EU takes note of the announcement of general elections for 5 June 2021 and welcomes the commitment by the Ethiopian Government to hold credible and transparent elections. The EU is ready to continue to support such a process and thanks the Ethiopian Government for its invitation to conduct election observation.

21. As a committed partner, the EU calls on the Ethiopian Government to ensure inclusive elections, so that political parties are able to participate freely and on equal basis, to enhance women's representation and participation, to allow peaceful gatherings and to ensure freedom of the press and the safety of journalists. Fair, transparent and timely trials of members of political parties in detention are also important for a democratic process and the rule of law.
22. The EU encourages the resumption of efforts to develop a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent national dialogue between all relevant stakeholders, including women, youth, civil society organisations, political parties and regional authorities. Further preparation for a national dialogue can serve as an important confidence building measure in the electoral context and beyond.
23. The EU's diverse and strong support to Ethiopia for many years now, shows its firm engagement and the importance it attaches to the partnership. The EU is currently supporting Ethiopia's transition, and would like to continue to do so. It strives for continued dialogue, in the framework of the EU-Ethiopia Strategic Engagement initiated in 2016 and ongoing discussions with Ethiopian partners on future cooperation. The EU is ready to support the Ethiopian population, contribute to the country's efforts to continue implementing critical political and economic reforms, promote further social and economic development, and foster trade and sustainable investment. The EU is willing to further strengthen this partnership on the basis of joint ownership and responsibility.
24. The upcoming revision of the EU's strategic framework for the Horn of Africa will seek to propose joint priorities as well as strengthen political dialogue and common engagement with the whole region.