

European Council conclusions on external relations, 1 October 2020



II. External relations

Eastern Mediterranean

15. The EU has a strategic interest in a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey. Pursuing dialogue in good faith and abstaining from unilateral actions which run counter to the EU interests and violate international law and the sovereign rights of EU Member States is an absolute requirement in this regard. All differences must be resolved through peaceful dialogue and in accordance with international law. In this context, the European Council reiterates its full solidarity with Greece and Cyprus, whose sovereignty and sovereign rights must be respected.

16. The EU welcomes the recent confidence building steps by Greece and Turkey, as well as the announcement that they will resume their direct exploratory talks aiming at the delimitation of the Continental Shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone of the two countries. These efforts need to be sustained and broadened.

17. At the same time, the European Council strongly condemns violations of the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus which must stop. The European Council calls on Turkey to abstain from similar actions in the future, in breach of international law. The European Council underlines that delimitation of the Continental Shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone should be addressed through dialogue and negotiation in good faith, in full respect of international law, and calls on Turkey to accept the invitation by Cyprus to engage in dialogue with the objective of settling all maritime-related disputes between Turkey and Cyprus.

18. The European Council supports the speedy resumption of negotiations, under the auspices of the UN, and remains fully committed to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem within the UN framework and in accordance with the relevant UNSC resolutions, including UNSC resolutions 550 and 789, and in line with the principles on which the EU is founded. It expects the same of Turkey. The EU stands ready to play an active role in supporting the negotiations, including by appointing, upon resumption, a representative to the UN Good Offices Mission.

19. Provided constructive efforts to stop illegal activities vis-à-vis Greece and Cyprus are sustained, the European Council has agreed to launch a positive political EU-Turkey agenda with a specific emphasis on the modernisation of the Customs Union and trade facilitation, people to people contacts, High level dialogues, continued cooperation on migration issues, in line with the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement. The European Council invites its

President, in cooperation with the President of the Commission and with the support of the High Representative, to develop a proposal for re-energising the EU-Turkey agenda to this effect.

20. Recalling and reaffirming i.a. its previous conclusions on Turkey of October 2019, in case of renewed unilateral actions or provocations in breach of international law, the EU will use all the instruments and the options at its disposal, including in accordance with Article 29 TEU and Article 215 TFEU, in order to defend its interests and those of its Member States. The European Council will continue to closely monitor developments and will revert accordingly and take decisions as appropriate at the latest at its December meeting.

21. Finally, the European Council calls for a Multilateral Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean and invites the High Representative to engage in talks about its organisation. Modalities such as participation, scope and timeline will need to be agreed with all involved parties. The Conference could address issues on which multilateral solutions are needed, including maritime delimitation, security, energy, migration and economic cooperation.

China

22. The European Council welcomes the oral report on the EU Leaders' meeting with President Xi Jinping on 14 September as well as the signing of the agreement on Geographical Indications. It stresses the need to rebalance the economic relationship and achieve reciprocity. It recalls the goal of finalising, by the end of this year, negotiations for an ambitious EU-China Comprehensive Investment Agreement (CAI) that addresses the current asymmetries in market access, contributes to a level playing field, and establishes meaningful commitments on sustainable development. It also calls on China to deliver on previous commitments to address market access barriers, to make progress on overcapacity and engage in negotiations on industrial subsidies at the World Trade Organization.

23. The European Council encourages China to assume greater responsibility in dealing with global challenges. This includes, in particular, taking more ambitious action on climate in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement and on biodiversity, and supporting multilateral responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, notably as regards treatments and vaccines, the independent review of the international health response, and debt relief as a necessary condition for recovery from the pandemic, particularly in Africa. The European Council welcomes, as an important step in the right direction, the statement of President Xi Jinping, following the Leaders' video conference, that China will aim to achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

24. The European Council underlines its serious concerns about the human rights situation in China, including developments in Hong Kong and the treatment of people belonging to minorities, as expressed at the EU-China summit in June and the Leaders' meeting held on 14 September.

25. The European Council reaffirms the policy approach towards EU-China relations as set out in the Joint Communication of the Commission and the

High Representative 'EU-China: A Strategic Outlook' of March 2019 and calls for further coherent efforts to implement it. It invites the Commission and the High Representative to present a progress report by March 2021. It looks forward to a meeting of all its members with President Xi Jinping in 2021.

Belarus

26. The European Council condemns the unacceptable violence by Belarusian authorities against peaceful protesters, as well as intimidation, arbitrary arrests and detentions following the presidential elections, the results of which it does not recognise. The European Council fully supports the democratic right of the Belarusian people to elect their President through new free and fair elections, without external interference. The European Council calls on the Belarusian authorities to end violence and repression, release all detainees and political prisoners, respect media freedom and civil society, and start an inclusive national dialogue. It agrees that restrictive measures should be imposed and calls on the Council to adopt the decision without delay. The European Council also encourages the European Commission to prepare a comprehensive plan of economic support for democratic Belarus.

27. With regard to the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant Ostrovets, the European Council reiterates the importance of ensuring nuclear and environmental safety.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

28. The European Council calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities and urges parties to recommit to a lasting ceasefire and the peaceful settlement of the conflict. The loss of life and the toll on the civilian population are unacceptable. There can be no military solution to the conflict, nor any external interference. Azerbaijan and Armenia should engage in substantive negotiations without preconditions. The European Council expresses its support for the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and asks the High Representative to examine further EU support for the settlement process.

Alexei Navalny

29. The European Council condemns the assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny with a military chemical nerve agent from the 'Novichok' group. The use of chemical weapons constitutes a serious breach of international law. The European Council calls upon the Russian Federation's authorities to fully cooperate with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to ensure an impartial international investigation and to bring those responsible to justice. The European Council will return to the matter on 15-16 October 2020.

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