



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council conclusions on EU Support for Sustainable Change in Transition Societies

*3218th FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting
Brussels, 31 January 2013*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. "Many countries around the world, in the EU's neighbourhood or elsewhere, are faced with the challenges of transforming their societies into inclusive democracies. These efforts include stabilisation, democracy support, institution building and consolidation of reforms to make change sustainable. The EU has considerable experience of such processes, which can be shared with partners.
2. The Council welcomes the Joint Communication on 'EU Support for Sustainable Change in Transition Societies'¹ as a timely contribution to developing and further refining the EU's approach to supporting democratic, social and economic transition processes². It may also contribute to further debates at both EU and international level, including regarding a post-2015 agenda.

¹ Doc. 14662/12 and ADD1.

² Transition is understood in a broad sense to include societal transformation, institution building, stabilization and consolidation of reforms. Each Transition, including in fragile and conflict-affected states, should be supported according to context, with any EU intervention being based on robust political, economic and social analysis.

P R E S S

3. The EU must have a comprehensive, coherent and targeted long-term response to transition processes based on a shared analysis towards the promotion of democratic governance, human rights and the rule of law, economic and social welfare, as well as peace and stability. It should make full use of existing EU policies, tools and resources, from CFSP to development cooperation to reach those objectives. A strong emphasis should be given to social equality when engaging with societies in transition. Socially excluded groups should be defended by the EU, with special focus on women and children and the promotion of their rights.
4. The EU approach should be applied in an efficient and effective way, closely coordinated across EU institutions and foreign policy instruments, aimed at consolidating sustainable social, economic, political and environmental reforms. The ultimate objective should be to bring about inclusive democracy as well as inclusive and sustainable growth, including a green and low-carbon economy, and poverty reduction.
5. While directing its support for sustainable changes in transition societies worldwide, the Council reiterates EU's commitment to continue working with its closest neighbours in helping them to ensure their transition is sustainable.
6. The starting point for the EU's policy response should be the country context and, where appropriate, the analysis of specific vulnerabilities. Moreover, the EU should act at country level and at the partner countries' requests, based on their needs and objectives, and enhance ownership of locally driven reform processes, without imposing specific models.
7. In this context and as part of a rights-based approach to development, the EU underlines the crucial role of civil society, including NGOs, social and economic partners, as well as the private sector and local authorities, national parliaments and political parties, in pushing for and driving through domestic reforms, with a view to ensuring an inclusive and transparent process.
8. The involvement of all stakeholders in the reform process and relevant policy dialogue should be encouraged, and the tools available for supporting political and civil society should be fully applied, in line with the recent Council Conclusions on the roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations.³ Effective civil society participation requires democratic structures and state actors who are responsive to the demands of civil society. It is therefore essential to apply a multidimensional strategy that includes building and consolidating a legal and institutional framework, while strengthening the capacity of the state and the empowerment of civil society.

³ Doc. 14535/12.

9. The Council welcomes the proposals to develop the EU's response to transition processes on the basis of a comprehensive needs assessment and draw from the experience gained in the enlargement process, including through the use of joint peer assessment missions with the possible participation of experts from EU Member States. It also stresses the need to coordinate and align interventions with EU Member States as much as possible at country level.
10. The Council also welcomes the proposal to explore early achievements on issues relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, the fight against corruption, capacity development, transparency, job creation and income generation, especially for the youth, gender equality and women's rights as well as in public service delivery, to encourage continued broad public support for reform processes, while paying adequate attention to possible negative side effects.
11. Incentives and conditionalities should be applied coherently, with clear, transparent criteria and benchmarks linked to concrete steps in the reform agenda⁴. Countries committed to reforms should be rewarded but the EU should also react to violations of human rights and democracy. While setbacks in the democratisation process can be expected and progress may be slow, a dialogue must still be ensured.
12. The Council calls upon the EU to make more efficient use of knowledge sharing and capacity development methods, promoting expert exchanges and twinning, where appropriate, and furthering the use of the transition experience of Member States, where applicable. More and better use should be made of the European Transition Compendium and other relevant tools such as TAIEX. In this context, the Council welcomes the offers of EU Member States to make their experience and expertise widely available, notably through centres of excellence or knowledge hubs.
13. The Council reaffirms its commitment to enhance coordination between EU actors in partner countries. In this regard, the EU and its Member States should strengthen cooperation in joint assessment of partner countries' needs and joint programming, at country level, where appropriate.⁵ The proposed Joint Framework Documents will be a useful tool to that end.
14. Adequate capacities are an important pre-condition for successful transformation processes. The EU should increase support and technical assistance in the building of impartial institutions, bound by the rule of law, to avoid gaps between reforms and their implementation.

⁴ I.e. the incentive-based approach specifically referred to in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as the "more for more" principle.

⁵ The modalities for joint programming are set out in the Council Conclusions on the EU Common Position for the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4, Busan, 29 November – 1 December 2011) (Doc. 16773/11).

15. The Council also welcomes the proposal to explore triangular cooperation and other options for cooperation with developing countries that are also emerging as providers of development cooperation and have recent experience with democratic transition.
 16. The EU and its Member States should also build on the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States endorsed at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in 2011, and place special emphasis on peace building and state building processes in countries and regions in situations of fragility or affected by conflict, as set out in the Agenda for Change.
 17. Transition often requires various forms of reconciliation and reintegration, where the EU should stand ready to deploy the full range of its conflict, post-conflict and crisis management instruments, including mediation, in a coherent and effective way.
 18. The EU and its Member States should also continue to develop and make efficient use of existing common tools, such as Human Rights Country Strategies and Action Plans for democracy support.
 19. Looking to the future, the EU and its Member States should use the Joint Communication as a basis for action to be undertaken in future support for and dialogue with countries in transition, including in the context of in-country programming and implementation of development cooperation. In this respect, the Council invites the Commission and the EEAS to reflect on the communication and continue to provide guidance, including through dissemination of best practices, methodologies, training of staff and awareness raising.
 20. The Council invites the Commission and EEAS to evaluate and report back annually in the context of the Annual Report, starting in 2014, on progress made in the implementation of the Joint Communication and of these Council Conclusions. "
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