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Strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region

Strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region

Report of the Secretary-General

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* A/79/50.



I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 78/65, commended the Mediterranean countries for their efforts in meeting common challenges through coordinated overall responses, based on a spirit of multilateral partnership, towards the general objective of turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchanges and cooperation, guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity.
2. The General Assembly also encouraged the Mediterranean countries to strengthen further their cooperation in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including the possible resort by terrorists to weapons of mass destruction, which pose a serious threat to peace, security and stability in the region and therefore to the improvement of the current political, economic and social situation and which jeopardize friendly relations among States, hinder the development of international cooperation and result in the destruction of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the democratic basis of pluralistic society.
3. Furthermore, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly at its seventy-ninth session on means to strengthen security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region. The present report is submitted in compliance with that request and on the basis of information received from Member States.
4. In this connection, notes verbales dated 7 February 2024 were sent to all Member States, requesting their views on the subject. To date, replies from the Governments of Greece, Qatar, Serbia, Spain, Türkiye and Ukraine are reproduced in section II below. A reply from the European Union is reproduced in section III below. Any views received after 31 May 2024 will be posted on the website of the Office for Disarmament Affairs in the original language received. No addenda will be issued.

II. Replies received from Governments

Greece

[Original: English]
[30 May 2024]

Respect for international law and the principle of good-neighbourly relations is of paramount importance for safeguarding and strengthening peace and security in the Mediterranean region. Greece, as a pillar of stability in the region, has always been committed to the rules of international law and remains a strong advocate of the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, emphasizing on the prohibition of the use or the threat of use of force, as well as on international cooperation to this end.

Furthermore, Greece has always exercised its sovereign rights in its maritime areas in accordance with the international law of the sea, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, abstaining from activities which could exacerbate tensions and jeopardize regional peace and security. Greece repeatedly stresses the importance of the respect of the sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction each State has over its maritime zones in accordance with international law, including the Convention, and strongly condemns any State's action or rhetoric challenging these principles.

It is unacceptable to raise issues of sovereignty which were settled clearly and definitively through international treaties. At the same time, full respect for and protection of monuments of outstanding universal value, language, religion and

fundamental rights of minorities is essential for the enhancement of cooperation among countries in the region.

Solidarity and common action in the face of climate change and natural disasters, as exhibited by Greece in its immediate response and assistance to Türkiye in the aftermath of the earthquakes that hit the country in February 2023, is viewed as essential in promoting regional cooperation. Given the crises affecting also the Mediterranean, Greece is actively committed to cooperating with the countries of the region, with the scope to enhance peace, security and stability.

In this vein, Greece has also established, along with Cyprus, regional mechanisms of cooperation with partners from the Middle East while our country has been steadily maintaining an excellent level of bilateral cooperation with neighbouring and Mediterranean States in order to produce dynamic synergies in various sectors, such as energy, investment, technology, security and environmental protection, contributing thereby to the stability and prosperity of countries and peoples in the wider region. This vibrant network includes Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates and the State of Palestine. Greece, Cyprus and Israel are also working closely with the United States of America under the 3+1 mechanism with an aim to promote regional cooperation and develop synergies, which will enhance energy security in the region. Great emphasis is placed on strengthening regional energy cooperation and providing an effective framework for promoting energy connectivity between the Eastern Mediterranean area and Europe. These schemes have gained great momentum and as a result other European partners have also expressed the wish to join.

In the midst of profound and turbulent changes in the Eastern Mediterranean, the trilateral and multilateral mechanisms of cooperation that Greece has forged with key partners provide the necessary context to foster a more stable, integrated and prosperous region. In this regard, Greece will continue to upgrade, expand and deepen this regional cooperation architecture towards advancing common interests and fostering a more connected and resilient community in the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Middle East.

The situation in the Middle East, following the 7 October terrorist attacks of Hamas against Israel, the outbreak of the war in Gaza and the ensued humanitarian crisis, still take toll on innocent civilian life. In this context, Greece, mindful of the role it will be called upon to play as an elected member of the Security Council, for the period 2025–2026, thinks it is indispensable to adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach towards the alleviation of human suffering, including through a sustainable ceasefire, the release of the hostages and international commitment to an irreversible peace plan, as well as the reconstruction in the Palestinian territories.

Addressing the consequences of the catastrophic humanitarian crisis will also create conditions for de-escalation and perspectives for sustainable peace based on the two-State solution as Palestinians and Israelis have an equal right to live side by side, in safety, dignity and peace.

Greece firmly believes that another fundamental condition for consolidating peace and security in the wider region of the Eastern Mediterranean is an agreed, just and viable settlement of the “Cyprus issue”, within the framework of Security Council resolutions. Such a settlement would also create significant potential in terms of political stability and economic development for the whole region.

However, regional stability is being further undermined by the ongoing build-up of the Turkish military capabilities in the occupied areas of Cyprus, with perilous implications for the whole region.

Greece fully supports the efforts of the Secretary General to resume negotiations for a settlement of the Cyprus issue, and thus has fully supported the mission of the new Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General on Cyprus, María Angela Holguín Cuéllar. At the same time, Greece constantly advocates for an enhanced cooperation between the European Union and the United Nations on the matter.

Qatar

[Original: Arabic]
[9 April 2024]

1. The State of Qatar engages in ongoing efforts to eliminate sources of tension in the region and find just and lasting solutions to ongoing issues through peaceful means. It stresses that occupation forces must be withdrawn, and the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries and the right of peoples to self-determination must be respected. The principles of non-interference of any kind, the non-use of force or threat of force, and the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force must be fully observed, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Palestinian issue remains the most urgent issue requiring just solutions. Qatar reiterates its call on the international community to cooperate in taking urgent measures for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the lifting of all restrictions that impede the delivery of humanitarian aid. Forced displacement must end, and civilians must be protected in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law.
2. Mediterranean countries should take comprehensive and coordinated measures based on multilateral partnerships to achieve the overall objective of transforming the Mediterranean region into a region of dialogue, exchange and cooperation, with a view to ensuring peace, stability and prosperity. That includes establishing a functional and cooperative dialogue among the States of the region on a permanent multilateral basis.
3. Action should be taken to eliminate economic and social disparities in levels of development and ensure respect and greater understanding among cultures in the region.
4. The Mediterranean States should accede to all legal disarmament and non-proliferation instruments, especially the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. That would help to create the necessary conditions for strengthening international peace and security and promoting cooperation among the States of the region.
5. The international community should encourage the Mediterranean States to continue with and reinforce their cooperation to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including the possible use by terrorists of weapons of mass destruction, taking into account the relevant United Nations resolutions. They should also cooperate to fight international crime, illicit arms transfers and the illegal production, consumption and trafficking of narcotic drugs.
6. The international community should encourage the States of the region to create the necessary conditions to promote mutual confidence-building measures by encouraging genuine openness and transparency in all matters related to the security of the region, which is in turn linked to global security.
7. It is important to promote efforts to create a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. That would be an essential step towards establishing

a region where peace and security prevail, and contribute to strengthening security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region.

Serbia

[Original: English]

[30 May 2024]

One of the most important tasks of international security is the fight against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Serbia's location on the crossroads of transit routes between Western and South-East Europe and the Mediterranean determines its geopolitical position in many aspects, including the trade control in arms, military equipment and dual-use goods. To fulfil this task effectively, it is necessary to establish an efficient, multi-pronged export control system, based on national legislation in accordance with international standards and rules; control lists harmonized with the lists of the international export control regime; cooperation at the national and international levels and outreach to the industry and all relevant stakeholders; and a sanctions system.

Cooperation among Mediterranean countries in the field of export control should be improved by its intensification and the sharing of information, including an exchange of end use and end user documentation, an exchange of national experiences and practices on end use and end user control and measures to address diversion, the sharing of national points of contact to assist with authentication and verification of end use and end user documentation and post-delivery cooperation.

Spain

[Original: Spanish]

[22 May 2024]

For historical and geographical reasons, the Mediterranean region has always been a priority for Spain in all respects.

The firm commitment of Spain to stronger security and cooperation in this region is clearly stated in its National Security Strategy, adopted in 2021. It states that the Mediterranean is a strategic priority for Spain.

Peace, stability and prosperity in the southern Mediterranean are of the utmost importance for the security of Spain and of Europe as a whole. Our strategic position in that region is undergoing a transformation as a result of change processes, whose main consequence thus far has been the democratic election of Governments that are accountable to their citizens. All transitions are complex and involve opportunities and risks. The exclusion of social groups or the use of violence to gain political advantage may create a great deal of instability, with extremely negative consequences for the countries on the southern shore and for the security of the whole region.

Together with the European Union and the international community, Spain will support the efforts of the countries of the region to bring about greater social and economic development, in addition to greater political stability. A stable, democratic and more prosperous Mediterranean is the best guarantee of security for all the countries in the region. On the other hand, political instability and the lack of economic prospects for a large part of the population of these countries have direct repercussions on regional security and could affect Spain and Europe.

The Maghreb is of particular interest to Spain. Acting in conjunction with the other countries of the region, we must respond to challenges common to both shores,

such as the promotion of the rule of law, economic development and social cohesion, the consolidation of economic models that encourage the inclusion of all citizens, the stabilization of energy supplies, the regulation and control of migratory flows and the combating of terrorism, drug trafficking and other forms of illegal international trade.

Spain will support the common security of the Mediterranean, not only bilaterally but also by promoting and leading such frameworks for broader cooperation as the Union for the Mediterranean, the European Neighbourhood Policy and other forums, including the 5+5 Initiative and the Mediterranean Dialogue under the auspices of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The Mediterranean continues to witness long-standing and highly complex conflicts that affect the security of everyone. Crises such as those in Libya and Syria remind us of the fragility of an area where security is subject to tension and not unrelated to the actions of extremist terrorist movements in more distant regions, which take advantage of States' instability to occupy spaces beyond the reach of Government.

In particular, Spain will continue to work within the European Union to reach a final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with the agreed parameters. Spain will also contribute to a just and definitive solution to the problem of Cyprus and will cooperate with Türkiye in its capacity as a regional actor of importance for the security and stability of the Eastern Mediterranean.

National Defence Directive 2020 sets out the strategic context that defines the most significant issues from an international perspective and includes, among its guidelines for action, a special focus on the Mediterranean.

Moreover, under the Defence Policy Directive, the Mediterranean is an environment of constant action and decision-making. That Directive is governed by the following criteria:

- It complies rigorously with international law.
- It has a strong multilateral focus that was developed within the framework of various initiatives and organizations with which Spain is involved: the Mediterranean Dialogue under the auspices of NATO; the Union for the Mediterranean within the European Union; the activities carried out with the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; and the 5+5 Initiative, in which Spain, together with nine other countries from both shores of the Mediterranean, participates. In all these multilateral forums, Spain has consistently demonstrated an active and highly committed policy in terms of its respective roles in the Mediterranean.
- Support for all security and defence initiatives that facilitate dialogue and promote bilateral cooperation among countries in the Mediterranean region, especially through defence diplomacy.

It can be seen that this is an active policy with a high level of commitment, as shown by our presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. In Lebanon, we participate in the complex mission of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, which works towards general stability in a specific area, with many implications for the region, the Middle East and the world.

However, it cannot be denied that the Mediterranean is a region of highly complex and contrasting social, religious, economic and value systems; therefore, the greatest challenge is to find or develop strategies that foster integration and cooperation

The transnational nature of maritime risks and threats, and the vital contribution of the sea to the prosperity and security of nations, led to the establishment and development of the international law of the sea, which, through the distribution of competence among States, constitutes the reference on which cooperation initiatives that facilitate the best common use of the opportunities offered by the sea are based.

Over the centuries, nations have endeavoured to turn the sea into an area of freedom, using their navies to ensure free navigation and trade and gradually establishing a body of law, first customary and then normative, which was consolidated in 1958 in Geneva through the Convention on the High Seas and in 1982 in Montego Bay, through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Maritime security is a global problem that requires comprehensive, global solutions whose general parameters can accommodate regional approaches adapted to each geographical area.

From a regional perspective, cooperation and security in the Mediterranean are also strengthened by contributions made in the Mediterranean sphere towards increasing the capacity to address risks through the promotion of maritime security instruments and resolutions agreed at the United Nations.

Türkiye

[Original: English]
[30 May 2024]

The General Assembly, in its resolution [78/65](#), encouraged all of the Mediterranean countries to work together based on a spirit of multilateral partnership in order to overcome challenges in the region towards the general objective of turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchanges and cooperation, guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity. Türkiye, having one of the longest coasts in the Mediterranean Sea, and being one of the co-sponsors of resolution [78/65](#), would like to see the Eastern Mediterranean as a region of cooperation and has always been in favour of dialogue.

For achieving this goal, Türkiye acknowledges the importance of cooperation among the States in the region on the basis of equal rights. Today, the Mediterranean Sea is a region of potential conflict rather than cooperation due to continuous geopolitical and geoeconomic competition among various actors. Unfortunately, unilateral actions of certain countries are worsening the situation.

International cooperation

Türkiye attaches particular importance to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation efforts, as they contribute to stability. Given the threats posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including their acquisition by terrorists, these efforts are critical enablers of not only regional, but also global peace and security. Türkiye desires to see all countries unanimously share the goals of disarmament and non-proliferation and collectively work towards a safer and more stable environment in the Mediterranean region. To this end, Türkiye is party to the major international disarmament and non-proliferation treaties and regimes and supports the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, including the Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Being located in the intersection of major trade routes, Türkiye pays particular attention to the prevention of illicit arms transfers. To this end, Türkiye is also party to all export control regimes for conventional weapons and dual-use equipment and technologies, namely, the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for

Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies, the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Zangger Committee, the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Australia Group.

As a participating State of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and a country in the Eastern Mediterranean region, Türkiye highly values the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation group. Türkiye keeps the Mediterranean-related issues high on the agenda of OSCE and supports increasing dialogue with its Mediterranean Partners on the relevant OSCE platforms.

As a littoral State, Türkiye has a keen interest in and responsibility for supporting the efforts to turn the Mediterranean into an area of peace, democracy and prosperity and is actively supporting the strengthening of cooperation in the Mediterranean. As a candidate country to the European Union, Türkiye is also a member of and a contributor to the work of the Union for the Mediterranean and the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, which bring regional countries together.

Türkiye's views on regional and topical issues are presented below.

Middle East

Türkiye is gravely concerned about the catastrophic situation unfolding in Gaza since 7 October 2023 and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, and condemns the brutal, indiscriminate Israeli attacks on Gaza targeting civilians that have killed more than 35,000 Palestinian civilians and have led to the devastation of the entire infrastructure in Gaza, including schools, hospitals and places of worship. Israel's aggression in Gaza is risking regional peace and stability.

Türkiye calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, the provision of unhindered, sustained and sufficient humanitarian assistance and its safe distribution.

Unilateral policies altering the character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory continue to undermine the two-State vision. Violations of the sanctity of and the historical status quo in the holy sites further escalate the already fragile situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Türkiye is of the view that a lasting peace can be possible only through a just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with international law, and on the basis of the two-State solution.

North Africa

The overall stability in North Africa is fragile owing to the ongoing political tensions since 2011, as well as economic and social challenges. The war between Russia and Ukraine has exacerbated the fragility of food security in particular.

In the face of this unpromising scene, it is incumbent upon the international community to act in close coordination to consolidate the stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean basin.

Further deterioration of stability in the Sahel region could have adverse spillover effects in the region in a wide range of areas, including terrorism, irregular migration, food and energy security. With this understanding, Türkiye aims at contributing to the stability and prosperity of the wider region and supports international efforts in this regard.

Libya constitutes a recent case in point. So far, the efforts of Türkiye have been instrumental in maintaining calm on the ground, paving the way for efforts towards a lasting political solution and putting the country on its path towards elections.

A strong, unified, inclusive and representative elected Government is essential to tackle the multiple problems in Libya. For this, a solid and working dialogue should be established among the Libyan stakeholders to overcome their mutual lack of trust and ensure consensus in the period, leading to free, fair and credible presidential and parliamentary elections.

In this regard, Türkiye encourages the Libyan parties to engage in an ongoing political dialogue and contributes to the Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process, as well as the endeavours of the United Nations to that end.

In the meantime, it is equally important to help Libya in its capacity-building endeavours and establish a fully fledged security architecture.

Cyprus issue

The Cyprus issue came to international forums in 1963 when the Greek Cypriots expelled the Turkish Cypriots from the partnership State organs and institutions, as well as from their homes, by use of force, in violation of the treaties of 1960 and all human rights norms. That is to say, the Republic of Cyprus, which was established in 1960, ceased to exist in 1963 and, since then there has been no single authority that represents the whole island. Today, it is a fact that there are two States and two peoples on the island.

Given this background, Türkiye believes that a just, lasting, sustainable and mutually acceptable settlement of the Cyprus issue on the basis of the realities on the island would contribute to strengthening stability and security in the Mediterranean region. In this sense, Türkiye maintains that only a negotiated settlement based on dialogue and diplomacy can be sustainable.

Türkiye is firmly convinced that persistent refusal to acknowledge the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Turkish Cypriots will perpetuate the instability and tension in the Mediterranean region. Türkiye therefore underlines the urgent need for the reaffirmation of the inherent sovereign equality and equal international status of the Turkish Cypriot people.

Hydrocarbon resources

The discovery of hydrocarbon resources has exacerbated the situation in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, Türkiye believes that hydrocarbon resources can also provide initiatives for cooperation among littoral States.

The policy of Türkiye towards the issues in the Eastern Mediterranean has two dimensions.

The first dimension is related to the maritime boundary delimitation in the Eastern Mediterranean. According to international law, coastal States should enter into negotiations in order to reach an agreement on maritime boundaries. Such an agreement should be based on the principle of equal and just treatment to each party.

In line with that, Türkiye has always been ready to enter into negotiations for the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas based on international law and the principle of equity with all coastal States in the Eastern Mediterranean with which it has diplomatic relations.

The second dimension of the Eastern Mediterranean policy of Türkiye concerns the protection of the rights of the Turkish Cypriots over offshore resources.

The Turkish Cypriots, as the co-owners of the island, have equal rights along with the Greek Cypriots over offshore resources. This is also an established principle agreed within the decades-long United Nations processes. It is of utmost necessity to reach an understanding that could establish an equitable revenue-sharing mechanism between the two peoples for the hydrocarbon resources around the island of Cyprus.

Türkiye emphasizes that it stands ready to give its full support to ensure a just, equitable and peaceful solution to all pending issues, including the equitable delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas with all relevant coastal States in accordance with international law, in order to further contribute to the stability and prosperity of the entire Mediterranean basin. Türkiye believes that it will only be possible to build peace and stability in the Mediterranean through dialogue and cooperation.

To this end, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called for a regional conference on the Eastern Mediterranean in 2020 and reiterated this proposal in 2022. The conference could be an opportunity to generate an inclusive cooperation mechanism with the participation of all littoral States. Türkiye expects the European Union and all parties in the Eastern Mediterranean to support this constructive and innovative proposal. No concrete steps have been taken by the European Union thus far.

In addition to the proposal by President Erdoğan to convene a regional conference, the proposals by Turkish Cypriots to the Greek Cypriots (in 2011, 2012, 2019 and 2022) could produce a durable solution in the region. The proposals of the Turkish Cypriots are built on an equitable revenue-sharing mechanism, which is similar to the Israeli-Lebanese agreement of 27 October 2022, based on joint development through hydrocarbon companies without prejudice to the political and legal positions of the parties.

Humanitarian crisis

Humanitarian crisis in Syria, in particular in the north-west, has become protracted, and humanitarian needs have reached their highest level since the eruption of the conflict. The population in the north-west of the country is 5.1 million, of which 3.4 million are internally displaced people. The devastating earthquakes that struck Türkiye on 6 February 2023 also affected north-west Syria, compounding the already dire humanitarian situation. A sustainable solution and stability can only be achieved through a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process in accordance with Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#).

In that regard, addressing the needs of these people in an uninterrupted and sustainable manner is of vital importance for the security of the wider Mediterranean region. Following the non-renewal of the relevant Security Council mandate, Türkiye continues to support United Nations cross-border humanitarian aid operations implemented on the basis of the understanding reached between the United Nations and the Syrian regime. This is also important to avoid possible displacements to the countries in the Mediterranean basin.

As the country hosting the largest number of refugees in the world since 2014, Türkiye continues to support almost 4 million people under its protection. Türkiye strictly complies with the principle of non-refoulement.

Türkiye continues its efforts to create proper and sustainable conditions for voluntary returns and expects the international community to exert more efforts to create conditions for voluntary returns and also to focus on durable solutions for refugees.

On the other hand, the rise in conflicts, as well as economic concerns, has led to a significant increase in migration flows. Unfortunately, pushbacks and cruel

behaviour towards irregular migrants push these people to try more dangerous ways in order to reach target countries. This results in more casualties, especially at sea. The international community should urge all countries to pursue a more dignified approach towards irregular migrants and to respect basic human rights.

Ukraine

[Original: English]

[31 May 2024]

The policy of the Russian Federation is the main reason for the militarization and aggravation of geopolitical confrontation in the Mediterranean region.

The aggressive actions of the Russian Federation in the Mediterranean region are dictated, first of all, by its ambitions to restore the status of a military superpower and the desire to oppose North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces.

III. Reply received from the European Union

[Original: English]

[31 May 2024]

The strengthening of security and internal regional and interregional cooperation in the Mediterranean and in the broader Middle East remains high on the European agenda. A democratic, more stable, greener and more prosperous southern neighbourhood is a strategic priority for the European Union. Further to the adoption of the new agenda for the Mediterranean on 9 February 2021, in which, inter alia, further development of the partnership of the European Union on security matters with its neighbouring countries was proposed, the European Union has moved ahead with its implementation in all priority domains.

The European Union stresses the urgent need to renew efforts for a political solution to the crisis in Gaza. It continues to call for an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages and the provision of humanitarian assistance. The European Union also underlines the need to implement the two-State solution respecting all the relevant United Nations resolutions and based on the internationally agreed parameters as the only way forward. Towards this end, the European Union is working with its regional and Arab partners to organize a preparatory peace conference. It continues to call for the respect of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, by all parties. In this regard, the European Union calls upon all parties to respect and implement the orders of the International Court of Justice. It stresses its continued support to the Palestinian Authority as the only legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people and to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which provides essential services in Gaza and across the region.

Important efforts have been made by the European Union during the past year to enhance regional cooperation in the Mediterranean through continued support for and cooperation with the Union for the Mediterranean, the League of Arab States (LAS), the Anna Lindh Foundation and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, an effort now more necessary than ever.

The regional forum of the Union for the Mediterranean of 2023 took place on 27 November in Barcelona and was redesigned to discuss the critical situation in Israel and Gaza/Palestine, the consequences across the region and the way forward.

The European Union-Southern Neighbourhood Ministerial meeting was postponed to a later date.

The Union for the Mediterranean continued to contribute to the promotion of a more peaceful, secure, green, prosperous and inclusive Mediterranean region by creating, through dialogue and cooperation, a political environment that can mitigate the tensions affecting its members by addressing many root causes of conflict and working towards a shared prosperity. The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, together with other Arab partners, continued work on the Peace Day Effort aimed at reviving the Middle East peace process.

The European Union partnership with the Gulf Cooperation Council and its members enjoys positive momentum, following the adoption in May 2022 of a European Union joint communication on a partnership with the Gulf, which was followed by Council conclusions on 20 June, which detailed concrete proposals for strengthened cooperation on global issues and challenges (green transition, energy, climate and trade), as well as regional stability, global security, development and people-to-people exchanges.

As part of its revamped strategy vis-à-vis the Gulf, the European Union appointed the European Union Special Representative for the Gulf Region in June 2023 who, as part of his mandate, is engaging with the interlocutors in the region on security and sectoral cooperation.

The twenty-seventh European Union-Gulf Cooperation Council joint council, held in Muscat, agreed on additional commitments, such as the launch of a European Union-Gulf Cooperation Council security dialogue in January 2024 in Riyadh, a one-of-a-kind format, that focus on, among other things, avenues for further cooperation and coordination on maritime security, cyber- and hybrid threats, disaster preparedness and response, non-proliferation and counter-terrorism. A second edition of this dialogue might take place in the second half of 2024. Also, the organization of a high-level forum on regional security and cooperation – led on the European Union side by the European Union Special Representative, Luigi Di Maio – to foster the exchange of views on maritime security, the war in Gaza and Iran/Gulf security.

In implementing the agenda for the Mediterranean, the European Union draws on its full toolbox. Multiannual indicative programmes are in place for most of the southern partners, together with a regional multiannual indicative programme and a multi-country multiannual indicative programme for migration, and actions for the Economic and Investment Plan are under way. Under the European Union Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, up to €7 billion is anticipated to be mobilized for the period 2021–2027 to implement the Economic and Investment Plan (annexed to the agenda for the Mediterranean), potentially leveraging up to €30 billion in private and public investment in the region. Through the Global Gateway strategy and the Economic and Investment Plan, the European Union is stepping up its support to partners to meet their infrastructure needs through the implementation of identified flagship initiatives (for example, the MEDUSA and ELMED projects).

The European External Action Service has led sectoral dialogues and subcommittees with partner countries on issues of common interest, such as governance, the rule of law, inclusive growth, climate change and energy, taking into account recent political developments in each country. It was agreed to relaunch the high-level dialogue on security with Algeria. A security dialogue with Morocco took place on 8 May 2023 in Rabat.

Joint efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts and promote security cooperation are paramount priorities. The European Union is a main provider of humanitarian and development assistance in the Mediterranean region and is able to deploy a wide range of instruments in a triple nexus humanitarian-development-peace approach. It is deploying military and civilian Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations, mediation and stabilization actions, as well as restrictive measures. The mandate of the European Union military operation in the Mediterranean was renewed until 31 March 2023, and it continued to be the only implementer of the United Nations arms embargo on Libya in accordance with Security Council resolutions [1970 \(2011\)](#) and [2292 \(2016\)](#). In April 2023, the Council extended the mandate of the European Union Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission in Libya until 30 June 2025, to enhance the capacity of Libyan authorities and agencies to manage the borders of Libya, to fight human trafficking and migrant smuggling and to counter terrorism. The European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories is mandated to contribute to the establishment of effective and sustainable policing and wider criminal justice arrangements under Palestinian ownership and to security sector and justice sector reform. The European Union Border Assistance Mission to the Rafah Crossing Point is supporting the Palestinian Authority general authority for borders and crossings. The mandates of both the European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories and the European Union Border Assistance Mission to the Rafah Crossing Point were extended until June 2024.

The European Union continues to call for a political solution to the Syria conflict in line with Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#) and to support the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. It organized the sixth Brussels conference, on 10 May 2022, and the seventh Brussels conference, on 15 June 2023, and continues to send annually a strong signal of its continued commitment to the Syrian people and to refugee-hosting communities. It continues to impose sanctions on leading members and entities of the Syrian regime. From a security perspective, the European Union is working on a package of measures to help alleviate the pressure on camps in north-east Syria, where persons believed to be affiliated with Da'esh and their families are detained, by supporting rehabilitation centres and reintegration efforts of Syrian/Iraqi nationals. The European Union supports a sustainable solution for the Syrian refugees, which can only be based on their voluntary, safe and dignified return to their places of origin when conditions on the ground as defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) allow this. In April 2023, the European Union also adopted additional sanctions against individuals and organizations associated with the Syrian regime, related to the production and trafficking of narcotics, notably Captagon.

The European Union continued to work in support of the political process facilitated by the United Nations in Libya, calling for renewal of the legitimacy of institutions through national elections as well as implementation of the ceasefire agreement (withdrawal of foreign forces, fighters, mercenaries and armed groups). Following the recent resignation of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Libya, the European Union remains committed to a lasting and sustainable political solution, based on a United Nations-led mediation.

The European Union continued to support the work carried out by the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, towards a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution to the Western Sahara conflict, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Part of European Union support on security addressed the chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear risks in the region. The Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area funds projects for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in the Mediterranean. European Union chemical, biological, radiological and

nuclear centres of excellence in the Mediterranean, including those in Morocco and Algeria, contribute to these tasks.

The European Union continued to cooperate with southern partners on tackling terrorism and preventing radicalization leading to violent extremism, by supporting institutional capacity-building and the development of relevant legislation. The work of counter-terrorism/security experts continues in European Union delegations, and counter-terrorism dialogues were organized with partner countries.

Migration continues to be a priority for the European Union and its member States. Work is ongoing on the external dimension of the European Union Pact for Migration and Asylum, which is the overarching framework of the European Union for migration policies. In this context, the European Union has further strengthened its cooperation with its partners in the region, aiming at a comprehensive, balanced and mutually beneficial partnership. Helping host countries in the region to protect millions of refugees and displaced persons, building partners' capacities for border management and anti-smuggling, funding assisted voluntary returns from host countries to countries of origin, establishing legal pathways and skills development and tackling the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement are important elements of these partnerships.
