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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/74/50](#).



I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 73/85, 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 at its seventy-fourth 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, a note verbale dated 4 February 2019 was sent to all Member States, requesting their views on the subject. To date, replies from the Governments of Algeria, Egypt, Greece, Lebanon and Spain have been received and are reproduced in section II below. A reply from the European Union has been received and is reproduced in section III below. Any replies received after 15 May 2019 will be posted on the website of the Office for Disarmament Affairs (www.un.org/disarmament) in the original language received. No addenda will be issued.

II. Replies received from Governments

Algeria

[Original: French]
[15 May 2019]

The security and cooperation situation in the Mediterranean region today requires the definition of a collective, global strategy that is based on a cross-cutting approach to partnership and cooperation and includes all initiatives intended to make the region an area of sustainable peace and stability.

Algeria therefore continues to promote and apply the principles of cooperation, friendship, good neighbourliness and mutual respect in the Mediterranean region, to which it attaches great importance in its foreign policy.

In this regard, Algeria has undertaken and supported such initiatives as the following:

(a) The combating of terrorism in the Sahel through the strengthening of the strategic, operational and military framework, the launch of socioeconomic development programmes and the enhancement of the administrative, technical and operational capacities of the security and customs personnel of several African countries;

(b) The Western Mediterranean Forum (5+5 Dialogue), which is an effective framework for cooperation in the promotion and consolidation of peace and collective

security in the Mediterranean, in particular through the adoption of cooperation measures in such areas as ground, air and maritime surveillance;

(c) The North Africa and the Sahel Regional Secretariat of the European Union Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative, which aims to strengthen cooperation between the countries of that region and the countries of the European Union to reduce the risks arising from the illicit use of sensitive materials;

(d) Cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which has developed significantly, particularly since 2014, following the conclusion of an individual partnership and cooperation programme to strengthen cooperation between Algeria and Europe;

(e) The informal high-level strategic dialogue between Algeria and the European Union on regional security and counter-terrorism, which is designed to identify opportunities to develop practical cooperation in order to meet the challenges posed by terrorism. The dialogue reflects the Algerian policy of providing assistance and of sharing with its partners its experience of deradicalization and combating terrorism and violent extremism;

(f) The African Centre for Studies and Research on Terrorism, which makes an important contribution to the prevention and combating of terrorism and related phenomena, including through targeted scientific studies. The Centre reflects the desire of African States to coordinate with the international community their efforts to take concrete, urgent and collective counter-terrorism measures;

(g) The African Police Cooperation Organization (AFRIPOL), which is a regional coordination tool intended to strengthen peace and security in Africa through the development of the capacities of African police forces in such areas as forensic science, criminal threat assessment and the combating of cybercrime and illicit trafficking in arms and drugs, and through the consolidation of the police forces deployed in connection with peacekeeping operations.

Egypt

[Original: Arabic]
[9 May 2019]

The Middle East in general and the Mediterranean region in particular are among the most politically volatile regions today. The situation is deteriorating as the incidence of armed conflicts, proxy wars, terrorism and sectarian violence increases. Arms trafficking and arms proliferation have reached unprecedented proportions, as has irregular migration. Egypt is therefore taking an active part in all bilateral and multilateral efforts to deepen all aspects of security cooperation among the Mediterranean countries in order to address those threats. That is consistent with the resolutions adopted at all the relevant international conferences and meetings with a view to enhancing security, cooperation and prosperity in the Mediterranean region. It is vital that the region's countries engage in more constructive dialogue in order to firmly establish shared principles and concepts for addressing its security challenges, eliminating the causes of tension and resulting threats to peace and security, and fostering economic, social, cultural and environmental cooperation.

Ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction is, in the view of Egypt, essential to bolstering regional peace and security, including in the Mediterranean. Regional arms control measures should be directed at strengthening peace and security in a cooperative and inclusive fashion. Egypt calls on all the region's countries to contribute to its stability and prosperity by respecting

the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the tenets of international law relating to international relations.

Certain countries in the region rely on the nuclear deterrent. That is, quite simply, a blatant violation of the provisions of international law and international arrangements to limit nuclear proliferation and hardly constitutes a sustainable policy for building peace and stability. All the region's countries must therefore seek every opportunity, in their negotiations on improving regional security and stability, to raise the matter of ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction through implementation of the relevant international resolutions, support for General Assembly decision 73/546 and backing for the holding of a conference to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction.

In a related context, Egypt maintains that the occupation and seizure of land and failure to abide by the principles and purposes of the Charter, under which States are enjoined to refrain from the use of force in their international relations, undermine attempts to bolster security and stability and remain a major obstacle to building a sustainable peace in the region. Egypt urges all the countries in the region to abide by the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and refraining from the use of force, in particular land seizures, in international relations, which runs counter to the principles and purposes of the Charter and international laws and customs.

Egypt is going to great lengths to enhance regional counter-terrorism cooperation, including by preventing weapons of mass destruction from falling into the hands of terrorist and extremist groups and cutting off their access to any types of weaponry and financial and technical support. It is also working at the international and regional levels to combat transnational organized crime, arms trafficking, human trafficking and irregular migration, the production and smuggling of narcotic substances and all crimes that threaten the region's security and stability.

The United Nations plays a pivotal role in maintaining international peace and security, boosting regional and subregional cooperation through international initiatives to enhance security and stability, and encouraging the region's countries to work together constructively to deal with the challenges that are holding back development and prosperity.

Egypt had the honour of hosting the European Union-League of Arab States summit in Sharm el-Sheikh in February 2019. The declaration issued by that summit, which was circulated in Security Council document [S/2019/238](#), contains an account of the issues addressed at the summit, which included security challenges and other matters of common interest, such as disarmament and international understandings on strengthening regional cooperation to enhance security and stability in the region.

Greece

[Original: English]
[15 May 2019]

Greece has established trilateral schemes of cooperation with countries of the Eastern Mediterranean region, notably Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. These schemes constitute mechanisms of a productive and sincere dialogue aimed at strengthening relations among the participant countries in areas of common interest and improving stability in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Building upon the abovementioned synergies, Greece has undertaken targeted initiatives, launching the Rhodes Conference for Security and Stability (the first was held in September

2016, the second on 22 and 23 May 2017, and the third on 21 and 22 June 2018); the Athens Conference on Religious and Cultural Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in the Middle East (the first was held in October 2015 and the second in November 2017); and the Ancient Civilizations Forum (April 2017). All the above emanate from our firm belief in proposing a positive and manifold agenda of cooperation, focusing on developing synergies and joint activities in the fields of culture, trade, education and research.

In view of the above, the “spirit of Rhodes” provides an appropriate response to multiple challenges facing the wider Eastern Mediterranean region, thus enhancing regional security and development, as well as mutual trust and understanding among the participants. Our enhanced cooperation with the countries of the region, and notably our abovementioned trilateral schemes of cooperation, also contribute to the coordination of efforts combat the rise of extremism and terrorism, which threatens the security of the region. Greece has twice convened (in 2015 and 2017), as mentioned above, the Athens Conference on Religious and Cultural Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in the Middle East, recognizing the urgency of communicating the message of cooperation and peace and of working on concrete alternative actions aimed at fighting radicalization that leads to violence. These conferences dealt with the urgent humanitarian crisis currently faced by religious communities and cultural entities in the region, caused by ongoing conflicts, tensions and extremism. The Centre for Religious Pluralism in the Middle East was subsequently established.

Lebanon

[Original: Arabic]
[15 May 2019]

In early 2016, as counter-terrorism cooperation in the Mediterranean region was intensifying, Lebanon and the European Union, represented respectively by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants and the European External Action Service, drafted a road map on cooperation with a view to developing a national strategy to combat terrorism, supporting the border security forces and the justice system, countering the financing of terrorism, combating violent extremism and improving security and aviation safety cooperation. Under that broad umbrella, the European Union launched a series of projects with agencies of the Lebanese Government. Implementation is on two tracks: joint projects carried out by groups of agencies and projects involving single agencies.

The Lebanese Armed Forces are involved in two joint projects with the security services and other State agencies: the first on designing a national counter-terrorism strategy and the other on combating illicit trafficking in firearms. In coordination with and under the sponsorship of its European partner, Lebanon is implementing a number of activities intended to meet the goals of the two projects, including visits, workshops and conferences in Lebanon and information-exchange visits abroad. The results to date are as follows:

- With regard to the national counter-terrorism strategy, a workshop and a conference were held in 2017. They produced recommendations focusing on the need for Lebanon to work towards two key objectives: to expedite development of the strategy by setting up a joint working group comprised of representatives of all relevant government agencies and civil society entities and to establish a national mechanism for the coordination of counter-terrorism affairs. A commission set up by the Army Command has put together the material necessary for the preparatory meetings that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants plans to hold in order to commence drafting of the strategy.

- As for illicit trafficking in firearms, the Lebanese Armed Forces, along with the security services and the relevant government agencies, are looking at a package of legal and technical measures that, if adopted, would reinforce the commitment of Lebanon to act to control the flow of firearms and combat illicit trafficking therein.

Alongside those joint projects, the Lebanese Armed Forces are involved in two individual projects launched by the European Union. They are directed at the Intelligence Directorate of the Lebanese Armed Forces, the General Directorate of the Internal Security Forces, the General Directorate of Public Security and the General Directorate of State Security. The first project is on cooperation between the European Union and Lebanon in counter-terrorism training and is being run by the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training. The second is on counter-terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa region.

- For the first project, two workshops have been held, the first on developing a local operational counter-terrorism model for the Intelligence Directorate and the second on methods for gathering and exploiting open source information.
- With regard to the second project, an agreement was reached on cooperation in capacity-building and training in a variety of areas, in particular cybersecurity, electronic forensics and combating the financing of terrorism. To date, however, no steps have been taken by the European side to give practical effect to the agreement.

As part of its ongoing efforts in the area of disarmament, Lebanon has acceded to the Arms Trade Treaty. It submitted its accession documents to the United Nations on 8 May 2019 and thereby became the 102nd State party to the treaty. This reflects the commitment of Lebanon to combat the illicit trafficking in and movement of arms, which will help to strengthen regional security, including in the Mediterranean region, and international security in general. This is consistent with the provisions of General Assembly resolution [73/85](#) of 14 December 2018, in particular paragraphs 5 and 7.

Spain

[Original: Spanish]
[15 May 2019]

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 2013, which states that “Europe and the Mediterranean are our principal strategic priorities”.

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 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 achieve greater social and economic development and greater political stability. A stable, democratic and more

prosperous Mediterranean is the best guarantee of security for all the countries in the region. However, political instability and the lack of economic prospects for a large part of the population of these countries have direct repercussions on the security of the Sahel and could affect Spain and Europe.

The Maghreb is of particular interest to Spain. 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 and illegal international trafficking, including drug trafficking.

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 Defence Initiative, the Mediterranean Dialogue of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the 2004 Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

The Mediterranean continues to witness long-standing and highly complex conflicts that affect security for all. Crises such as those in Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic remind us of the fragility of an area that is sensitive in terms of security and is not immune to the actions of extremist terrorist movements that originated in more distant regions and take advantage of States' instability to occupy spaces beyond the reach of Government.

In particular, Spain will continue to work within the European Union towards a final settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in accordance with the agreed parameters. With regard to the question of Western Sahara, Spain, in accordance with United Nations resolutions and as a member of the Group of Friends of Western Sahara, will not falter in its active commitment to the achievement of a just, lasting and, mutually acceptable political solution. Spain will also contribute to a just and definitive solution to the problem of Cyprus and will cooperate with Turkey in its capacity as a regional actor of importance for the security and stability of the Eastern Mediterranean.

The National Defence Directive of 31 July 2012 sets out the strategic context that defines the most significant international issues; these include the emergence of new world powers and the strengthening of existing ones, the global financial and economic crisis, unrest in the Mediterranean, instability in the Sahel, nuclear proliferation and piracy.

In terms of Spanish defence policy, the Mediterranean is an environment of constant action and decision-making. That policy is governed by the following criteria:

- It complies rigorously with international law.
- It has a strongly multilateral character that is manifested in the involvement of Spain in various initiatives and organizations, including the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue, the Union for the Mediterranean, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the 5+5 Initiative, in which Spain and nine other countries on both shores of the Mediterranean participate. 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 with countries in the Mediterranean region, especially through defence diplomacy.

This is an active policy with a high level of commitment, as shown by our presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, specifically in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), whose complex mission is to work towards general stability in a specific area that has many implications for the Middle East region and the rest of the world.

However, the Mediterranean is a region of highly complex and diverse social, religious, economic and value systems; the greatest challenge, therefore, is finding and developing 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, Jamaica, 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.

Cooperation and security in the Mediterranean are also strengthened by contributions made in the Mediterranean sphere from a regional perspective, in the United Nations framework, with a view to increasing the capacity to respond to risks, through the promotion of United Nations instruments and resolutions related to maritime security.

III. Reply received from the European Union

[Original: English]
[15 May 2019]

The strengthening of security and internal regional cooperation in the Mediterranean, as well as in the broad Middle East, remains high on the European agenda.

Cooperation was reinforced through relevant regional organizations, especially through the Union for the Mediterranean, whose strategic importance as a key platform for dialogue and as a mechanism to strengthen regional and social cohesion in the Mediterranean was also reiterated in the European Union Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy. A number of high-level meetings were conducted in pursuit of the European Union's goal of strong engagement with Mediterranean partners with a view to an increasingly effective partnership within the context of the reviewed European Neighbourhood Policy. The European Neighbourhood Policy review and the 2017 joint communication on a strategic approach to resilience in the European Union's external action proposed concrete measures to reinforce partners' resilience against global challenges and threats, such as supporting the development and growth of the poorest areas, countering the terrorist threat and violent extremism,

as well as supporting security sector reform and border management in the context of the rule of law. The Common Foreign and Security Policy missions and operations in the region also play an important role in achieving this goal.

Where possible, the European Union cooperated with Southern Mediterranean and Middle East countries on political, economic, security and civil society tracks. The European Union stepped up its engagement in favour of countries that are implementing political and economic reforms, such as Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia, and is relaunching its bilateral relations with Morocco. Work on implementing priorities for partnerships has continued, including in the area of counter-terrorism and security, as well as supporting structural socioeconomic reforms.

The European Union continued to cooperate with the Southern partners on tackling terrorism and preventing radicalization leading to violent extremism. Security and counter-terrorism dialogues have been conducted in the region, specifically in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and Turkey, leading to concrete results, and an informal high-level dialogue with Algeria has been launched. The next counter-terrorism and security dialogue with Tunisia will take place on 12 June 2019. The work of counter-terrorism and security experts continues in European Union delegations in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey, with the direct support of member States, to contribute to a better situational awareness of local context, deepen engagement with respective authorities and define targeted cooperation programmes. They also act as a reference point for matters related to counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism for local and international counterparts, for example in donor coordination platforms or at Global Counterterrorism Forum meetings.

On Lebanon, the European Union's support to the security sector further increased in 2018. At the Ministerial Meeting in support of Lebanon's Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces, known as the Rome II Conference, the European Union commended the efforts of the Internal Security Forces and the Armed Forces in developing existing capacities. The European Union announced that it would provide support of €50 million until 2020 to strengthen the country's aviation security and support all security agencies in the areas of rule of law, security and counter-terrorism, with a focus on integrated border management and counter-terrorism.

On Jordan, the European Union has also stepped up its support of security, counter-terrorism and integrated border management through bilateral and regional programmes with the different security departments and agencies. Furthermore, Jordan has shown an interest in participating in the Common Security and Defence Policy missions and in the European Union's hybrid risk survey.

The European Union and Egypt co-chaired the Global Counterterrorism Forum's East Africa Working Group. At the International High-level Conference on the Sahel, held in Brussels in February 2018, Egypt pledged to hold 250 training courses for military staff in 2018 in areas such as countering terrorism and demining, along with other training courses to train local leaders in the Sahel region on radicalization.

Following the signature of the administrative arrangement on cooperation in civil protection and disaster risk management with Tunisia, the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations is organizing this year, at the request of Tunisia, a peer review, with a view to supporting areas most at risk.

Through its comprehensive approach, the European Union continues to support the political transition of Libya towards becoming a stable and functioning country, including by being the most vocal supporter of the United Nations-led political

mediation process. The European Union underlines the importance of inclusiveness of the political process and Libyan ownership, notably through the participation of all legitimate Libyan stakeholders. The European Union has mobilized significant resources through ambitious bilateral cooperation programmes in support of the institutional capacity-building of the Libyan authorities. The European Union has also deployed Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations, the European Union military operation in the Southern Central Mediterranean, the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Libya and the European Union Liaison and Planning Cell to help to create conditions for a peaceful transition process.

The European Union maintained its position as the region's largest donor and foreign aid provider.

In 2018, the migratory situation became more stable, but remained challenging, in particular with regard to the western Mediterranean route. Migration continues to be a top priority for the European Union and its partners in the region. The decrease in irregular arrivals to Europe has been confirmed throughout 2018, while work is ongoing to save lives, tackle the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, protect Europe's external borders and further strengthen cooperation with international partners in the Mediterranean region and beyond. The principles of solidarity, partnership and shared responsibility from the Valetta summit in Malta in November 2015 will continue to guide the response of the European Union and African partners.

The implementation of the European Union-Turkey statement continues to deliver results in reducing irregular and dangerous crossings and in saving lives in the Aegean Sea. The European Union remains seized of the matter, given the ongoing and increased flows from Turkey.

The joint African Union-European Union-United Nations Task Force has contributed to helping people stranded in Libya, including through assistance as part of voluntary return programmes and evacuations from Libya, including to the Niger, through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees emergency transit mechanism. Joint efforts will continue to evacuate migrants in detention and put an end to the dire conditions in which they are held, as well as to dismantle networks involved in the smuggling of migrants and human trafficking.

The European Union emergency trust fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa continues to play a critical role in the European Union's work to foster stability and better migration management in the region. In total, the fund has now approved 147 programmes across its three windows (the Sahel and Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa and North Africa) for a total of more than €2.5 billion, with contracts signed for just over €1.5 billion. The External Investment Plan and its European Fund for Sustainable Development have also generated strong interest from partner financial institutions. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency is currently supporting national border guards with 1,350 deployed experts along all migratory routes.

The Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations that are active on the main migratory routes are enhancing capacity in the region to address local challenges, including those linked to irregular migration, and contributing ultimately to regional stability. The European Union military operation in the Southern Central Mediterranean contributes to the European Union's efforts to ensure the return of stability and security in Libya and maritime security in the Central Mediterranean region by disrupting the business model of migrant smugglers and human traffickers, training and monitoring the Libyan Coastguard and contributing to the implementation of the United Nations arms embargo.

The European Union continues to actively support the United Nations-led Geneva process aimed at finding, through the intra-Syrian talks, an agreed political solution to the conflict, in line with the provisions of Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#). The European Union remains engaged in support of the work of the task forces on humanitarian aid and the ceasefire in Geneva and continues to be the largest donor for the Syrian crisis. The European Union and the United Nations co-chaired the third Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, held from 12–14 March 2019, where prominence was given to the voices of civil society organizations from Syria and the region. The Conference succeeded in mobilizing aid to Syrians inside the country and in neighbouring countries, including for hosting communities, through pledges totalling \$7 billion (€6.2 billion) for 2019, and multi-year pledges of close to \$2.4 billion (€2.1 billion) for 2020 and beyond. Over 11 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, and more than 5.6 million Syrian refugees are displaced outside the country. 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, will allow it.

The European Union has joined the League of Arab States, the United Nations and the African Union to form the Libya Quartet, with the objective of contributing to the efforts of finding a solution to the crisis.

As participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union member States foster cooperation and dialogue on wider security issues through the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation programme with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. Priority areas in this forum include countering radicalization and terrorism, boarder security, migration management and non-discrimination.

The European Union stresses the importance of respect for the sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction that each State has over its maritime zones in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The European Union stresses that any activities contravening international law and contradicting good neighbourly relations, as well as provocative public statements, are not conducive to easing tensions and creating a positive environment for regional stability.

Political dialogue has been further intensified with regional partners, such as the League of Arab States. Under the European Union-League of Arab States Strategic Dialogue, launched in November 2015, work continued in the joint working groups and at the diplomatic and ministerial levels, and in 2018, the European Union and the League of Arab States held a historic first summit. The European Union also seeks to work with the Gulf States in addressing challenges in the region, such as those in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and the Horn of Africa. The European Union's cooperation with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation also continued throughout 2018.