
European Leaders Vow Tougher Action On Chemical Weapons, Spying

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Brussels: EU leaders on Friday pledged to crack down harder on chemical weapons and step up efforts to combat spying, as Europe frets about threats from Russia.

Three months after a nerve agent attack in the British city of Salisbury, blamed on Russia, united the EU in condemnation of Moscow, the bloc's leaders said they wanted new measures to stop the spread of chemical weapons.

A summit of EU leaders in Brussels called for "the adoption as soon as possible of a new EU regime of restrictive measures to address the use and proliferation of chemical weapons".

The call came a day after the international community voted to beef up the powers of the world chemical weapons watchdog, allowing it to name those responsible for toxic arms attacks in Syria.

The Salisbury attack, along with repeated gas attacks in Syria's bloody civil war and the assassination of North Korea leader Kim Jong-Un's half brother using VX nerve agent in Malaysia, have led to fears that the century-old taboo against chemical weapons was being eroded.

The European Commission, the EU's powerful executive arm, said Wednesday's decision to boost the powers of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was a "crucial step towards preserving and upholding the global norm against the use of chemical weapons".

And with European nations increasingly anxious about Russian interference in elections across the continent, the summit tasked the commission with coming up with "a coordinated EU response to the challenge of disinformation".

Leaders also urged EU countries to cooperate more closely and in consultation with NATO, to combat the threat from "hostile intelligence activities".
