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NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations

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Subject: Council Conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special report
No 17/2012: "The European Development Fund (EDF) contribution to a
sustainable road network in sub-Saharan Africa "

At its meeting on 27-28 May 2013, the Council adopted the Conclusions annexed to this note.

Council Conclusions
on the European Court of Auditors' Special report No 17/2012:
"The European Development Fund (EDF) contribution to a sustainable road network
in sub-Saharan Africa "

I. Introduction

1. The Council welcomes the Court of Auditors' special report No 17/2012: "The European Development Fund (EDF) contribution to a sustainable road network in sub-Saharan Africa"¹.
2. In this special report, the European Court of Auditors has assessed whether the EDF has contributed effectively to the sustainability of the road network in sub-Saharan Africa, whether the road infrastructure supported by the EDF is sustainable and whether the Commission has effectively promoted the sustainability of that road infrastructure.
3. The audit addressed the technical, financial and institutional sustainability of road transport infrastructure in sub-Saharan countries and looked at programmes financed since 1995 under the 8th, 9th and 10th EDFs.

II. General remarks

4. The Council notes that the Court, amongst its main findings, concluded that:
 - the Commission is partially effective in its support for a sustainable road network in sub-Saharan Africa; and
 - partner countries visited by the Court do not do enough to ensure the sustainability of road infrastructure.

¹ OJ C 14, 17.01.2013, p. 4 and <http://eca.europa.eu>.

In this regard, the Council also notes the Commission's reply to the Court's findings that it has made substantial progress in its support for a sustainable road network in sub-Saharan Africa but recognises that such progress is not yet sufficient to ensure overall sustainability of the entire African road network. The Commission observes that the two thirds of the roads inspected by the Court, which represent 90% of kilometres inspected, were in fair to very good condition.

5. The Council also notes that the Court's report underlines the scope for significant improvement in several areas and contains a series of recommendations to the Commission aimed at maximising the effectiveness and benefits of EU development support.
6. The Council acknowledges the fact that the Commission accepts the Court's conclusions and has pointed to a number of initiatives that it has already taken to address certain of the issues raised in the Court's report, notably in promoting the importance of, and spending on, road maintenance, increased dialogue with partner countries' Governments, greater technical cooperation, identification of additional sources of project funding and an increased focus on output based performance assessment frameworks.
7. The Council welcomes the Commission's stated intention to draw up an action plan to fully implement the recommendations of the Court of Auditors.

III. Conclusions and Recommendations

8. Roads are essential for regional integration, economic growth, social development, effective public administration and security and financially, they constitute an important sector of cooperation. It is clear that the roads already constructed with financial support from the EU have contributed to economic growth and poverty reduction in a number of partner countries.

9. The Court's audit underlines how improper road maintenance and vehicle overloading is putting the sustainability of the sub-Saharan road network in jeopardy.

10. In conclusion, the Council requests the Commission:

- a) to ensure that, in assessing what steps are needed to strengthen partner Governments' efforts in relation to road maintenance and vehicle overload control, including through policy dialogue and EDF support geared to output-based performance assessment frameworks, the appropriate level of attention is given to the need for regionally-coordinated, national-level action to harmonise and enforce appropriate axle load control regulations, including fighting against the root causes of vehicle overloading. This is especially important for regional transport corridors, given the role that cross-border trucking plays in damaging roads and the constraints that are placed on trade between neighbouring countries when these partner Governments enforce different transport sector regulations;
- b) to provide, when required, support to partner countries to improve their technical capacity in managing executive projects designs, with tender specifications in order to avoid deficient works management which often causes lack of sustainability in the infrastructures performance;

c) to conduct an evaluation on the results and development impact of EU support to a sustainable road network in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Commission should especially assess whether the roads meet traffic requirements, contribute to the increase of regional trade and economic integration as well as to the improvement of access for rural populations to the social and economic infrastructure. Furthermore the Commission should evaluate the capacity of the Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Program. In this regard, particular attention should be paid to the link between sector reform and interventions funded by the Commission in the road infrastructure sector. The Council recommends also to analyse whether the Commission can strengthen its own capacities to guide and monitor sector reform approaches in the context of EDF-funded interventions. The Council invites the Commission to launch this evaluation within the next twelve months.
