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OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3517th Council meeting

General Affairs

Brussels, 7 February 2017

President

Louis Grech

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for European Affairs
of Malta

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
 - Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
 - Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

ITEMS DEBATED

Preparation for the March European Council

The Council examined an annotated draft agenda for the European Council meeting to be held on 9 and 10 March 2017.

The Spring European Council will focus on:

- jobs, growth and competitiveness: the European Council will stress the urgency of promoting investment, growth and employment to allow EU citizens to enjoy economic well-being and prosperity; it will examine the implementation of structural reforms by member states; it will also take stock of the work undertaken on legislative priorities such as the single market strategy, the digital single market strategy, the capital markets union action plan and the energy union
- security: the European Council will assess the implementation of its December 2016 conclusions on external security and defence; it will also look at where the EU stands in terms of internal security
- external relations: the European Council will address this item in the light of the most recent developments

The annotated draft agenda will serve as the basis for draft conclusions, to be prepared in the run-up to the meeting.

Follow-up to the December European Council

The presidency informed ministers about the implementation of the December European Council conclusions. It briefed ministers on the progress and state of play of the main files referred to in the conclusions.

Sustainable European future

The Commission presented its [communication on next steps for a sustainable European future](#). The communication sets out how the EU could contribute to implement the [2030 agenda for sustainable development adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015](#).

The presidency intends to submit the Commission communication to various Council formations for discussion. The results of these debates will feed into the conclusions that the **General Affairs Council** is expected to adopt in June.

Any other business

The Portuguese delegation informed the Council about the outcome of the high level seminar "A Euro for Growth and Convergence" that took place in Lisbon on 24 January 2017.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Protection against fraud to the EU budget

The Council confirmed a political agreement on a [directive strengthening the protection of the EU's financial interests](#), confirming a deal reached in December 2016 with the European Parliament.

Political agreement means that the directive, in all official languages and resulting from the negotiations with the Parliament, has been endorsed at political level. It will now undergo legal-linguistic revision before formal adoption by the Council at first reading. This will be followed by final approval by the European Parliament at second reading.

The directive will establish minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions in the field of the fight against fraud and other illegal activities affecting the EU's financial interests.

For further information about the new directive see the Council's [press release](#) on the agreement reached in December 2016.

Schengen - internal border controls

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation to prolong temporary internal border controls in exceptional circumstances.

For more information see [press release](#).

Visa-waiver agreements - Kiribati, Micronesia, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands

The Council adopted decisions on the conclusion of the agreements between the European Union and Kiribati, Micronesia, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Marshall Islands on the short-stay visa waiver.

European Public Prosecutor's Office

The Council registered the absence of unanimity in support of the proposal for a regulation creating a European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO). This opens the way for a group of at least nine member states to refer the text for discussion to the European Council for a final attempt at securing consensus on the proposal. If this does not prove possible, enhanced cooperation can be considered.

For details, see [press release](#)

ENLARGEMENT

Relations with Kosovo*

The Council adopted a regulation on certain procedures for applying the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and Kosovo of the other part ([PE-CONS 56/16](#)).

Montenegro

The Council adopted conclusions on the following Court of Auditors' report:

"Strengthening administrative capacity in Montenegro: progress but better results needed in many key areas".

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

TRADE POLICY

Belarus - Textile imports

The Council adopted a regulation repealing quota restrictions on imports of textiles and clothing from Belarus, amending regulation 2015/936 ([5580/17](#) + [PE-CONS 54/16](#)).

This follows the release of political prisoners in August 2015 and several positive initiatives taken by Belarus over the last two years, contributing to an improvement in EU-Belarus relations. Adoption of the regulation is without prejudice to a further recourse to quotas in the future should the human rights situation in Belarus seriously deteriorate.

The European Parliament adopted its position at first reading on 19 January 2017, following an agreement between the institutions.

INTERNAL MARKET

Non-road mobile machinery engines: type-approval and pollutant emissions

The Council decided not to object to the adoption by the Commission of two regulations supplementing [regulation 2016/1628](#) in order to set out new requirements relating to:

- emission limits and type-approval for internal combustion engines for non-road mobile machinery ([15755/16](#) + ADD1-ADD4), and
- the monitoring of gaseous pollutant emissions from in-service internal combustion engines installed in non-road mobile machinery ([15756/16](#) + ADD1).

The Commission regulations are delegated acts pursuant to article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. They can now enter into force, unless the European Parliament objects.

ENVIRONMENT

Biodiversity and ecosystem services

The Council approved a revised EU position regarding the status of the EU in the International Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). This position implies that the EU strives *ad interim* to obtain the status of an enhanced observer to IPBES, without prejudice to the long-term objective of full membership, and will be defended at the next session of the IPBES plenary from 7 to 10 March 2017 in Bonn, Germany.
