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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
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To:	Delegations

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Subject:	Council Conclusions on the Mid-Term Review of the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy - Council conclusions (16 October 2017)
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Delegations will find in the Annex the Council conclusions on the Mid-Term Review of the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, adopted by the Council at its 3566th meeting held on 16 October 2017.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE ACTION PLAN ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

(Foreign Affairs Council, 16 October 2017)

1. The Council welcomes the publication of the Mid-Term Review of the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019 and the progress that the EU has made in many areas of the Action Plan. The Council reiterates its strong commitment to implementing the EU's Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy, as an indispensable element of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, in particular through the continued implementation of the EU Action Plan.
2. During these challenging times, and while the global situation as regards respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic principles, including the rule of law, has been progressing in some countries although regressing in others, over the past years the EU and its Member States have promoted consistent actions in support of human rights and democracy.
3. The Action Plan has been instrumental in fostering and delivering a more coherent approach to mainstreaming human rights in all areas of EU external action. The EU has continued to engage actively with international partners, the UN, regional organisations and civil society. The Council reiterates that in an increasingly challenging international context, it is essential to demonstrate leadership, unity, and ensure coherence and consistency in EU action particularly in multilateral fora.
4. The EU human rights and democracy policy in external action has progressively been oriented towards empowering third country actors and regional bodies, boosting their ownership and resilience, as indicated in the EU Global Strategy, and to a model that empowers individuals to understand their rights. The EU is a significant donor in the field of human rights; it operates the largest Human Rights Defenders' support programme worldwide and since 2015 has further expanded its concrete efforts to address the shrinking space of civil society. It also plays a major role in developing and helping to finance National Human Rights Institutions.

5. The EU also continues, through Election Observation Missions and Electoral Assistance, to be a leading supporter of inclusive, transparent and credible elections, as well as the fundamentals of democratic pluralism such as freedom of expression and opinion and freedom of association and assembly. Support to parliaments, political parties, civil society and media have also become an integral part of our efforts to promote inclusive political processes.
6. The rights-based approach to development is a key methodology to ensure that the international human rights framework is respected in, and promoted through, development cooperation. EU instruments have been increasingly coordinated and well-aligned, especially in the case of human rights dialogues, guidelines and Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies. These instruments also complement the work of the UN and regional mechanisms including UN Special Rapporteurs and Representatives.
7. The EU has continued to promote and defend the universality and indivisibility of all human rights. Non-discrimination, human dignity, gender equality and women's empowerment and child rights are at the core of the Action Plan. The EU has also increased its focus on efforts to advance economic, social and cultural rights. The Council calls for continued work to promote and protect persons in situations of vulnerability and to combat any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation.
8. The Council commends the extensive work accomplished in this regard by the High Representative/Vice President, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the European Commission and the European Parliament as well as the active contribution of EU Member States to implement the Action Plan's commitments. The Council welcomes the involvement of and support from civil society organisations in taking forward the Action Plan.

9. As implementation will continue into 2019, the Council invites all partners to continue to contribute to further achievements. The EU will continue to work to further improve the evaluation of the human rights impact of its actions and to enhance its communication. Promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and rule of law remain, and will continue to remain, a core priority of the EU's foreign and security policy beyond 2019.
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