

15578/14

(OR. en)

PRESSE 585
PR CO 59

PRESS RELEASE

3347th Council meeting

General Affairs

Brussels, 18 and 19 November 2014

Presidents **Sandro Gozi**
State Secretary for European Affairs of Italy
Graziano Delrio
State Secretary

P R E S S

Rue de la Loi 175 B – 1048 BRUSSELS Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319 / 6319 Fax: +32 (0)2 281 8026
press.office@consilium.europa.eu <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press>

15578/14

1
EN

Main results of the Council

General Affairs

The Council prepared the European Council to be held on 18-19 December. The European Council will focus, in particular, on further efforts to promote job creation and European competitiveness. "The Commission's initiative to mobilise 300 bn EUR of investment will be key to supporting long-term growth and job creation. We look forward to its presentation at the next European Council", said Sandro Gozi, State Secretary for European Affairs of Italy and President of the Council.

The Council discussed inter-institutional programming and the priorities being considered for inclusion in the 2015 Annual Work Programme. The Council also took note of the agreements for future coordination between the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament on this issue, taking into full account the Strategic Agenda adopted by the European Council in June 2014. "The issue is very high on the agenda of the Italian Presidency. It is important that all three EU institutions align their legislative priorities for Europe. In this manner we will be able to promote a faster and more efficient decision-making process, and thus deliver better results for our citizens", State Secretary Gozi said.

Ministers also discussed the Rule of Law Initiative. "We would like to promote the debate on the issue on a regular basis, once or twice a year. We believe that this can help strengthen the rule of law, the fundamental pillar on which the European project is based, and promote a constructive dialogue among Member States in order to prevent, rather than address, the risks of threats to the rule of law", said State Secretary Gozi after the meeting.

Cohesion

The Council adopted conclusions on the sixth cohesion report, recognising that cohesion policy is the main investment policy at EU level for pursuing economic, social and territorial cohesion. "We agreed that cohesion policy plays a key role in stimulating growth and create new jobs, and is an essential instrument for achieving the objectives of Europe 2020, the EU's growth strategy", said Graziano Delrio, State Secretary of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Italy, chairing today's Council meeting. "This is very much in line with what was established in the European Council conclusions of June 2014, which emphasized the need for fiscal consolidation and structural reforms, but also agreed to focus on growth, supported by cohesion policy.", said Mr Delrio.

The Council exchanged views on the cohesion policy's contribution to the preparation of the mid-term review of the EU 2020 strategy. "I am very satisfied that the Council shared the view that the objectives of cohesion policy and those of Europe 2020 strategy are closely linked", added Mr Delrio.

Under any other business, the European Commission informed Ministers on the latest developments

as regards the negotiation and adoption of the partnership agreements and programmes under the European structural and investment funds.

“Today we received assurance from the new Commissioner, Corina Crețu, that the adoption of the programmes will be as swift as possible, while outstanding issues will be addressed through joint work between the Commission and the member states”, *concluded Mr Delrio.*

CONTENTS¹**PARTICIPANTS..... 6****ITEMS DEBATED**

Preparation of the December European Council..... 8

Legislative planning..... 8

Ensuring respect for the rule of law mechanism..... 8

Follow-up to the Strategic Agenda - energy and climate..... 9

Any other business - Improving the functioning of the EU..... 9

COHESION 10

Sixth cohesion report 10

Cohesion policy and the EU 2020 strategy mid-term review 16

Any other business 17

– Partnership agreements and operational programmes 17

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED*GENERAL AFFAIRS*

– European Regional Development Fund - Council conclusions on the Court of Auditors' report..... 18

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

– Euro-Mediterranean Agreement between the EU and Lebanon 18

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

– EU support to the extraordinary chambers in the Courts of Cambodia..... 18

¹

- 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.

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

- Norway - liberalisation of trade in agriculture 19

INTERNAL MARKET

- Agricultural and forestry vehicles - Type-approval requirements 19

AGRICULTURE

- Animal feed - adjustment of the maximum levels of undesirable substances 19

HEALTH

- Statistics on health care expenditure and financing 20

PARTICIPANTS

Belgium:

Mr Didier REYNDERS

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs,
External Trade and European Affairs

Mr Geert BOURGEOIS

Minister-President of the Flemish Government and
Flemish Minister for Foreign Policy and Immovable
Heritage

Bulgaria:

Ms Meglena KUNEVA

Deputy Prime Minister for European Policy and
Institutional Issues

Mr Tomislav DONCHEV

Deputy Prime Minister for EU Funds and Economic
Policy

Czech Republic:

Mr Lubomír ZAORÁLEK

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ms Karla ŠLECHTOVÁ

Minister for Regional Development

Denmark:

Mr Kim JØRGENSEN

State Secretary for Foreign Policy

Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN

Permanent Representative

Germany:

Mr Michael ROTH

Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr Reinhard SILBERBERG

Permanent Representative

Estonia:

Mr Matti MAASIKAS

Permanent Representative

Ireland:

Mr Dara MURPHY

Minister of State for European Affairs and Data Protection

Greece:

Mr Dimitrios KOURKOULAS

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Mr Spyridon EFSTATHOPOULOS

General Secretary for Public Investments and Structural
and Investments Funds

Spain:

Mr Iñigo MENDEZ DE VIGO Y MONTOJO

State Secretary for European Affairs

Ms Marta FERNÁNDEZ CURRÁS

State Secretary for Budget and Expenses

France:

Mr Harlem DÉSIR

State Secretary for European Affairs

Croatia:

Mr Mato ŠKRABALO

Permanent Representative

Mr Branko GRČIĆ

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Regional
Development and EU Funds

Italy:

Mr Sandro GOZI

State Secretary in charge of European Affairs

Mr Graziano DELRIO

State Secretary

Cyprus:

Mr Kornelios KORNELIOU

Permanent Representative

Mr George GEORGHIOU

Permanent Secretary of the Directorate General for
European Programmes, Coordination and Development

Latvia:

Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA

Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr Jānis REIRS

Minister of Finance

Lithuania:

Mr Rolandas KRIŠČIŪNAS
Mr Aloyzas VITKAUSKAS

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs
Deputy Minister of Finance

Luxembourg

Mr Christian BRAUN

Permanent Representative

Hungary:

Mr Péter SZIJJÁRTÓ
Mr Péter GYÖRKÖS

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade
Permanent Representative

Malta:

Mr Ian BORG

Parliamentary Secretary for the EU Presidency 2017 and
EU Funds within the Ministry for European Affairs and
Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto

Netherlands:

Mr Pieter de GOOIJER

Permanent Representative

Austria:

Mr Walter GRAHAMMER

Permanent Representative

Poland:

Mr Rafał TRZASKOWSKI
Ms Maria WASIAK

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Minister for Infrastructures and Development

Portugal:

Mr Bruno MAÇÃES
Mr Miguel POIARES MADURO

Secretary of State for European Affairs
Minister for Regional Development

Romania:

Mr George CIAMBA
Mr Eugen TEODOROVICI

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Minister for European Funds

Slovenia:

Ms Dragoljuba BENČINA
Mr Rado GENORIO

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Permanent Representative

Slovakia:

Mr Peter JAVORČÍK
Mr Ľubomír VÁŽNY

State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Deputy Minister for Investments

Finland:

Ms Lenita TOIVAKKA
Ms Pilvi-Sisko VIERROS-VILLENEUVE

Minister for European Affairs and Foreign Trade
Permanent Representative

Sweden:

Ms Margot WALLSTRÖM
Mr Sven-Erik BUCHT

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Rural Affairs

United Kingdom:

Mr Ivan ROGERS
Mr Tariq AHMAD

Permanent Representative
Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Department for
Communities and local Government)

Commission:

Mr Frans TIMMERMANS
Ms Corina CREȚU

First Vice-President
Member

ITEMS DEBATED

Preparation of the December European Council

The Council examined a draft annotated agenda, drawn up by the President of the European Council in cooperation with the presidency and the Commission, for the European Council meeting to be held on 18 and 19 December ([14866/14](#)).

The European Council in December will focus on:

- economic and social policy; the European Council will look at further efforts to promote growth, job creation and European competitiveness and discuss the Commission's initiative mobilising 300 bn EUR of investment over the period 2015-2017;
- other items; specific external relations issues, such as the Ebola crisis, are expected to be addressed in the light of developments on the international scene.

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

Legislative planning

The Council discussed the priorities set out in a letter of intent from the President and the Vice-President of the Commission for inclusion in its work programme for 2015. It invited the Commission to take into account the various points raised by ministers and agreed to continue to discuss the issue once the annual programme is available, ideally, at its next meeting on 16 December.

The presidency also updated ministers on its discussions with the Commission on how to manage annual and multiannual planning with the other institutions in the longer term. The Council took note of the intention of the presidency to present a draft political declaration setting out the commitment of all three institutions to work together to establish common arrangements on inter-institutional legislative planning.

The common basis for all this work is the strategic agenda adopted by the European Council in June and the ten priority points drawn up by Commission President Juncker.

Ensuring respect for the rule of law mechanism

The Council held an exchange of views on an idea to establish a regular political dialogue among member states within the Council on ensuring respect for the rule of law.

The debate was based on a discussion paper by the presidency ([15206/14](#)), which takes into account the [conclusions on fundamental rights and the rule of law](#) adopted in June 2013, and the rule of law mechanism presented by the Commission on 11 March 2004 ([7632/14](#) + [ADD 1](#)).

The ministers expressed their broad support for the Council's central role in safeguarding the rule of law in the Union and stressed that the dialogue must be constructive, non-discriminatory and should, in the first instance, focus on best practices.

The Council agreed to return to the issue at its the next meeting on 16 December.

Follow-up to the Strategic Agenda - energy and climate

By way of a follow-up to the June [European Council](#), the Council took stock of the strategic agenda focusing on the chapter on energy and climate policy.

Ministers evaluated progress achieved in this area over the past five years and gave their assessment of where we stand and what can be done to improve or accelerate implementation. Particular attention was given to the completion of the internal energy market by 2014.

The ministers' discussion was based on a [presidency report](#) focusing on the five energy policy areas that have recently been addressed by the [European Council](#): the internal energy market, energy efficiency, infrastructure, energy security and climate.

The implementation discussion is a new exercise launched by the Italian Presidency, which at the July [General Affairs Council](#) proposed an improvement in the follow-up to [European Council](#) "orientations", and to focus on the five priorities set out in the strategic agenda adopted in June. The idea is to complement the comprehensive implementation reports that are published every six months, and which cover all sectors, by issuing monthly reports that focus on a specific pillar of the strategic agenda.

The Council's debate was the third [European Council](#) follow-up discussion on a pillar of the strategic agenda. It follows the discussion on growth in September and on freedom, security and justice in October.

Any other business - Improving the functioning of the EU

The presidency informed the Council about the outcome of the third meeting of the [Friends of the Presidency Group](#) on improving the functioning of the EU which took place on 7 November 2014.

COHESION**Sixth cohesion report**

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the sixth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion:

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. RECALLING the Treaty on the European Union, and in particular Article 3, third subparagraph, thereof providing for that the Union shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States, and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, in particular Article 174 thereof which stipulates that in order to promote its overall harmonious development the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of economic, social and territorial cohesion and, in particular, shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favored regions, paying particular attention among the regions concerned to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions;
2. RECALLING the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and in particular Article 175 thereof which provides that Member States shall conduct their economic policies and shall coordinate them in such a way as, in addition, to attain the objectives of economic, social and territorial cohesion and that the formulation and implementation of the Union's policies and action and the implementation of the internal market shall take into account the objectives set out in Article 174 and shall contribute to their achievement and that the Commission shall submit a report to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions on the progress made towards achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion and on the manner in which the various means provided for in the referred Article have contributed to it;
3. RECALLING the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and in particular Article 349 which provides for specific measures for outermost regions also as far as conditions of access to structural funds are concerned;
4. ACKNOWLEDGING the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions - Sixth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion: investment for jobs and growth (hereinafter also: "the Sixth report"), composed of the Commission Communication¹ and a Staff Working Document;

¹ COM(2014) 473 final.

5. RECALLING the Conclusions of the European Council of 7 and 8 February 2013¹, in particular points 2, 3 and 88 thereof that, in order to allow for a detailed assessment of the quality of spending, ask the General Affairs Council to discuss every two years the implementation and results of the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds and to provide input to the Spring Council's overall assessment of all EU policies and instruments to deliver growth and jobs across the European Union, and RECALLING that, according to Article 53 of the Regulation (UE) No.1303/2013, the Commission shall report each year from 2016 to the Council on ESI Fund programmes;
6. TAKING NOTE of the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - The urban dimension of EU policies – key features of an EU urban agenda²;
7. TAKING NOTE of the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Guidelines on the application of the measures linking effectiveness of the European Structural and Investment Funds to sound economic governance according to Article 23 of regulation (EU) No.1303/2013³;
8. RECALLING the Conclusions of the European Council 26/27 June 2014, in all its elements, and in particular the "Strategic agenda for the Union in times of change", which calls for a Union of jobs, growth and competitiveness to be achieved through a set of priorities for the Union for the following five years, to be achieved – *inter alia* – by making full use of the EU structural funds; RECALLING the Conclusions of the European Council 23/24 October 2014 on economic issues⁴;
9. TAKING NOTE that the Communication on the Sixth Report sets cohesion policy into the broader context of the economic and financial crisis and in relation to the achievements of the Europe 2020 strategy objectives and targets; summarises the achievements regarding smart, inclusive and sustainable growth; explains the evolution of cohesion policy over time; presents the main new regulatory innovations laid down for the 2014-2020 programming period introduced to enhance the result orientation of the policy; takes stock of the preliminary findings from the negotiations on the Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes submitted at the time the Sixth report was issued;
10. RECOGNISING that Europe is facing challenges in terms of competitiveness, high and persistent unemployment, poverty and social exclusion and in pursuing economic, social and territorial cohesion, considering that Member States differ in terms of severity of their challenges and that it is necessary to boost growth and jobs in a sustainable and balanced manner;

¹ EUCO 37/13.

² COM(2014) 490 final.

³ COM(2014) 494 final.

⁴ EUCO 169/14.

11. RECOGNISING that cohesion policy is the main investment policy at EU level for pursuing economic, social and territorial cohesion and one of the main investment policies to achieve the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and because of that it needs to be fully aligned to the Europe 2020 strategy, while providing a large support in a number of domains;
12. TAKING NOTE of the consequences of the crisis, in particular the decline of public investment by 20% in real terms between 2008 and 2013, and by 60% in the most affected Member States and the elimination of many of the gains in increasing employment and reducing unemployment achieved before the crisis, RECOGNIZING that the crisis reinforced the role of cohesion policy in boosting growth and jobs and reducing disparities between the level of development of various regions and ACKNOWLEDGING the valuable mitigating effect of cohesion policy against the economic and financial crisis in many countries, considering that the investments supported by cohesion policy have helped to prevent from a further drop of public investments and higher rates of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion in the EU;
13. ACKNOWLEDGING the tangible benefits and positive results already achieved and estimated for cohesion policy in 2007-2013 as well as the possible indirect spill-over effects but, nevertheless, REGRETTING the reversal of the trend towards economic, social and territorial convergence among regions prevailing before the crisis;
14. ACKNOWLEDGING the increased efforts to develop monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the results of cohesion policy, WELCOMING the further improvement of these processes adopted for 2014-2020 programming period, in order to strengthen result-orientation and maximize the potential for an evidence-based, effective and efficient delivery of cohesion policy and to ensure that the investments supported by the ESI Funds are more effective and the use of the Funds more efficient;
15. RECOGNISING the reference to the territorial dimension included in the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment (ESI) Fund regulatory framework and TAKING NOTE that all territories, including urban areas, can play a key role, in line with Member States development needs and institutional arrangements, in implementing cohesion policy and meeting the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy by giving territorially differentiated local answers to the common European challenges;
16. TAKING NOTE that good governance is important for cohesion policy efficient implementation as well as for the impact on Member States and regions' economies and thus that the effectiveness of cohesion policy also relies on the institutional and administrative capacity of Member States and authorities involved in the programming and implementation of the co-financed interventions;

17. RECALLING that Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 (Common Provision Regulation) broadens and reinforces the link between cohesion policy and the EU economic governance, by requiring that the programmes take into account the National Reform Programmes, where appropriate, and relevant country-specific recommendations, as well as by identifying measures ensuring that the effectiveness of ESI Funds is underpinned by sound economic policies;
18. ACKNOWLEDGING that the thematic concentration fulfilled in the 2014-2020 Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes makes the focus of cohesion policy on Union priorities more evident, and confirms that cohesion policy is a major instrument aimed at supporting growth and jobs at EU-level, RECALLING the importance of appropriate regulatory, institutional and strategic frameworks in order to ensure the effectiveness of investments supported by ESI Funds, and UNDERLINING that the adopted programmes are designed and will be implemented in accordance with subsidiarity, shared management and partnership principles and underpinned by a specific intervention logic;
19. CONSIDERING that the findings of the Sixth Report could provide valuable input to the Europe 2020 strategy review process that will be finalized in 2015;
20. WELCOMES the Sixth report;
21. RECOGNISES that in the current programming period cohesion policy continues to play a key role for the re-launch of growth and jobs across the EU, while concentrating its intervention in the less developed regions, supporting investments capable of boosting growth and creating sustainable employment, and fostering economic, social and territorial cohesion in all EU regions, and, to that aim, WELCOMES the commitment to support growth and jobs, announced in the Strategic Agenda adopted by the European Council, and TAKES NOTE that the European Council supports the incoming Commission's intention to launch an initiative mobilising 300 billion euro of additional investment from public and private sources over the period 2015-2017;
22. RECALLS the objective of cohesion policy to promote the overall harmonious development across the EU and POINTS OUT that the multi-level governance structure, underpinned by the partnership principle, as well as the sectorial and territorial integrated approach are the main features of the policy;
23. CALLS UPON the Commission and the Member States to ensure full commitment to implement cohesion policy as reformed for the 2014-2020 period, ensuring consistency with the adopted provisions, and to avoid additional obligations or burdensome application of the rules;

24. STRESSES that the new programming exercise needs to ensure the quality of the interventions and the compliance with the relevant country-specific recommendations as well as with the ex-ante conditionalities and RECALLS the supportive role that cohesion policy can play in promoting important reforms, and removing long-term bottlenecks, and the reinforced link between cohesion policy and economic governance;
25. In that spirit CALLS ON the Commission and the Member States to accelerate the negotiation and the procedures leading to adoption of all the Partnership Agreements and all the 2014-2020 Programmes, UNDERLINES the negative impacts that could derive from a late adoption of the programmes, STRESSES the importance of ensuring the availability of the allocated resources, as agreed within the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2014-2020, and URGES the Commission and the Member States to cooperate and explore all the possibilities in order to facilitate the prompt and timely implementation of the programmes 2014-2020 and to speed up all procedural steps needed to preserve the availability of the financial resources within the EU budget;
26. UNDERLINES the importance of simplification and RECOMMENDS that the Commission and the Member States continue their efforts to simplify the implementation of cohesion policy, in order to enhance the result orientation of the policy and to reduce administrative burdens at all levels; STRESSES the importance of platforms to share good practices in various areas of implementation;
27. RECALLS that cohesion policy investments in many Member States play a key role in achieving the Europe 2020 strategy objectives and INVITES the Member States to adequately undertake relevant structural reforms in order to increase the effectiveness of investments supported by the ESI Funds; RECOMMENDS the Commission and the Member States to take into account the findings of the Sixth report and CALLS UPON them to pay attention to cohesion policy's role in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy review and its potential contribution to prepare EU economy for the future;
28. CALLS UPON the Member States to explore opportunities linked to sound and transparent financial instruments and to involvement of private resources, while minimizing the risks and ensuring that no additional burdens are put in the long-term on public budgets, and INVITES the Commission to facilitate the exchange of good practice and knowledge in that respect;

29. INVITES the Commission to implement the measures to link the effectiveness of ESI Funds to sound economic governance in dialogue with Member States and in full respect of the principles and conditions laid down in Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 while RECALLING that under the first strand of measures linking effectiveness of ESI Funds to sound economic governance, the Commission should be able to request amendments to the Partnership Agreement and to the programmes in order to support the implementation of relevant Council recommendations or to maximise the growth and competitiveness impact of the available ESI Funds where Member States are receiving relevant financial assistance and that reprogramming should be used only in cases where it could indeed have a direct impact on the correction of the challenges identified in the relevant country-specific recommendations under the economic governance mechanisms in order to avoid frequent reprogramming which would disrupt fund management predictability;
30. AGREES that the objectives of enhancing growth and jobs could be achieved through a coherent interaction within the EU economic policy mix of fiscal consolidation, structural reforms and growth enhancing investment supported by cohesion policy, UNDERLINES that EU economic governance and cohesion may have a positive correlation, considering that effective, high quality cohesion funding can enhance growth and jobs and as a result have positive effect on public finances, and that EU economic governance and cohesion policy should cooperate in order to deliver the objective of "sustainable, sustained and balanced growth"¹ in the EU;
31. RECALLS that good governance does not create, but rather reduces unnecessary administrative burdens at all levels and contributes to create a favorable environment for the effectiveness of the ESI Funds as well as other public and private investments; ENCOURAGES the Member States to continue reinforcing the institutional and administrative capacity to ensure the efficiency and the effectiveness of the investments and INVITES the Commission to facilitate the exchange of good practice and knowledge in that respect and explore possibilities for further simplification and proportionality taking into account the findings in the Sixth report on varying governance capacities;
32. ENCOURAGES the Commission and the Member States to further analyse and develop the territorial dimension of cohesion policy, in line with Member States development needs and institutional arrangements, taking note of the Territorial Agenda 2020, and to continue the work towards an EU Urban agenda ensuring that it is made in full respect of the subsidiarity principle and competences under the EU Treaties, taking into account the intergovernmental cooperation on the issue;

¹ Six Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, p. 248.

33. RECOMMENDS that a regular debate in the General Affairs Council takes place among relevant ministers to discuss on the implementation and results of the ESI Funds, contributing in a meaningful and substantial way to ensure effective implementation and result orientation of cohesion policy, debating on the ESI Funds on the basis of the yearly Commission summary reports as well as Commission strategic reports in 2017 and 2019¹, and providing input, as requested by the European Council in February 2013², to the Spring Council's overall assessment of all EU policies and instruments to deliver growth and jobs across the European Union;
34. RECALLS that this debate would add substance to the discussion in the General Affairs Council, by focusing on key issues, ensuring that a relevant part of the EU budget is spent in the most effective way to support growth and jobs;
35. UNDERLINES the need to ensure that this debate is coordinated with relevant Council formations, in particular with ECOFIN, fully respecting the competencies of each, to ensure that adequate information is shared as appropriate;
36. INVITES all the EU Institutions and the Member States to consider these Conclusions, also in the context of Europe 2020 strategy review process as well as in any developments to boost growth and jobs."

Cohesion policy and the EU 2020 strategy mid-term review

The Council had an exchange of views on a presidency note ([15466/14](#)) on the contribution of cohesion policy to the preparation of the mid-term review of the EU 2020 strategy.

The presidency note depicts the main actions undertaken under the Italian presidency during the second semester of 2014 to prepare the ground for the review.

Ministers stressed the significant contribution that cohesion policy can make to drive investments and achieve the objectives of the EU 2020 strategy. They emphasised the importance of implementing the cohesion programmes and called for further simplification of the rules to place less burden on public administration and the final beneficiaries.

¹ Article 53 of the Regulation (UE) No. 1303/2013.

² EUCO 37/13.

The review of the EU 2020 strategy is being addressed in all relevant Council configurations, each focusing on aspects within its competence. The presidency intends to feed the outcome of the different Council formations' discussion into a summary report to be endorsed by the General Affairs Council of 16 December and forwarded to the European Council of 18 and 19 December. This summary will provide input to the Commission which is expected to present proposals in time for the March 2015 European Council to have a discussion. The review of the strategy is due to be endorsed by the European Council in 2015.

Any other business

– *Partnership agreements and operational programmes*

The Commissioner in charge of Regional Policy, Corina Crețu, briefed ministers on the latest developments on the negotiation and adoption of partnership agreements and programmes under the European structural and investment funds. She informed ministers that the Commission had deferred the deadline for submitting operational programmes by one week to 24 November 2014. The Commissioner expects that more than half of the operation programmes will be adopted by the end of the year or will be subject to the carry-over procedure of commitments to next year.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

GENERAL AFFAIRS

European Regional Development Fund - Council conclusions on the Court of Auditors' report

The Council adopted conclusions on the Court of Auditors' special report concerning the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) entitled "Has the ERDF successfully supported the development of business incubators?". The conclusions are set out in [14820/14](#).

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Euro-Mediterranean Agreement between the EU and Lebanon

The Council approved, on behalf of the EU, the signature, provisional application and conclusion of a protocol to the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement between the EU and Lebanon, to take account of the accession of Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia to the EU.

Additionally, the Council approved an accompanying joint declaration so as to take into account the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

EU support to the extraordinary chambers in the Courts of Cambodia

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the EU membership of the Principal donors group of the extraordinary chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC):

"Recalling all relevant conclusions of the Council, the European Union reaffirms its full support for the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). The EU has become one of the largest financial contributors of the ECCC. In this context and in line with its policy of deciding to apply for membership of international bodies on a case-by-case basis, following thorough analysis of the merits of the specific application, the Council agrees that the European Union should apply to become a member of the Principal Donors Group for the ECCC, provided that this step does not affect adversely the membership status or role of any EU Member State currently represented in the Principal Donors Group. The Council stresses the importance of this step in particular to monitor how the EU contribution is used.

The Council agrees that the following rules should apply:

- 1) A member of the EU Delegation to the United Nations in New York will be the representative of the European Union in the Principal Donors Group for the ECCC;
- 2) The EU will treat information dealt with in the Principal Donors Group for the ECCC with due regard to the confidentiality of its proceedings;
- 3) The Commission, in coordination with the EEAS, will regularly report to the **Asia-Oceania Working Party.**"

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

Norway - liberalisation of trade in agriculture

The Council adopted a decision authorising the Commission to open negotiations with Norway with a view to achieving progressive liberalisation of bilateral trade in agricultural products, in the framework of Article 19 of the agreement on the European Economic Area.

INTERNAL MARKET

Agricultural and forestry vehicles - Type-approval requirements

The Council decided not to oppose the entry into force of a Commission regulation supplementing and amending regulation 167/2013 with regard to vehicle construction and general requirements for the approval of agricultural and forestry vehicles ([13533/14](#)).

The Commission regulation is a delegated act, which may now enter into force unless the European Parliament objects.

AGRICULTURE

Animal feed - adjustment of the maximum levels of undesirable substances

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission amendment to annex I to directive 2002/32 as regards maximum levels for arsenic, fluorine, lead, mercury, endosulfan and *Ambrosia* seeds ([14410/14](#)).

Directive 2002/32 prohibits the use of products intended for animal feed which contain levels of undesirable substances exceeding the maximum levels laid down in Annex I to that directive. Those levels should be:

- increased for arsenic, fluorine and lead in calcareous marine shells used for animal nutrition because the current maximum levels in those products are not achievable;
- increased for mercury in food by-products used in pet food to make it consistent with current maximum levels in muscle meat of fish for human consumption.
- decreased for endosulfan in oilseeds, maize and derived products used in feed.

In addition, a footnote on the presence of *Ambrosia* seeds in feed deleted by mistake, was re-inserted to avoid dissemination of those seeds in the environment.

This Commission regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the regulation, unless the European Parliament objects.

HEALTH

Statistics on health care expenditure and financing

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation setting up rules for the production of European statistics in the area of health care expenditure and financing ([13812/14](#)).

The Commission regulation is subject to the so called regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.
