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To: Delegations

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Subject: Council Conclusions on Special Report No 22/2017 by the European Court of Auditors: "Election Observation Missions - Efforts made to follow up recommendations but better monitoring needed"

Delegations will find in the annex Council Conclusions on Special Report No 22/2017 by the European Court of Auditors: "Election Observation Missions – Efforts made to follow up recommendations but better monitoring needed", adopted by the Council at its meeting held on 28 May 2018.

**Council Conclusions on Special Report No 22/2017 by the European Court of Auditors:
"Election Observation Missions - Efforts made to follow up recommendations
but better monitoring needed"**

(Foreign Affairs Council, 28 May 2018)

1. The Council welcomes the positive spirit in which the Special Report No 22/2017 by the European Court of Auditors entitled "Election Observation Missions - Efforts made to follow up recommendations but better monitoring needed" was prepared, and the exceptionally good co-operation between the Court of Auditors, the EEAS and the Commission services.
2. The Council notes the positive conclusions of the Special Report with regard to the efforts made by the Commission services and the EEAS to support the implementation of EU Election Observation Missions' recommendations. According to the report, presentation of EU Election Observation Missions' recommendations has improved in recent years, and both political dialogue and electoral assistance were used to support implementation of these recommendations.
3. The Council generally supports the recommendations of the Court to the EEAS and Commission services in order to improve the follow-up of EOMs, including: a) The preparation and presentation of final reports and recommendations should follow a more consistent approach; b) Local stakeholders should be consulted on the recommendations before the report is finalised; c) Discussions with stakeholders should be scheduled at least four working days after the final report is released, allowing sufficient time to study the report and recommendations; d) Election Follow-up Mission should be deployed when possible, at a suitable time between elections; e) A centralised database of recommendations should be set up; f) The implementation of EU Election Observation Missions' recommendations should be tracked on a regular basis.

4. The EU is firmly committed to a systematic and effective follow-up of EU as well as OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Missions' recommendations and has undertaken a wide range of actions to promote them. The Council welcomes that the EEAS and the Commission services have accepted all the Court's recommendations and that their implementation is well underway. The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015-2019) already requires consolidating best practices for leveraging EU and OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Missions' recommendations in EU and Member States political dialogues and democracy support activities. Further engagement on EU EOM recommendations by EP Delegations could also be further encouraged. In this regard, a central database of recommendations is being developed; the format of the Return Visits of the Chief Observers has been reviewed to allow more in depth discussions with stakeholders on recommendations and to support EU Delegations in preparing follow-up plans, and a more consistent presentation of Election Observation Missions' reports is underway. Also, the number of Election Follow-up Missions foreseen for 2018 has been increased.

5. The Council considers that EU Election Observation Missions are a highly visible demonstration of the EU's commitment to supporting democracy and promoting respect for human rights and civil society participation across the world. The role of Election Observation Missions is to closely observe and assess the electoral process – before, during and after election day – and to provide the country's authorities (whether Government, Parliament, the Election authorities, the Judiciary and other relevant bodies), civil society and political parties with concrete suggestions for improving the process in the future. Their longer-term objectives aim at improving the election framework and the context in which elections are held, strengthening the independence and accountability of state institutions and enhancing citizens' participation and supporting political pluralism. Therefore, the recommendations issued by EU Election Observation Missions are central to efforts to improve future elections and are a crucial element of the EU's efforts to support the deepening of democracy.

6. The Council encourages the EU and its Member States to further develop concrete projects supporting the recommendations of the EU and OSCE Election Observation Missions. The Council underlines that both the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and bilateral funds can be utilised by EU Delegations for this, depending on the nature of the recommendations.
7. The Council recognizes the joint responsibility of the EU Institutions and Member States in pursuing coherence and coordination in the follow-up to Election Observation Missions, including via regular collective analysis and reporting as well as integrating follow-up in political and human rights dialogues with partner countries. The Council notes the important role of EU Delegations - operating in close cooperation with the EU Member States, the Commission services and the EEAS, as well as the European Parliament - as the main interlocutors between the EU and local actors with regard to maintaining political dialogue with the governing authorities, and implementing electoral and democracy assistance. At the same time, the main responsibility for a successful implementation of Election Observation Missions' recommendations lies with local stakeholders; the political will of state authorities as well as sufficient capacity of independent institutions and civil society are indispensable.
8. The Council encourages the EU and its Member States to continue to cooperate closely on achieving a greater impact in following up to Election Observation Missions, and to ensure complementarity between the EU's electoral and democracy support and the recommendations of the EU's electoral observation missions.
