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OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3629th Council meeting

General Affairs

Luxembourg, 26 June 2018

President

Ekaterina Zaharieva

Deputy prime minister for judicial reform and minister for
foreign affairs of Bulgaria

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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>).
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ITEMS DEBATED

Enlargement

The Council discussed the EU's enlargement policy and the stabilisation and association process. It adopted [conclusions](#) on this issue.

The discussion took place in the light of the Commission's annual communication and reports on Turkey, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

In its conclusions, the Council reaffirms its commitment to the enlargement process and to the European perspective of the Western Balkans.

The Council also reaffirms the need for fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits, combined with the EU's capacity, in all its dimensions, to integrate the new members, in line with the renewed consensus on enlargement approved by the [European Council](#) in 2006.

The focus will remain on fundamental reforms in the areas of rule of law, fundamental rights, economic development and competitiveness, the strengthening of democratic institutions and public administration reform. A solid track record of reform implementation and concrete and tangible results in these crucial areas remain essential, in particular for the overall pace of the accession negotiations.

The Council agreed to respond positively to the progress made by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania, and set out the path towards opening accession negotiations with both countries in June 2019.

June European Council

The Council finalised preparations for the European Council meeting of 28 June 2018 by discussing draft conclusions.

The European Council will focus on:

- migration: EU leaders are expected to discuss the internal and external dimensions of migration policy, including the reform of the Common European Asylum System.
- security and defence: leaders are expected to discuss EU-NATO cooperation ahead of the NATO summit in July and provide orientations for further work, in particular on permanent structured cooperation. The European Council will also address military mobility, the European Defence Fund, the European Defence Industrial Development Programme and Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy.
- economy and finance: leaders are expected to adopt conclusions on several issues recently debated under the Leaders' Agenda, such as taxation, innovation and digital issues. The European Council will also endorse the country-specific recommendations under the 2018 European Semester and discuss the future handling of the multi-annual financial framework, including a timeline. It is expected that leaders will also discuss trade.
- external relations: the European Council will address this item in the light of the most recent developments.

The European Council is also expected to adopt a decision on the composition of the European Parliament.

European Semester

As part of the European Semester process, the Council approved integrated country-specific recommendations and transmitted them to the [European Council](#) for endorsement.

The country-specific recommendations provide member states with yearly guidance on national reforms. They adapt priorities identified at EU level to the national level.

After endorsement by the [European Council](#), they are expected to be formally adopted by the Council in July.

Interinstitutional agreement on better law-making

Ministers reviewed the implementation of the interinstitutional agreement (IIA) on better law-making, based on a [note](#) from the Presidency.

The IIA on better law-making provides for closer cooperation between the institutions in a number of areas, in particular legislative programming. It also covers impact assessments and public consultations, delegated and implementing acts, transparency, simplification and implementation of EU law. On several provisions follow-up is required.

The main strands of work for the Council during the first half of 2018 concerned:

- the monitoring of the progress made under the [joint declaration](#) on the EU's legislative priorities for 2018-2019
- interinstitutional negotiations on cooperation and information-sharing in relation to international agreements
- work on the handling of impact assessments within the Council
- negotiations on non-binding criteria for the delineation between delegated and implementing acts
- work at technical level on the transparency and communication of the legislative procedure, including a joint database on the state of play of legislative files

Rule of law in Poland

The Council held a hearing under Article 7(1) TEU on the rule of law in Poland.

The hearing offered a possibility for ministers to have an in-depth exchange with Poland on the concerns identified in the Commission's reasoned proposal.

Next multiannual financial framework

Over lunch, ministers discussed the Commission's proposals for the multiannual financial framework for 2021–2027 with Commissioner Oettinger.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

GENERAL AFFAIRS

European Citizens' Initiative

The Council agreed its negotiating position on a proposed revision of the European Citizens' Initiative. The aim of the new rules is to make it easier to launch and support initiatives and to increase the impact of the tool. The Council's position will serve as a mandate for the Austrian presidency to enter negotiations with the European Parliament, once the Parliament has agreed its negotiating stance.

In its negotiating mandate, the Council backs most of the suggestions put forward by the Commission. This includes proposals concerning:

- enhanced information and assistance to the organisers, including the creation of contact points in member states and an online collaborative platform
- the possibility of partial registration of initiatives
- translation of all initiatives into all EU languages
- enabling organisers to choose the start date of the 12-month collection period
- providing a free online service for the collection of signatures, with the possibility of uploading signatures collected on paper, as well as using e-ID for support
- allowing EU citizens to support an initiative regardless of their country of residence
- extending the examination phase and providing for a more inclusive public hearing for successful initiatives

On the minimum age for supporting a European Citizens' Initiative, the Council prefers to keep the current system whereby initiatives can be signed by EU citizens whose age entitles them to vote in elections to the European Parliament.

Given that a common system for the collection of signatures will be made available, free of charge, the Council also proposes to discontinue the use of individual collection systems. This would simplify the procedure for both organisers and national authorities.

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

Composition of the European Parliament

The Council recommended to the European Council to adopt the decision establishing the composition of the European Parliament, as set out in document [EUCO 7/18 REV 1](#).

Rules of procedure of the General Court

The Council approved amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the General Court aimed at making the use of the e-Curia IT application mandatory for the lodging of procedural documents and the service of documents by the General Court Registry in connection with proceedings before the General Court.

The Rules of Procedure of the General Court are established by the General Court in agreement with the Court of Justice. They require approval by the Council.

EU maritime security strategy (EUMSS) action plan

The Council adopted conclusions on the revision of the EU maritime security strategy (EUMSS) action plan.

90% of the EU's external trade and 40% of its internal trade is transported by sea. Safe and secure seas and oceans are of fundamental importance for free trade, the EU economy and living standards.

The EU has interests but also responsibilities in global maritime security. This is why the EU actively contributes to safe and secure seas and oceans in different parts of the world, using several of the EU's existing instruments such as the Instrument for Peace and Stability and the European Development Fund, as well as EU policies, such as the Common Security and Defence Policy.

The EU's maritime security strategy action plan was first adopted on 16 December 2014 to help safeguard the interests of the EU and protect its member states and citizens. It addresses global maritime risks and threats, including cross-border and organised crime, threats to freedom of navigation, threats to biodiversity, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing or environmental degradation due to illegal or accidental discharge.

The revision adopted today allows for a more focused reporting process to enhance awareness and better follow-up to the strategy. The action plan brings together both internal and external aspects of the Union's maritime security. The actions foreseen in the plan also contribute to the implementation of the EU Global Strategy, the renewed EU internal security strategy 2015-2020, the Council conclusions on global maritime security, and the joint communication on international ocean governance.

For more details, see the [Council conclusions](#).

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Strategic Partnership Agreement between the EU and Japan

The Council adopted a decision on the signing and provisional application of the Strategic Partnership Agreement between the EU and Japan. The objective of the agreement is to strengthen cooperation and dialogue across a broad range of bilateral, regional and multilateral issues. It highlights the shared values and common principles that form the foundation of the EU-Japan partnership, including human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

On 29 November 2012, the Council authorised the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to open negotiations with Japan on a framework agreement. The negotiations on the framework agreement were successfully concluded in April 2018.

[EU delegation in Japan](#)

BUDGETS

Multiannual financial framework - progress report

The Council took note of a Presidency progress report summarising the progress of work within the Council on the package of proposals concerning the multiannual financial framework for 2021–2027.

Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for France

The Council adopted a decision mobilising €9.9 million under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) to provide support to 1 858 workers made redundant in Air France (9302/18). The redundancies are the result of a continuation of major structural changes in world trade patterns due to globalisation.

The EGF helps workers to find new jobs and develop new skills when they have lost their jobs as a result of changing global trade patterns, e.g. when a large company shuts down or a factory is moved outside the EU, or as a result of the global financial and economic crisis. The help provided by the EGF consists of co-financing measures such as job-search assistance, careers advice, tailor-made training and re-training, mentoring and promotion of entrepreneurship. It also provides one-off, time-limited individual support, such as job-search allowances, mobility allowances and allowances for participating in lifelong learning and training activities.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Macro-financial assistance to Ukraine

The Council adopted a decision on a new package of macro-financial assistance for Ukraine ([10071/2/18 REV 2](#) + *REV 1 ADD 1 REV 1* + [PE-CONS 27/18](#)).

A fresh €1 billion in loans will support economic stabilisation and a programme of structural reforms, covering Ukraine's financing needs over a period of two and a half years. It will supplement resources provided by the IMF and other donors.

This is the third package of macro-financial assistance for Ukraine since 2014. The EU pledged €1.6 billion in 2014 and €1.8 billion in 2015, of which Ukraine received €2.81 billion. A €600 million instalment was cancelled in January 2018 due to incomplete compliance with the conditions set.

The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission have issued a joint statement in the light of this.

The further disbursements will be conditional on Ukraine respecting democratic mechanisms and the rule of law, and guaranteeing respect for human rights. They will be subject to economic policy and financial conditions, focusing on structural reforms and sound public finances and including a timeframe for their fulfilment. The conditions will be laid down in a memorandum of understanding between Ukraine and the Commission.

The Commission will be responsible for disbursing the macro-financial assistance. The Commission and the European External Action Service will monitor the fulfilment of the conditions.

JUSTICE

Regulation replacing annexes A and B to regulation (EU) 2015/848 on insolvency proceedings

The Council adopted a regulation replacing annexes A and B to regulation (EU) 2015/848 on insolvency proceedings ([10070/18](#)).

Council conclusions on EU external cyber capacity building guidelines

The Council adopted conclusions on the EU external cyber capacity building guidelines ([10072/18](#)).

These conclusions provide guidance for a coherent holistic approach but also to take into account human rights considerations and EU values.

Council decision on the signing of amended Convention 108 on data protection

The Council adopted a decision authorising member states to sign the Council of Europe amended Convention 108 on data protection ([10129/18](#)).

The aim of the modernisation of Convention 108 is two-fold: on the one hand, to better address challenges resulting from the use of new information and communication technologies, and, on the other hand, to strengthen the implementation of the Convention.

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

Cooperation in specific fields outside the four freedoms

The Council adopted two decisions establishing the EU position to be taken in the Joint Committee of the European Economic Area (EEA) concerning amendments to protocol 31 to the EEA agreement, on cooperation in specific fields outside the four freedoms ([9267/18](#), [9270/18](#)).

The aim of the two decisions is to allow the contracting parties of the EEA Agreement to continue their cooperation in the Union actions funded from the general budget regarding company law, and regarding the operation and development of the internal market of goods and services, and internal market governance tools.

EEA Agreement - incorporation of EU legislation

The Council adopted a decision establishing the EU position to be taken in the Joint Committee of the European Economic Area (EEA) concerning the amendment of Protocol 30 to the EEA Agreement, on certain provisions on the organisation of cooperation in the field of statistics ([9273/18](#)).

The aim of the decision is to incorporate regulation (EU) 2017/1951, which extends the European statistical programme 2013-17 to 2020, into the EEA Agreement.

TRADE

WTO negotiations on the apportioning of the EU's TRQs in view of Brexit

In preparation for the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the Council authorised the Commission to open formal negotiations within the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on how to divide up existing EU tariff rate quotas (TRQs) between the EU27 and the UK.

After Brexit, the EU will continue to apply its scheduled commitments for goods, but its existing quantitative commitments, in particular the TRQs for agricultural, fish and industrial products, will require adjustments to take into account the fact that the EU's WTO schedule will no longer be applicable to the UK.

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

AGRICULTURE

ECAs report on the CAP basic payment scheme: Council conclusions

The Council adopted conclusions on [Special Report No 10/2018](#) from the European Court of Auditors entitled: 'Basic Payment Scheme for farmers – operationally on track, but limited impact on simplification, targeting and the convergence of aid levels'.

The report focuses on the effectiveness of the scheme introduced in 2015 and having an annual expenditure of around €18 billion. It highlights that the scheme is operationally on track, but that its impact on simplification, targeting and the convergence of aid levels is limited. As a consequence, the ECA makes a number of recommendations to the Commission concerning the correction of farmers' payment entitlements, key controls by paying agencies, the systems for disseminating information among member states, and the role of national certification bodies.

TRANSPORT

Civil aviation safety

The Council adopted a regulation on common rules in the field of civil aviation and establishing a European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) ([PE-CONS 2/18](#)). The regulation includes the first ever EU-wide rules for civil drones of all sizes.

Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic abstained and Malta and Cyprus voted against (statements: [10063/18 ADD 1 REV 1](#)).

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

Aviation agreements with China

The Council adopted two decisions on signing aviation agreements with China. The first one relates to civil aviation safety ([9698/18](#), [9702/18](#)) and the second one to certain aspects of air services ([9682/18](#), [9685/18](#)).

HEALTH

Food regulation on flavourings

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation (EU) .../... of XXX amending annex I to regulation (EC) No 1334/2008 as regards the inclusion of pyroligneous distillate in the Union list of flavourings ([9586/18](#) + ADD 1).

The Commission regulation is adopted through the so-called 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.

CULTURE

EU strategic approach to international cultural relations

The Council took note of a report on certain elements of the future EU strategic approach to international cultural relations (9952/18).

The report was prepared by the Friends of the Presidency Group on EU strategic approach to international cultural relations.
