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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Delegations

Subject: Draft Council Conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No. 28 "*The majority of simplification measures brought into Horizon 2020 have made life easier for beneficiaries, but opportunities to improve still exist*"
- Presidency text

Delegations will find attached the Presidency text on the draft Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No. 28 "The majority of simplification measures brought into Horizon 2020 have made life easier for beneficiaries, but opportunities to improve still exist" with a view to the Research Working Party on 21 January 2019.

DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS'
SPECIAL REPORT NO. 28 "THE MAJORITY OF SIMPLIFICATION MEASURES
BROUGHT INTO HORIZON 2020 HAVE MADE LIFE EASIER FOR BENEFICIARIES,
BUT OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE STILL EXIST"

The COUNCIL:

1. WELCOMES the Special Report No. 28/2018 by the European Court of Auditors entitled "The majority of simplification measures brought into Horizon 2020 have made life easier for beneficiaries, but opportunities to improve still exist";
2. TAKES NOTE of the conclusions and recommendations of the Special Report and ACKNOWLEDGES their importance in view of the remaining years of Horizon 2020 and especially in view of the proposed new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation for 2021-2027, "Horizon Europe"¹;
3. RECOGNISES, whilst acknowledging the value of stable rules for participation in European research and innovation activities, that the already introduced simplification measures have reduced the administrative burden for beneficiaries and that most actions have been effective, particularly the establishment of the Common Support Centre (CSC); WELCOMES the European Commission's intention to improve its mechanisms for examining the quality of outsourced *a posteriori* audits;

¹ 9865/18 + ADD 1-6 and 9870/18 ADD 1-5 + ADD 6 COR1

4. CONSIDERS that a better overall communication process entailing improved guidance to applicants and beneficiaries through the validation process of the proposed European research and innovation activities makes the evaluation process easier and more manageable for those groups; WELCOMES therefore, the European Commission's intention to better communicate with applicants and beneficiaries, notably by improving the Research Enquiry Service, and to enhance further the introduction of simplified tools and guidance, in particular for SMEs and start-ups;
5. WELCOMES the Commission's intention to better align the legal frameworks and make the implementation of the initiative easier for the benefit of final beneficiaries;
6. RECOGNISES that applicants often spend unnecessary time on the development of ultimately unsuccessful projects but notes that the Horizon 2020 rules for participation allow for both one and two stages evaluation processes, which could reduce such workload; According, INVITES the European Commission to explore enhanced use of two-stage proposals evaluation where and if appropriate;
7. CONSIDERS that simplified cost options, e.g. lump sums and inducement prizes, can further reduce the administrative burdens for research and innovation beneficiaries and APPRECIATES that the Commission will intensify the testing of simplified cost options, in particular lump sums;
8. NOTES that evaluators' daily remuneration rate has remained unrevised for more than ten years and STRESSES that the evaluation of submitted proposals process under the Union's research and framework programmes should rely on high quality evaluators; Therefore WELCOMES the European Commission's intention to review the remuneration conditions for expert evaluator;

9. NOTING that the information campaign undertaken by the European Commission on the "Seal of Excellence" concept launched in 2015 has raised awareness, but that it has been only partially accepted by national or other Union funding schemes, WELCOMES the Commission Horizon Europe proposals that aim at increasing the recognition of the "Seals of Excellence" in order to promote excellent proposals evaluated above threshold but not funded under the Framework Programme;
10. Also WELCOMES that the Commission's Horizon Europe proposals contain clear provisions on synergies and complementarities with other MFF funding programmes, provide a one stop shop for innovation through the European Innovation Council, provide a new approach to rationalise the European R&I partnership landscape, aim to improve the evaluation process by providing better feedback to applicants at all stages of the evaluation and to reduce the administrative burden for applicants even further with a control system ensuring an appropriate balance between trust and control.
