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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council

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To: Delegations

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Subject: Annual Implementation Report 2016 of the EU Gender Action Plan II
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of
Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020
- Council conclusions (11 December 2017)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the Annual Implementation Report 2016 of the EU Gender Action Plan II - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020, as adopted by the Council at its 3587th meeting held on 11 December 2017.

Council conclusions**Annual Implementation Report 2016 of the EU Gender Action Plan II****Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020**

1. The EU and its Member States are strongly committed to the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. The EU and its Member States are global leaders in promoting gender equality, the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls and their empowerment, across all areas of external relations. The Gender Action Plan is one important tool to contribute to this. The Council reaffirms that gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are vital for the 2030 Agenda and for achieving its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both as a stand-alone goal and as a cross-cutting priority.
2. The EU and its Member States reaffirm their commitment to promote women's and girls' rights, gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and their protection as a priority across all areas of action.¹ This includes promoting their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and empowerment, strengthening their meaningful and active voice and participation in social, economic, cultural, political and civil life, and ensuring their physical and psychological integrity. This also entails shifting the institutional culture of the EU and its Member States to deliver on their commitments.

¹ New European Consensus on Development: 'Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future', OJ C 210, 30.6.2017, p. 1

3. The Council recalls its conclusions of 26 May 2015 on Gender in Development² and of 26 October 2015 on the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020³ (GAP II) and reiterates the importance of ensuring its strategic and efficient implementation, monitoring, evaluation, reporting and follow-up in all EU external relations.
4. The Council welcomes the progress made in the implementation of the Gender Action Plan II 2016-2020⁴ as presented in the first annual implementation report. It welcomes the detailed and substantive information contained in the report as well as its broad geographical coverage. The Council commends the joint efforts of the EU and the Member States in reporting on their activities both at the level of partner countries and in headquarters, including in CSDP missions and operations. The Council stresses that the full and effective implementation of the GAP II requires strengthened efforts and commitment by the Commission Services, the EEAS and the Member States.
5. The Council notes the progress made across the six institutional culture shift objectives, such as a more dedicated political and management leadership, increased mainstreaming of gender actions across new initiatives, increased use of gender analyses and sex disaggregated data, and the increase of dedicated funds and gender expertise. The Council stresses that continued progress against the full range of institutional culture shift objectives, including better integration of these activities into mandatory organisational practices, is essential. The Council also welcomes that the GAP II has provided a renewed opportunity for enhanced collaboration between all EU actors and the Member States, both in headquarters and in partner countries, on gender equality, human rights and the empowerment of women and girls.

² 9242/15

³ 13201/15

⁴ 11786/17 - SWD(2017) 288 final

6. The Council notes that three thematic priorities of the GAP II were selected in all regions and that most attention of the EU Delegations and Member States at partner country level was given to the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls both in the public and in the private spheres (GAP II Objective 7); to ensuring equal access for girls and women to all levels of quality education and vocational education and training, free from discrimination (GAP II Objective 13); to the promotion and protection of the equal rights and ability of women to participate in policy and governance processes at all levels (GAP II Objective 17).
7. The Council stresses that the implementation of all thematic priorities and objectives across a wider geographical scope and by all different actors is essential for transforming the lives of women and girls, men and boys. This requires long-term and high-level engagement from the political level as well as close and on-going coordination between political, policy and operational levels, and progressive integration of lessons learned.
8. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services⁵. The Council welcomes the detailed reporting on EU activities on sexual and reproductive health and rights as outlined in the new European Consensus on Development, and stresses the need to improve the reporting methodology, continue mobilising additional funds and supporting stakeholders in this area.

⁵ New European Consensus on Development: 'Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future', OJ C 210, 30.6.2017, p. 1

9. The EU recognises the key role of civil society organisations working towards gender equality, notably women's organisations, in implementing the GAP II. The Council stresses the importance of enhancing support to women human rights' defenders and encourages stronger engagement and consultation with civil society at all levels in the implementation of the GAP II, including in gender analysis, and throughout the programming and policy cycles. It further stresses the importance of engaging with men and boys in effective ways to eliminate gender inequalities, address discriminatory social norms, combat gender stereotypes and strengthen the participation of women and girls in political and civil life. Furthermore, it calls on all actors to develop strategies that tackle the root causes of gender inequalities, and violence against women and girls, including intimate partner violence and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, and child, early and forced marriage.
10. The Council takes note of the recommendations for improving the GAP II implementation and urges the Commission Services, the EEAS and all Member States to implement them. It calls for enhanced efforts in gender mainstreaming across all sectors throughout all EU external action, including the systematic use of gender analyses, sex and age disaggregated data and enhanced use of GAP II indicators in the project and programme management cycles. Furthermore, it underlines the need for increased coordination between the EU and Member States, both at country level and headquarters, in order to integrate gender perspectives into political dialogues with partner countries. It also calls for enhanced leadership at all levels, not least at senior political and management levels, regarding the implementation of the GAP II. The Council stresses the need for further integration of gender perspectives in trainings at headquarters level and in partner countries. The Council calls on the Commission to use the mid-term review of multiannual indicative programmes as an opportunity to review initiatives to better deliver on the GAP II objectives.
11. The Council welcomes the launch of the Spotlight Initiative as an example of EU-UN joined-up action to eliminate violence against women and girls. It urges the Commission Services and the EEAS to closely coordinate and cooperate with Member States, to seek complementarities and explore partnerships with existing initiatives, in order to achieve the expected results of the GAP II. It also welcomes the Commission's leadership of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies.

12. The Council calls on the Commission Services and the EEAS to make full use of the accountability provided by the GAP II reporting – both its process and the final result – as a means to praise good performance and analyse shortcomings of each of their components. The Council calls on the Commission Services and the EEAS to explore and identify ways of simplifying and harmonising the reporting requirements as appropriate, improving the reporting methodology, including the use of appropriate indicators in all policy areas. In order to improve the substantive analysis of the implementation of the GAP II, the Council further stresses the need to ensure that the report captures qualitative feedback and best practices from the Commission Services, the EEAS and the Member States. The Council looks forward to the second implementation report and calls on Member States and all relevant EU actors in HQ and in EU Delegations to contribute fully and in a timely manner to future reporting exercises.
