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#### 'I/A' ITEM NOTE

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

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No. prev. doc.: 12006/22

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Subject: Draft Council Conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No. 15/2022 "*Measures to widen participation in Horizon 2020 were well designed but sustainable change will mostly depend on national authorities*"  
- Approval

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1. On 15 June 2022, the European Court of Auditors published its Special Report No 15/2022 entitled "Measures to widen participation in Horizon 2020 were well designed but sustainable change will mostly depend on national authorities"<sup>1</sup>.
2. Pursuant to the rules laid down in the Council conclusions on improving the examination of special reports drawn up by the Court of Auditors<sup>2</sup>, the Permanent Representatives Committee, at its meeting on 22 June 2022, instructed the Working Party on Research to examine the report in accordance with the rules laid down in the above-mentioned conclusions<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eca.europa.eu>

<sup>2</sup> 7515/00 FIN 127 + COR 1

<sup>3</sup> 10280/22

3. On 4 July 2022, the European Court of Auditors presented its report to the Working Party on Research.
  4. The Presidency presented a proposal for draft Council conclusions on this special report, set out in document 11132/22, subsequently revised as set out in documents 11900/22 and 12006/22.
  5. The Working Party discussed the Presidency proposal at its meetings on 14 July, 6 and 22 September 2022. No delegation raised objections to the final compromise text proposed by the Presidency, as set out in the annex to this note.
  6. The Permanent Representatives Committee is therefore invited to recommend to the Council to adopt, as an "A" item, the draft conclusions set out in annex to this note.
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**Draft COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS**

**on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 15/2022:**

**'Measures to widen participation in Horizon 2020 were well designed but sustainable change will mostly depend on efforts by national authorities'**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING

- Horizon 2020's specific objective 'Spreading excellence and widening participation' which aimed to fully exploit the potential of Europe's talent pool and to ensure that the benefits of an innovation-led economy are both maximised and widely distributed across the Union in accordance with the principle of excellence;
- its conclusions of 1 December 2017 'From the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020 towards the ninth Framework Programme'<sup>4</sup>, in which it acknowledged that measures addressing 'Spreading excellence and widening participation' (SEWP) have to continue and should be strengthened, including monitoring SEWP as a cross-cutting issue;
- its conclusions of 1 December 2020 on 'the New European Research Area' (ERA)<sup>5</sup>, which stresses the need to fully activate and use the potential of ERA to contribute to regional, national and European policy objectives by means of targeted measures at national and/or EU level to promote and facilitate openness and inclusiveness of collaboration networks and to reduce fragmentation and disparities between and within Member States;

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<sup>4</sup> 15320/17

<sup>5</sup> 13567/20

1. WELCOMES the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 15/2022: *Measures to widen participation in Horizon 2020 were well designed but sustainable change will mostly depend on efforts by national authorities*<sup>6</sup> and TAKES NOTE of the Commission's replies accompanying the Special Report<sup>7</sup>; ACKNOWLEDGES the Court's findings that widening measures introduced under Horizon 2020 addressed some of the causes of the low participation of some Member States in the Framework Programme and that some projects have already delivered a number of positive intangible and tangible outcomes; TAKES NOTE of the Court's conclusion that genuine sustainable change requires continuous national investments and reforms in national R&I systems;
2. TAKES NOTE of the Court's recommendation to strengthen and extend the use of the Policy Support Facility; ACKNOWLEDGES the importance of accompanying measures under the Policy Support Facility as well as the Technical Support Instrument to support Member States in strengthening their national R&I system; INVITES the Commission to take into account the different national systems and the reforms already undertaken by the Member States; and ENCOURAGES regular policy dialogues on a voluntary basis between the Member States and the Commission in the relevant fora to jointly identify pathways for the implementation of reforms and investments, including those planned under the Recovery and Resilience Facility taking into account Member States competence;

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<sup>6</sup> The Special Report is available in all official languages on the Court's website: [https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR22\\_15/SR\\_Horizon\\_2020\\_Widening\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR22_15/SR_Horizon_2020_Widening_EN.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> The Commission's replies accompanying the Special Report are available in all official languages on the Court's website: [https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECARepplies/COM-Replies-SR-22-15/COM-Replies-SR-22-15\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECARepplies/COM-Replies-SR-22-15/COM-Replies-SR-22-15_EN.pdf)

3. TAKES NOTE of the Court's recommendation to aim for a more geographically balanced participation of widening countries in widening measures; CALLS on the Commission to monitor participation levels and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the whole portfolio of widening measures, including new measures introduced under Horizon Europe, and, if continuous significant imbalances emerge, to assess the need for more tailor-made actions and targeted networking activities, including through National Contact Points, in order to achieve a wider level of participation and address disparities in participation among widening countries while ensuring the allocation of funding continues to be based on the principle of excellence;
4. WELCOMES the Court's recommendation to facilitate the timely availability of complementary funding; STRESSES the importance of synergies between Union programmes, on the one hand, and between European, national and regional levels, on the other hand, in order to ensure coherent programming and implementation and to address the R&I divide; CALLS on the Commission and the Member States to tackle delays in the implementation of complementary funding and to strive for its simplification;
5. SUPPORTS the Court's recommendation to enhance the capacity of project beneficiaries to exploit their research results; CALLS on the Commission to reinforce the training and coaching provided to widening projects' beneficiaries, to promote contacts between beneficiaries and potential partners including industry, and to encourage valorisation of widening measures' research results; ENCOURAGES the Commission to examine the possibility of providing support in order to enable the valorisation of results achieved under widening measures;
6. SUPPORTS the Court's recommendation to enhance monitoring of widening measures; INVITES the Commission to identify indicators assessing the contribution of widening measures to key impact pathways, including beyond the duration of individual projects, and to evaluate the impact of widening measures on participation in the Framework Programme;

7. ASKS the Commission to take the European Court of Auditors' special report No 15/2022 and the Court's recommendations into account when implementing current and designing future widening measures in the context of the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe and of the preparation of the next Framework Programme.
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