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General Affairs

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President

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¹ • 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>).
 • Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

ITEMS DEBATED

Priorities of the Croatian presidency

The Croatian presidency presented its [priorities](#) and [programme](#) for the next six months.

In the area of general affairs, the Croatian presidency will focus its activities on the remaining work on sectoral and horizontal legislation related to the next multiannual financial framework, both in the Council and with the European Parliament. In this priority area, the presidency is cooperating closely with the President of the [European Council](#), who was called in December to take the negotiations on the multiannual financial framework forward with the aim of reaching a final agreement.

Special attention will be given to the enlargement policy and to achieving further progress by candidates and potential candidates in line with the established criteria, while reaffirming their European perspective. An informal EU-Western Balkans summit will take place in Zagreb in May 2020.

Croatia will continue to work on the effective implementation of the EU Strategic Agenda and on promoting constructive cooperation between the European institutions in setting legislative priorities for the forthcoming period.

The presidency will promote a balanced and sustainable development of the EU aimed at reducing economic, social and territorial disparities, by also taking forward the negotiations on the cohesion policy legislative package under the MFF.

The priorities of the Croatian presidency also include enabling an orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU and starting negotiations on future partnership.

The presidency will continue to promote the EU as a community of values, advocating a comprehensive and efficient approach to prevention, protection and promoting the rule of law in the EU, while strengthening dialogue and unity of member states. The [General Affairs Council](#) will remain seized of these highly important matters.

Conference on the Future of Europe

Ministers exchanged views on the proposed Conference on the Future of Europe due to start in 2020 and end in 2022.

The European Council considered the idea of such a conference at its [meeting on 12 December 2019](#). It asked the Croatian presidency to work towards defining a Council position on the content, scope, composition and functioning of the conference and to engage, on this basis, with the European Parliament and the Commission.

During the discussion, ministers stressed the importance of putting citizens at the heart of the conference and focusing on issues that truly matter to them. As underlined in the conclusions of the December European Council, priority should be given to implementing the Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024 and delivering concrete results. The conference should contribute to the development of EU policies in the medium and longer term in order to better address the challenges facing Europe. Building on the success of the citizens' dialogues which have taken place over the past two years, the process should involve a wide range of stakeholders and groups to ensure that different views and opinions are represented.

Ministers also expressed their views on the detailed organisation of the conference. Many speakers underlined the need to ensure a balanced representation of the three EU institutions and to fully involve national parliaments. Several ministers also expressed their preference for a lean and simple governance of the conference process.

The presidency concluded that discussions would continue after the Council meeting with a view to defining the Council position on the conference and engaging with the other EU institutions.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**ENLARGEMENT****Accession negotiations with Serbia**

The Council adopted the EU common positions on Chapter 4 (Free movement of capital) and Chapter 9 (Financial services) of the acquis for the purposes of accession negotiations with Serbia.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS**Ukraine - EU sanctions list**

The Council added seven persons to the list of those subject to restrictive measures over actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. These new designations come as a consequence of the organisation of Russian local elections on 8 September 2019 in the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol in Ukraine.

[Official Journal of the European Union](#)

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS**Significant deviation procedures of Hungary and Romania**

The Council adopted a report to the [European Council](#) on its recent decisions on the significant deviation procedures regarding Hungary and Romania.

The report takes stock of the latest developments regarding the budgetary situation of both countries and notes that the Council decided on 5 December 2019 that Hungary and Romania had not taken effective action in order to remedy the significant observed deviation from the adjustment path toward their medium-term budgetary objectives ([5044/20](#)).

CUSTOMS UNION**TIR convention**

The Council adopted a decision setting out the position to be taken on behalf of the EU within the administrative committee for the Customs Convention on the international transport of goods under cover of TIR carnets (the "TIR convention") as regards the amendment of the Convention.

The TIR convention came into force in 1978 as has now 68 contracting parties. The objective of the TIR Convention is to facilitate international transit through a simplified Customs transit procedures and an international guarantee system. The underpinning of the so-called TIR system are a common customs document, the TIR carnet, a common guarantee system, the mutual recognition of customs controls and secured vehicle containers. Usage of the TIR system is limited to authorized operators ([5203/20](#)).
