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OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3752nd Council meeting

General Affairs

Brussels, 25 February 2020

President **Andreja Metelko-Zgombić**
State Secretary for European Affairs of Croatia

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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>).
- 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

March European Council

Ministers started preparations for the **European Council** meeting on 27 and 28 March by discussing an [annotated draft agenda](#). The annotated draft agenda will serve as the basis for draft conclusions, to be prepared in the run-up to the meeting.

At their meeting in March, EU leaders will focus on economic issues. They will hold an exchange of views on strengthening the economic base of the EU. Leaders are expected to provide guidance on tackling existing barriers in the single market and on the EU's industrial policy.

They will be invited to endorse policy guidance on the priorities for the [Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy](#), as well as the [recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area](#).

The **European Council** will also discuss the EU's digital policy.

In line with its conclusions of October 2019, the **European Council** will return to the issue of enlargement. Under external relations, it will also hold an exchange of views on preparations for the Western Balkans summit to be held in Zagreb in May.

Leaders will hold a strategic discussion on EU-China relations ahead of the EU-China summit and the EU-China leaders' meeting.

The **European Council** will also be invited to endorse the new strategic guidelines in the field of justice and home affairs.

EU-UK relations

The Council adopted a decision authorising the opening of negotiations with the UK for a new partnership agreement and nominating the Commission as the EU negotiator. The Council also adopted negotiating directives for the talks, which are annexed to the decision.

Both texts are based on a [recommendation](#) presented by the Commission on 3 February 2020. They also build on the [revised political declaration](#) of 17 October 2019, as well as the [European Council](#) (Art. 50) guidelines of [23 March 2018](#) and [29 April 2017](#).

The EU is determined to have as close as possible a partnership with the UK in the future. The future partnership should be comprehensive and cover the areas outlined in the political declaration:

- trade and economic cooperation
- law enforcement and judicial cooperation in criminal matters
- foreign policy, security and defence
- thematic areas of cooperation

The first formal meeting between the EU and UK negotiators is expected to take place in early March. EU ministers also discussed the next steps in the EU-UK relationship.

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

Enlargement methodology

The Commission presented to ministers its proposals for a revised enlargement methodology.

The proposals were set out in its [communication](#) of 5 February 2020 entitled 'Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans'. Their overall aim is to enhance credibility and trust on both sides and yield better results on the ground. Ministers took note of the communication.

The Commission is now expected to present updates on the reform process in Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia. On this basis, ministers are expected to hold a comprehensive discussion in March both on the opening of negotiations with these candidate countries, and on the revision of the enlargement methodology.

Legislative programming

The Council discussed legislative work in 2020 and multiannual programming, which will take place with the 2019-2024 Commission for the first time.

Both annual and multiannual programming exercises are provided for in the [interinstitutional agreement on better law-making](#) of 2016. Their aim is to improve cooperation between the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament in setting and delivering on the EU's political agenda.

Ministers outlined their views on the areas and legislative proposals to be included in the joint declaration on the EU's legislative priorities for 2020. They also discussed which major policy objectives could be included in the multiannual programme and how to monitor the implementation of the joint conclusions to be drawn up by the three institutions. Several speakers mentioned the importance of climate and digital transformation.

On the basis of the debate, interinstitutional negotiations on the joint declaration on the EU's legislative priorities for 2020 will begin. The Council is expected to approve that declaration at its meeting on 24 March and return to the multiannual programme in May.

European rule of law mechanism

Under 'any other business', the Commission informed ministers about ongoing preparations for the annual rule of law cycle and report, presented in its [communication of 17 July 2019](#).

The Commission focused on the methodology that it intends to follow when preparing its report and the information that it plans to gather. It stressed that it intended to involve member states in the process as much as possible and that the monitoring approach would be the same in every member state. The first report would be presented well in advance of the annual rule of law dialogue, which is expected to take place in the Council this autumn.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Council extends the mandates of six EU Special Representatives

The Council extended the mandates of six EU Special Representatives (EUSRs): for the Sahel, Kosovo, the Horn of Africa, Central Asia, the Middle East Process, and the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia.

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

ENERGY

Labelling of tyres – new rules

The Council adopted its position at first reading on a regulation revising labelling rules for tyres ([14649/19](#) + [ADD1](#)) following a provisional agreement reached between the European Parliament and the Council on 13 November 2019. The aim of the regulation is to make labels more visible and to give consumers more information to enable them to choose safer, more fuel-efficient and quieter tyres.

The regulation now needs to be adopted by the European Parliament at second reading before being published in the Official Journal.

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