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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' special report No 15/2023: "The EU's industrial policy on batteries: New strategic impetus needed"

Delegations will find attached a Presidency proposal for draft Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' special report No 15/2023: "The EU's industrial policy on batteries: New strategic impetus needed", with a view to the discussion by the Working Party on Competitiveness and Growth (Industry) at its meeting on 14 September 2023.

DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS
on the European Court of Auditors' special report No 15/2023:

“The EU’s industrial policy on batteries: New strategic impetus needed”

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. WELCOMES the European Court of Auditors' special report No 15/2023 entitled “The EU’s industrial policy on batteries: New strategic impetus needed” and TAKES NOTE of the Court’s observations;
2. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of the development and production of batteries as a strategic imperative for the EU, enabling the clean energy transition and supporting the competitiveness of relevant strategic industrial sectors, in particular the automotive sector, and UNDERLINES that battery production in the EU is projected to increase rapidly until 2030;
3. STRESSES the importance of the policy objectives and intervention tools set out in the Commission’s strategic action plan on batteries of 2018 as a relevant framework for developing a European industrial policy on batteries and as a key instrument in support of the EU battery value chain;
4. WELCOMES the Court’s observations that the Commission largely delivered the most significant actions in its action plan, that the Commission’s strategy for batteries is supported by European stakeholders and aligned with the strategies of Member States, and that the Commission put in place key instruments in support of the battery sector, such as the creation of stakeholder platforms encompassing the whole value chain, a legislative proposal for a new regulation on batteries which significantly expands the scope of the previous legislative framework, and increased public financial support for research, innovation and manufacturing projects; also TAKES NOTE of the provision of national aid through two Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEIs);

5. EXPRESSES CONCERN, however, about the significant risk identified by the Court that the Commission's zero-emission goal for 2035 will not be reached due to insufficient battery production, or that it might be reached on the basis of imported batteries or electric vehicles, to the detriment of the EU battery value chain and associated jobs, and REGRETS the recently observed decline in private investments in the battery value chain in Europe;
6. NOTES that the EU's battery value chain remains strongly dependent on supplies from outside the EU and that, from 2030 onwards, EU manufacturers could face a shortage of key battery raw materials due to the combined effects of an increase in global demand, driven mostly by the electrification of road transport, and the limitations of the EU's domestic supply of raw materials which is both scarce and rigid; ACKNOWLEDGES the Commission's renewed efforts to address this situation by issuing its proposals for a Critical Raw Materials Act and a Net Zero Industry Act;
7. TAKES NOTE of the Court's observation that public funding of the EU's industrial policy on batteries is insufficiently coordinated and location-dependent, in spite of the multiple funding streams supporting new battery research and manufacturing projects amounting to at least EUR 1.7 billion from the EU budget during the 2014-2020 period and State aid of up to EUR 6 billion between 2019 and 2021, approved inter alia under IPCEIs, and that the results fall short of ambitions;
8. WELCOMES the overall conclusion nevertheless made by the Court that the Commission's promotion of an EU industrial policy on batteries has been effective, despite the identified shortcomings in the monitoring of relevant data, in coordinating and targeting EU funding, as well as the fact that access to raw materials remains a major strategic challenge for the EU's battery value chain;

9. SUPPORTS the Court's recommendations to the Commission to:

- update its strategy for a sustainable and competitive European battery value chain on the basis of realistic expectations to reflect the global evolution of the battery sector since 2018 as well as its current strategic challenges, especially the access to raw materials;
- include quantified and time-bound targets for the twin goals of achieving climate neutrality and a competitive automotive sector in the EU, and ensure the consistency of the targets for the domestic production of batteries with the 2035 ban on emissions for passenger cars and vans, and with the supply of the raw and advanced materials needed to sustain that production;
- strengthen its monitoring of the battery value chain by basing it on timely and independently verifiable data, thus enabling the tracking of actual progress towards the EU's objectives and warning against potential risks to achieving them, and ensure that the monitoring covers the critical stages of the value chain;
- build and maintain a consolidated overview of EU and, where information is available, national funding sources that provide financial support for projects in the battery value chain;
- improve the coordination and targeting of the EU's financial support for the battery value chain, taking account of the national funding already provided to this industry;
- ensure that all participants in an IPCEI on batteries have a level playing field in accessing public funding and financial support, so that the collaborations envisaged by the IPCEI can be implemented as scheduled and that spill-over effects can be achieved to spread the benefits across Member States and companies of all sizes;

10. ASKS the Commission to take the European Court of Auditors' special report No 15/2023 and the Court's recommendations into account in its policies, and to update the strategic action plan on batteries, with a particular focus on securing access to raw materials.