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## OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3710th Council meeting

### General Affairs

Brussels, 18 July 2019

President **Tytti Tuppurainen**  
Minister for European Affairs of Finland

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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.

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## **ITEMS DEBATED**

### **Next multiannual financial framework**

The presidency informed ministers about its plans regarding work on the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-2027.

In its June 2019 conclusions, the European Council called on the Finnish presidency to pursue work on the MFF and develop the negotiating box. On that basis, EU leaders will hold an exchange of views in October, aiming for an agreement before the end of the year.

To prepare for the exchanges among the leaders, the presidency will continue thematic discussions at technical level in July and September. Furthermore, the presidency has prepared a questionnaire for delegations to reply to over the course of the summer break. In addition, bilateral meetings at ministerial level will take place ahead of the General Affairs Council meeting in September.

In parallel, the presidency will seek to make the greatest possible progress in negotiations on the MFF-related sectoral proposals.

### **Priorities of the Finnish presidency**

The Council heard a presentation on the priorities of the Finnish presidency for the next six months.

The overall priorities of the Finnish presidency are: strengthening common values and the rule of law, making the EU more competitive and socially inclusive, strengthening the EU's position as a global leader in climate action, and protecting the security of citizens comprehensively.

In the second half of 2019, ministers in the General Affairs Council will focus on the following topics in particular:

- multiannual financial framework
- rule of law
- enlargement
- hybrid threats

[Finnish presidency priorities and programme \(presidency website\)](#)

## **Implementation of the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024**

Ministers exchanged views on the implementation of the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. The debate was held in public session.

The strategic agenda, which was agreed by EU leaders in June, is intended to guide the work of the EU institutions over the next five years. It focuses on four main priorities:

- protecting citizens and freedoms
- developing a strong and vibrant economic base
- building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe
- promoting European interests and values on the global stage

Finland is the first presidency to integrate the new priorities of the strategic agenda for 2019-2024 into the Council's work. Ministers discussed how this could best be done, taking into account the multidimensional challenges and opportunities ahead. They also addressed the Council's working methods and the cross-cutting principles of the strategic agenda, such as transparency.

The discussion was based on a paper in which the presidency provided a tentative indication of when and in which Council configurations the main issues would be examined.

During the debate, ministers stressed the importance of achieving tangible results. The EU has to respond to the expectations of citizens. In addition, clear and active communication was considered crucial.

The **General Affairs Council** is expected to return to the implementation of the strategic agenda at its meetings in October and December. The **European Council** will also discuss the follow-up to the strategic agenda at its meeting in October 2019.

[Implementation of the strategic agenda - presidency discussion paper](#)

## **Strengthening the rule of law in the EU**

The Commission presented its communication on strengthening the rule of law in the EU, adopted on 17 July. The communication sets out concrete initiatives for strengthening the rule of law in the EU, grouped around three pillars:

- promoting a rule of law culture
- preventing rule of law problems
- responding effectively to breaches of the rule of law

Ministers provided their initial comments on the Commission's proposals.

They are expected to return to this topic at their meeting in September.

## **Rule of law in Poland**

The Council took stock of the state of play as regards the rule of law in Poland in the light of recent developments, in particular the judgment of the European Court of Justice on Poland's Supreme Court law.

In its judgment of 24 June 2019, the Court of Justice determined that the Polish legislation lowering the retirement age of judges of the Supreme Court is contrary to EU law, as it breaches the principles of the irremovability of judges and judicial independence.

This item on the agenda followed the hearing of Poland at the meetings of the **General Affairs Council** on 26 June, 18 September and 11 December 2018 as part of the Article 7(1) TEU procedure.

## **OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

### **GENERAL AFFAIRS**

#### **Article 7 procedure - hearings**

The Council approved standard modalities for the hearings referred to in Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

Article 7(1) TEU provides for a procedure whereby the Council may determine that there is a clear risk of a serious breach by a member state of the values referred to in Article 2 TEU. Article 7(1) also provides that before making such a determination, the Council must hear the member state in question.

The purpose of having standard modalities for hearings under Article 7(1) TEU is to streamline the process and create a level playing field for all the member states involved. The arrangements cover three possible types of reasoned proposal: by a group of member states, by the European Parliament or by the Commission.

### **FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

#### **ASEAN Regional Forum statement on preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism**

The Council approved the adoption of an ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) statement on preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism. It aims to promote meaningful cooperation between ARF participants and to support their common efforts in countering terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

The statement is expected to be adopted in Bangkok, Thailand, at the ARF meeting on 2 August 2019.

## **EU-ASEAN ministerial statement on cybersecurity cooperation**

The Council approved the adoption of an EU-ASEAN ministerial statement on cybersecurity cooperation.

The statement aims to further strengthen EU-ASEAN cooperation on the diplomatic aspects of cybersecurity policy, as well as the EU's already active participation in the ARF and the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Security of and in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ISM on ICTs Security). The statement will also contribute to the EU's efforts to promote a strategic framework for conflict prevention, stability and cooperation in cyberspace.

The statement is expected to be adopted in Bangkok, Thailand, at the ARF meeting on 2 August 2019.

## **EU-Vietnam relations**

The Council adopted a decision authorising the signing and conclusion of an agreement between the EU and Vietnam establishing a framework for the participation of Vietnam in EU crisis management operations. This agreement will further deepen EU-Vietnam cooperation in the field of common security and defence policy (CSDP), in particular by allowing the participation of Vietnamese personnel in CSDP missions and operations. The agreement is expected to be signed in Hanoi on 5 August 2019.

## **Sanctions - Mali**

The Council added five persons to the list of persons responsible for or complicit in actions or policies that threaten the peace, security or stability of Mali. This decision transposes into EU law the addition on 10 July 2019 by the UN Security Council sanctions committee established by UNSC resolution 2374 (2017) of five persons to the list of persons subject to the travel ban set out in resolution 2374 (2017).

The legal acts were adopted by written procedure on 17 July and include the names and specific reasons for listing.

[Council implementing decision 2019/1216 of 17 July 2019 \(Official Journal of the EU\)](#)

[Security Council 2374 Committee Adds Five Entries to Its Sanctions List \(UN press release\)](#)

[Mali: sanctions may be imposed on actors impeding the peace process \(press release\)](#)



**TRADE****Poultry meat from Ukraine**

The Council adopted a decision on the signing, on behalf of the EU, and provisional application of an agreement in the form of an exchange of letters amending the trade preferences for poultry meat and poultry meat preparations provided for by the Association Agreement with Ukraine ([10721/19](#) - text of the agreement [10752/19](#)).

The Council also approved a decision on the conclusion of the agreement ([10720/19](#)) and agreed to forward the decision to the European Parliament for its consent.

**Joint Committee under the EU-Japan EPA: list of arbitrators**

The Council adopted a decision on the position to be adopted on behalf of the EU within the Joint Committee established under the agreement between the European Union and Japan for an Economic Partnership, as regards the establishment of the list of arbitrators ([10970/19](#)).

The Council also decided to order that the decision of the Joint Committee, as set out in document [10970/19](#), be published in the Official Journal of the EU.

The European Parliament will be informed in accordance with Article 218(10) TFEU.

**ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS****Protocol on the Statute of the European Investment Bank**

The Council adopted a decision amending the Protocol on the Statute of the European Investment Bank ([9725/1/19 REV1](#), [9723/19](#)). The decision increases the subscribed capital of Poland and Romania and amends provisions on the nomination of alternate members of the Board of Directors. The decision will apply one month after the date of application of a previous amendment of the Protocol on the Statute of the European Investment Bank ([Council decision \(EU\) 2019/654](#)) concerning the withdrawal of the UK from the EU.

On 11 March 2019, the European Investment Bank submitted a request to the Council to amend its statute ([7651/19](#)). The purpose of the request was to increase the subscribed capital of Poland and Romania by EUR 5 386 000 000 and EUR 125 452 381, respectively, in line with their requests.

**JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS****Europol - Deputy Executive Director**

The Council selected Mr Jürgen Ebner as a Deputy Executive Director of Europol.

The General Secretariat of the Council will now inform the European Parliament that the competent committee can proceed to the hearing provided for in Article 54(2) of the Europol Regulation.

**TRANSPORT****Cabotage agreement between Italy and Switzerland**

The Council adopted a general approach on the Commission proposal to empower Italy to amend its road transport agreement with Switzerland in order to allow cabotage operations in the course of international road passenger transport in the respective border regions of both countries ([10432/19](#)).

**Cabotage agreement between Germany and Switzerland**

The Council adopted a general approach on the Commission proposal to empower Germany to amend its road transport agreement with Switzerland in order to allow cabotage operations in the course of international road passenger transport in the respective border regions of both countries ([10425/19](#)).

**Wet Lease Agreement between the United States of America, the European Union, Iceland and Norway**

The Council approved the signing and the provisional application of the Wet Lease Agreement between the United States of America, the European Union, Iceland and Norway.

The agreement promotes flexibility in operating arrangements between airlines to lease aircraft with crew by reciprocally removing time limits on such arrangements ([10485/1/19 REV 1](#), [10584/19](#)).

**Preparations for the 40th ICAO Assembly: third batch**

The Council endorsed the text of a number of papers to be submitted by Finland on behalf of the European Union and its member states to the 40th Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), which will be held from 26 September to 4 October 2019 in Montreal (10912/19 + ADD 1-4).

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