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SUSTDEV 82
ONU 57
DEVGEN 125
ENV 433
RELEX 567
AG 53
AGRI 280
TRANS 400

ENER 284
COHOM 99
JEUN 63
EDUC 232
COMER 60
WTO 156
CULT 39
COHAFA 57

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

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Subject: A comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development – Building back better from the COVID-19 crisis
- Council conclusions (22 June 2021)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on a comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development – building back better from the COVID-19 crisis, as adopted by the Council at its 3805th meeting held on 22 June 2021.

**A comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda
for sustainable development – Building back better from the COVID-19 crisis**

Council conclusions

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. *REAFFIRMS* that the European Union (EU) and its Member States stand firmly behind the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which continue to guide the actions taken by the EU and its Member States, both internally and externally to building back better. *RECALLS* its conclusions of June 2017, April 2019 and December 2019, as well as the European Council conclusions of October 2018, and *REAFFIRMS* the commitments therein.
2. *RECALLS* that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. The EU and its Member States will promote women and girls' full enjoyment of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a priority across all areas of action. Also *RECALLS* that the EU is committed to promoting a human rights-based approach, encompassing all human rights, be they civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, at the core of all SDG-related initiatives. Further *RECOGNISES* the importance of focusing on transformative education at all levels as key for empowering citizens to contribute to these objectives.

Challenges posed by COVID-19

3. *RECOGNISES* that the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and has caused reversals on some of the progress made within the EU and worldwide. *STRESSES* that the pandemic and its socio-economic consequences have had disproportionate impacts on women and girls, including suffering increased gender-based violence, including domestic violence and interrupted access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, requiring a global and ambitious response. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services. *UNDERLINES* that the 2030 Agenda provides the shared blueprint for ensuring a sustainable recovery that is equitable, inclusive, socially just, resilient and green. *STRESSES* that its implementation is essential to our world for a prosperous post-pandemic future for all and for ensuring a peaceful and secure life for the current and next generations while respecting the limits of our planet, by upholding democracy, the rule of law, human rights and gender equality, protecting the climate and the environment, building modern, dynamic, and inclusive economies, improving living and working standards, and reducing inequalities, leaving no one behind.

4. *STRESSES* that the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis make it no longer a choice, but a necessity to accelerate innovative and decisive joint action and align investments towards the achievement of the SDGs, by undertaking urgent structural reforms and building back better and greener, to effectively address the root causes of zoonotic diseases as well as other shocks and future crises. *WELCOMES*, in this regard, the fact that the Commission's action will remain guided by the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs, both internally and externally, as well as by other multilateral agreements and instruments, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Convention on Biological Diversity.
5. *RECOGNISES* the urgent need to accelerate action at all levels and by all stakeholders in order to fulfil the vision and goals of the 2030 Agenda, bearing in mind that the SDGs are integrated and indivisible. *NOTES*, in this regard, the opportunity provided by the international agenda in 2021 with the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference, the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP 15), and the UN Food Systems Summit, as well as the G20 Ministerial Meetings and Summit, including on Global Health, to enhance and accelerate the collective implementation of the 2030 Agenda in an integrated manner.

Enhancing the dialogue between the Council and the Commission with the shared goal of further advancing SDG implementation

6. *REAFFIRMS* the strong support of the EU and its Member States for the UN Decade of Action to deliver on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and *ACKNOWLEDGES* the need to make further progress on an integrated, strategic, ambitious and comprehensive EU approach to implementing the SDGs.

7. In this regard, *WELCOMES* the Commission Staff Working Document ‘Delivering on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals – A comprehensive approach’. *WELCOMES* the Commission’s commitment to:
 - integrating the relevant SDGs into the European Semester, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the recovery instrument ‘Next Generation EU’;
 - mainstreaming of the SDGs in its proposals and in the implementation of EU policies and instruments, including through integrating SDGs in better regulation tools;
 - ensuring Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD);
 - ensuring strong EU engagement in the world to foster international partnerships for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs;
 - encouraging the engagement of civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders and
 - undertaking effective regular monitoring and reporting for its internal and external actions.
8. *ACKNOWLEDGES* the need to focus on concrete operational actions at all levels to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs through concrete objectives, measures and timelines, which are and will continue to be mainly established by sectoral policies, while underlining the importance of aligning the implementation of headline ambitions with the relevant SDGs in an effective and coherent manner.
9. *CALLS ON* the Commission to propose such concrete actions to implement the SDGs, building on its Staff Working Document and in conjunction with the delivery of the Commission President’s headline ambitions - a European Green Deal, an economy that works for people, a Europe fit for the digital age, promoting our European way of life, a stronger Europe in the world and a new push for European democracy – and with the Commission’s annual work programmes.
10. *INVITES* the Commission to engage in a regular structured dialogue with the Council in the context of the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making, to further promote an integrated, strategic, ambitious, and comprehensive approach to SDG implementation, address overarching cross-cutting issues related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, take stock of progress made in implementing the SDGs at EU level in an integrated and coherent manner, and discuss strategic orientations as appropriate.

11. *CALLS FOR* that regular dialogue to take place both in advance of the adoption of the Commission's annual work programme, based on the latest Eurostat report, and after the adoption of the work programme, based on a summary of the Commission's assessment of SDG implementation in the work programme in view of the joint declaration on the annual legislative priorities.
12. *REQUESTS* the Commission, with respect to multiannual programming, to regularly compile the most important existing objectives, concrete measures and timelines in key transformative policies and to assess them in conjunction with Eurostat's reports. This assessment should summarise progress made on specific Commission initiatives in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including their impact as well as potential challenges, including spill-over effects, synergies and trade-offs as well as potential risks that may have to be mitigated, and proposals for additional or corrective action where necessary. This assessment should be presented in writing to the Council before the mid-term evaluation of the joint conclusions of the three institutions on multiannual programming and before the end of the legislative term in order to prepare the programming by the next appointed Commission.
13. *COMMITTS* to review progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda at EU level in the context of that regular dialogue. *ACKNOWLEDGES* the importance of and *COMMITTS* to step up efforts on better mainstreaming and integrating of the SDGs in a consistent and coherent manner in all its work across policy sectors.
14. *TAKES NOTE* of the SDG governance structure within the Commission and *INVITES* the Commission to clarify, in this respect, how horizontal coherence between Commissioners' respective responsibilities on SDGs, as well as effective coordination between Commission services and the EEAS are being ensured. Further *ENCOURAGES* the Commission to continue to foster coherent and transformative policies, by taking forward its 'whole-of-government' approach towards a 'whole of society' approach.

Priority areas to enhance SDG implementation

15. *TAKES NOTE* of the various strategies and action plans adopted by the Commission so far to address challenges in specific policy areas and contribute to implementation of the SDGs. *STRESSES* that they need to be implemented without delay and while respecting Member States competences.
16. *RECALLS* that SDG implementation represents a shared responsibility, requiring action at the national, sub-national and local levels, and *URGES* Member States to raise the level of ambition of their national responses on implementing the 2030 Agenda, by accelerating its mainstreaming into national planning instruments, policies, strategies, including the National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS), and financial frameworks, as appropriate.
17. *WELCOMES* the commitment of the Commission to ensuring policy coherence for sustainable development as a central part of the integrated, strategic, ambitious and comprehensive approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda. Further *RECALLS* the fact that the European Commission system of better regulation is contributing to PCSD by identifying and assessing, synergies and trade-offs, as well as spill-over effects on partner countries, with a view to addressing these. *WELCOMES* the objective in the Communication ‘Better regulation: Joining forces to make better laws’ which proposes a number of improvements to mainstream the SDGs to help ensure that every legislative proposal contributes to the 2030 Agenda, including the identification of the relevant SDGs for each proposal and the examination of how the initiative will support their achievement. *RECOGNISES*, in this regard, the importance of the four levers of change – Governance; Economy and finance; Individual and collective action; and Science and technology – as being critical for achieving the SDGs in a coherent manner.

18. *RECALLS* the integration of the relevant SDGs into the European Semester, with the inclusion of a chapter on environmental sustainability in the country reports and a dedicated annex reporting on Member States' SDG performance. *INVITES* the Commission to provide more clarity as to how the Member States are expected to report on the relevant SDGs in the framework of the European Semester and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and provide support for the Member States aimed at reducing administrative burden. *STRESSES* that the focus of the European Semester should remain on coordinating economic, fiscal and employment policies, for identifying major structural policy challenges and monitoring the implementation of reforms. Within its mandate, this also includes keeping track of progress towards relevant SDGs, as well as guiding the Union and Member States through the challenges of the sustainable recovery and the green and digital transition. In this regard, *ACKNOWLEDGES* that while short-term recovery is a priority, it is important that future European Semester exercises preserve such relevant commitments and goals, which contribute to long-term resilience and stability.
19. *WELCOMES* the fact that the RRF is aimed at building a more sustainable, resilient and fairer Europe, through reforms and public investments in response to the challenges identified in the context of the Semester, including in regard to the SDGs. *WELCOMES* that the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) will address policy areas of European relevance structured around six pillars which cover several SDGs. Based on the reporting by Member States in the context of the European Semester, *INVITES* the Commission to address, in their monitoring of the implementation of the NRRPs, how these can better contribute effectively to the implementation of the relevant SDGs.

20. *ACKNOWLEDGES* the Union's budget, including programme statements, as an effective instrument to support progress on the SDGs and the efforts made by the Commission to assess how the budgetary policies included in the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) can support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda internally and externally. *RECALLS* that the Commission shall prepare annual reports to accompany the general budget of the Union, including on the implementation of the SDGs in all relevant Union programmes of the MFF 2021-2027. In this regard, *ENCOURAGES* the Commission to further develop a coherent SDG expenditure tracking methodology, reflecting the cross-cutting nature of the SDGs and the simultaneous contribution of programmes to different SDGs, to explore how the MFF, the RRF, and the Green Budgeting European Framework contribute to achieving the SDGs. This should be done, bearing in mind the 'Do No Significant Harm' principle within the meaning of the EU Taxonomy regulation as well as the 'Leave No One Behind' principle.
21. *WELCOMES* the 2020 edition of Eurostat's 'Monitoring report on status and progress towards the SDGs in an EU context' and the closer link between the 2020 edition and the European Semester, thanks to the chapter on progress by EU Member States towards the SDGs.
22. *WELCOMES* the progress on several goals, but *NOTES* that progress on some goals has been faster than on others and *EXPRESSES* concern with the movement away in specific areas. *INVITES* the Commission, in this context and taking into account national circumstances and principle of subsidiarity, to take measures to address the areas where further effort is needed, including improving data and monitoring for those facing marginalisation and exclusion. Also *STRESSES* the relevance of other indicators sets as a supplement to Eurostat's data and its monitoring of progress towards the SDGs. Further *STRESSES* the importance of improving data sources and their timeliness and of selecting indicators for ensuring the availability of adequate, measurable, disaggregated and sufficient data and a science-based approach as to avoid serious gaps and potential misinterpretations about the progress achieved.

23. *WELCOMES* the work done by Eurostat in developing its SDG monitoring report and the continuous reviewing and improvement of the EU SDG indicator set used to monitor progress towards the SDGs in an EU context, by taking into account the country-specific context and data, including disaggregation of data up to the sub-national level, the data of other EU institutions and bodies, global SDG indicators agreed at UN level and the work carried out by other relevant international organisations and institutions. *CALLS FOR* the selection of the indicators to consider the availability of adequate statistical data allowing a comprehensive assessment of progress in all Goals at both national and EU levels. Also *CALLS FOR* further involving Member States thematically in the selection of the indicators, including through relevant committees such as the Employment Committee Indicators Group and the Indicator Subgroup of the Social Protection Committee.
24. *ACKNOWLEDGES* that the 2021 review aims to adapt the EU SDG indicator set for the Commission's Green Deal and other recent or upcoming proposals. *UNDERLINES* that the indicators concerning the spill-overs generated by the EU around the world need to be further improved and used and *WELCOMES* the fact that the 2021 edition of the EU SDG monitoring report will include a section on COVID-19 effects, as well as expanded coverage spill-over effects and gap indicators. Further *ENCOURAGES* the Commission and Member States to make better use of Eurostat's SDG monitoring report when formulating policy proposals or developing policies.
25. *INVITES* the Commission and Member States to encourage further civil society engagement in the consultation process on the review of the EU SDG indicator set.

Strengthening the social dimension of sustainable development

26. *REAFFIRMS* the importance of strengthening the social dimension of sustainable development to promote human rights, gender equality, inclusion, human development, social cohesion and equality in all its forms, as well as social dialogue, occupational health and safety and decent work. *WELCOMES* the Commission's commitment to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights with due regard for respective competences and the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality and with a view to guaranteeing a fair, inclusive and resilient recovery and enhancing social fairness, in particular in the digital and green transitions, to ensure no one is left behind. *TAKES NOTE* of the fact that the Commission has presented new EU headline targets for the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its contribution to the implementation of the SDGs as well as the inclusion of the European Pillar of Social Rights in the general and specific objectives of the Recovery and Resilience Facility. *STRESSES* that the proposed headline targets for 2030, as well as the proposal for a revision of the social scoreboard, are supportive of the SDGs. *WELCOMES*, in this regard, the Porto Social Summit, which can give political impetus to the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan. Also *HIGHLIGHTS* the importance of the European Skills Agenda and, in particular, of its Pact for Skills. Further *WELCOMES* the Commission's plan to issue a communication on Decent Work Worldwide.
27. *CALLS ON* the Commission to provide additional information on the role of the European Pillar of Social Rights within the European Semester in the future, to ensure that the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely economic, social and environmental, and the existing interlinkages between the SDGs are addressed in a balanced and appropriate manner.

28. *REITERATES* the EU's commitment to meet the needs and protect the rights of women and girls and to promote gender equality. In this regard, *STRESSES* that the EU is committed to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policy measures for realising SDG5 as a stand-alone goal, and *REITERATES* that the EU and its Member States should ensure the development and implementation of gender responsive and transformative policies as a key contribution to the successful achievement of the SDGs. In this light, according to the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, gender inequality is a global problem. Gender equality and women's empowerment is a core objective of the EU's external action. It further *TAKES NOTE* of the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative on the third Gender Action Plan (GAP).

European Green Deal's contribution towards SDGs

29. *STRESSES* the need for a strong environmental dimension in order to live up to the 2030 Agenda ambition as well as the implementation of the European Green Deal. In this regard, *WELCOMES* the provisional Political agreement on the European Climate Law achieved by the Council and the European Parliament negotiators on 20 April and looks forward to the presentation, by the European Commission, of the 'Fit for 55' package and other legal proposals to implement the EU's ambitious greenhouse gas emission reduction targets and other relevant strategies.
30. *WELCOMES* the European Green Deal as the Commission's proposed new sustainable growth strategy and the ambition to contribute directly to 12 out of the 17 SDGs. Noting the opportunities of sustainable finance for supporting economic growth that contributes to the EU's environmental and social objectives while avoiding harm, *LOOKS FORWARD TO* the Commission's renewed Sustainable Finance Strategy, which aims to revisit the current finance strategy and reinforce the ambition to match that of the European Green Deal within the context of the EU's COVID-19 recovery programme, and *UNDERLINES* the importance of its proper implementation. *HIGHLIGHTS* the important role of the private sector for achieving the SDGs, *RECALLS* the importance of enhancing sustainable and green financing for SMEs and entrepreneurship, and *LOOKS FORWARD TO* an upcoming legislative initiative on mandatory due diligence for companies and the contribution that social corporate responsibility can offer.

Strengthening the whole of society approach on implementation

31. *RECALLS* that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is a shared responsibility that requires a whole of society approach, through continuous and strong involvement of all stakeholders, including all national, sub-national, regional and local authorities and cities, national parliaments, the private sector, social partners, academia and epistemic communities and civil society. There is also a need for political oversight and coordination at all levels, global to local, taking into account the interlinkages between the SDGs. *RECOGNISES* the importance of the youth dimension in the 2030 Agenda and the role of children and youth as agents of change and meaningful interlocutors in decision-making processes and governance platforms, in line with the SDGs, the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the 11 EU Youth Goals 2019-2027. Also, *RECOGNISES* the contribution of culture and of the cultural sector to the SDGs, which can be significantly reinforced through the new digital technologies.
32. *RECALLS* the important role played by the Multi-Stakeholder Platform in enriching the debate on how to make progress toward the SDGs and on existing policy trade-offs and synergies and the possible solutions that could be envisaged at the local, sub-national, national and European levels. *URGES* the Commission to establish a platform that engages a wide range of stakeholders in EU's work with the SDGs, both at EU and global levels, with inclusive and representative membership, to facilitate the whole of society approach to enhance action and delivery on the SDGs and seek good cooperation with initiatives such as the European Climate Pact and the Conference on the Future of Europe. *PROPOSES* that a new and improved platform be involved, among others, in the monitoring of the Goals implementation, hold discussions on the Eurostat annual SDG monitoring report and be consulted in sustainability impact assessments of new initiatives.

33. *SUPPORTS* the inclusion of the SDGs implementation in the work of the Conference on the Future of Europe. *UNDERLINES* the need to engage with stakeholders in relation to consultation, implementation and monitoring, so as to properly reflect the interdependence of the dimensions of sustainable development and to enable a reinforced, structured and results-oriented dialogue that can inform and monitor EU policies and their contribution to SDG implementation through a cross-sectoral approach. *WELCOMES* the European Climate Pact aim to bring together different stakeholders and civil society to commit to climate action and more sustainable behaviours and supports integrating SDG implementation in its activities.
34. *CALLS* on the Commission and Member States to carry out communication and awareness-raising activities on the 2030 Agenda, with a view to engaging, sharing responsibility with and increasing shared ownership between citizens, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders, whilst ensuring open and transparent processes for designing policies and bringing greater legitimacy to decision-making.

Improving external action aiming at accelerating global SDG implementation

35. *RECALLS* that it is in the EU's interest to play a leading role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda also globally through its external action and *REAFFIRMS* that development policy and international partnerships are an important part of the overall response of the EU and its Member States to the 2030 Agenda, in line with the new European Consensus on Development and the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, and *EMPHASISES* the need for an integrated approach.
36. *STRESSES* that the EU and Member States continue their strive to further improve the effectiveness of development cooperation in all its forms, to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.

37. As the world's leading provider of Official Development Assistance, the EU and its Member States *SHARE* a strong commitment to support partner countries and populations in situation of vulnerability, where the needs are greatest, including the least developed and fragile countries, Africa, the Neighbourhood and other geographical regions, in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development.
38. *UNDERLINES* the role of EU external action instruments and initiatives supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in partner countries, including the upcoming Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI) and the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) and *INVITES* the Commission to ensure, through their implementation, that they actively contribute to progress towards the SDGs, in line with the EU's policy framework, and that the EU supports CSOs working on the 2030 Agenda as a whole and to keep the Council informed on the progress achieved.
39. *ENCOURAGES* the Member States and the Commission to enhance their efforts to work better together, including through joint programming. *REMAINS COMMITTED* to the Team Europe approach, initially developed as part of the Global EU response to COVID-19, to shape a collective European response that includes EU institutions, EU Member States, their diplomatic network, finance institutions, including national development banks, and implementing agencies, as well as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to support partner countries towards a sustainable recovery aligned with the implementation of the SDGs.
40. *WELCOMES* the significant contribution of Team Europe members to the Access to COVID Accelerator (ACT-A), including its vaccine pillar COVAX, and the proposed EU Vaccine Sharing Mechanism as important steps towards an inclusive recovery, while also recognising its important contribution to health system strengthening in many partner countries.

41. *STRESSES* that a green and inclusive recovery in line with the SDGs and the Paris Agreement requires optimal use of all available financial resources. *CONSIDERS*, in this regard, the Commission's proposal for a Global Recovery Initiative linking investment and debt relief to the SDGs as a way of setting a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the post-COVID-19 crisis along a truly transformative path, towards the achievement of the SDGs by 2030. *WELCOMES* the ongoing work on multilateral actions on debt and sustainable financing, such as the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) and the new Common Framework for Debt Treatments, which were adopted by the G20/Paris Club. *ACKNOWLEDGES* the need for strong and inclusive global governance and the importance of advancing the further development of a global financial system that better preserves financial stability and underpins sustainable development in its three dimensions. *ENCOURAGES* Multilateral Development Banks that are partners to the EU to account and report on how their activities contribute to the achievement of SDGs, in their operations both inside and outside the EU, and to continue enhancing this process, so that the link between MDB financing, knowledge transfer and capacity building and support of the SDGs gains visibility.
42. *UNDERLINES* that trade is a central instrument for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Highlights the positive contribution of open and rules-based trade to achieving the SDGs. *REMAINS* committed to an open, transparent rules-based multilateral trading system with a central role for the WTO, trade agreements conducive to social and environmentally sustainable development and to promoting inclusive and sustainable trade.

43. *STRESSES* the importance of the EU, as a natural ally of the UN and its agencies, continuing to play a leading role in supporting and promoting effective multilateralism and the rules-based international order with the UN at its core, and in accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a shared, universal agenda. *INVITES* the Commission, in this regard, to reaffirm the EU's commitment and leading role, by presenting the integrated, strategic, ambitious and comprehensive approach to delivering on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs at the 2021 High Level Political Forum (HLPF), and to prepare, in cooperation with the EEAS by 2023 at the latest, a comprehensive voluntary review of the EU's internal and external implementation of the SDGs for consideration in the HLPF. *FURTHER STRESSES* the importance of ensuring that the EU and its Member States are represented at the highest level and with broad stakeholder participation, including youth. *STRESSES THAT* the EU should continue identifying and further means of cooperation with other international organisations in support of SDG implementation.
