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General Affairs

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President **Tytti Tuppurainen**
Finnish minister for European affairs

P R E S S

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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

Next multiannual financial framework

The Council took stock of the work on the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027. The presidency indicated that it plans to submit the full Negotiating Box with figures at the end of November for the final stage of negotiations. At the **General Affairs Council** meeting in December, ministers would hold a debate on the Negotiating Box ahead of the **European Council**.

December European Council

Ministers started preparations for the **European Council** meeting of 12-13 December by examining an annotated draft agenda.

In line with its June conclusions, the **European Council** is expected to return in December to the issue of climate change. Leaders will focus in particular on the target of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. The aim is to finalise the guidance for the adoption and submission of the EU's long-term strategy to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in early 2020.

Leaders are also expected to hold a substantial discussion on the next MFF following the submission by the presidency of a Negotiating Box with figures.

In the light of events, the **European Council** may address specific foreign policy issues.

Strengthening the rule of law in the EU

The Council reviewed its annual rule of law dialogue and discussed a set of conclusions on the issue. In the absence of consensus on the text, the presidency decided to issue presidency conclusions. It concluded that the text was supported or not objected to by 26 delegations.

The conclusions suggest that the current thematic discussions that form part of the Council's rule of law dialogue be developed into a more general annual debate on the state of the rule of law within the EU, covering all member states and capturing positive and negative trends. Member states supporting the conclusions also agree that this yearly stocktaking could make use of the Commission's new annual rule of law reports, whilst calling upon the Commission to closely involve the member states in their preparation.

The Council also held an exchange of views with Michael O'Flaherty, Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, on the links between democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.

Mr O'Flaherty stressed that fundamental rights are an integral part of the rule of law in the European Union and that all actions in the area should be evidence-based, in order to ensure objectivity, non-discrimination and equal treatment of all the member states.

[Presidency conclusions on the evaluation of the annual rule of law dialogue](#)

Enlargement

The Council discussed the state of play on enlargement and the stabilisation and association process following the October European Council.

The discussion focused on possible ways forward to facilitate the next discussion at the European Council when it reverts to the issue of enlargement next spring.

At the end of the discussion the presidency took note of member states' shared commitment to the European perspective of the Western Balkans and to the continued engagement with the region. The presidency also noted a common understanding of the usefulness of examining the effectiveness of the accession negotiation process, and of further updates on reform progress.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Conclusions on oceans and seas

The Council today adopted conclusions on oceans and seas, stressing that climate change is a direct and existential threat to life in oceans and seas globally. It calls for increased policy action at all governance levels to protect marine and coastal ecosystems. It notes with great concern the warming of European regional seas at a higher pace than average.

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

Council conclusions are set out in document [14249/19](#)

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

EU civil protection mechanism

The Council agreed a partial mandate for negotiations on a proposal to amend the EU civil protection mechanism decision ([13792/19](#)). This text is part of the sectoral proposals made in the context of the preparation of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027.

Budget-related and horizontal issues which are currently being discussed as part of the negotiations on the EU's next MFF fall outside the scope of this agreement.

INTERNAL MARKET AND INDUSTRY

Regulation on European business statistics (FRIBS)*

The Council approved the European Parliament's position at first-reading on a draft regulation aimed at providing a common legal framework for the production and compilation of business statistics across the EU. The Czech, Hungarian and UK delegations abstained.

The regulation establishes a common legal framework for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics related to the structure, the economic activities and the performance of businesses. It also sets up the European network of national statistical business registers and the EuroGroups Register.

The regulation is therefore adopted in the wording which corresponds to the position of the European Parliament.

[PE-CONS 81/19](#)