European Council

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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	European Council meeting (13 and 14 December 2018) – Conclusions

Delegations will find attached the conclusions adopted by the European Council at the above meeting.

I. MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

1. The European Council welcomes the intensive preparatory work carried out during this semester on the future Multiannual Financial Framework and takes note of the Presidency's progress report. It calls on the incoming Presidency to continue that work and develop an orientation for the next stage of the negotiations, with a view to achieving an agreement in the European Council in autumn 2019.

II. SINGLE MARKET

2. The Single Market is one of the great achievements of the Union which has delivered major benefits to Europeans. It is our main asset for ensuring citizens' welfare, inclusive growth and job creation, and the essential driver for investment and global competitiveness. Twenty-five years on, we need to press ahead with the Single Market agenda in all its dimensions and develop a forward-looking approach. The European Council:

   – invites the European Parliament and the Council to agree, before the end of the current legislature, on as many of the pending proposals relevant for the Single Market as possible. It is also important to remove remaining unjustified barriers, in particular in the field of services, as well as to prevent any new barriers and any risk of fragmentation. The European Council calls on the Commission to continue its analysis and its work in this respect;

   – calls for implementing and enforcing, at all levels of government, decisions taken and rules adopted, as well as upholding standards and ensuring the smart application of better regulation principles, including subsidiarity and proportionality;

   – stresses that more needs to be done to ensure that the Single Market provides a solid underpinning for an outward-looking, confident and more autonomous European Union in a challenging global environment;

– underlines the need for the Single Market to evolve so that it fully embraces the digital transformation, including Artificial Intelligence, the rise of the data and service economy, connectivity, and the transition to a greener economy;

– calls for strengthening the coherence with all related policies.

3. The European Council will hold an in-depth discussion next spring on the future development of the Single Market and European digital policy in preparation for the next Strategic Agenda.

III. MIGRATION

4. The European Council addressed the implementation of its comprehensive approach to migration, which combines more effective control of the EU's external borders, increased external action and the internal aspects, in accordance with its conclusions of June and October 2018.

5. The European Council notes that the number of detected illegal border crossings has been brought down to pre-crisis levels, and that the overall downward trend is continuing. This is the result of the external migration policy of the Union and its Member States, based, in particular, on control of the external borders, the fight against smugglers and cooperation with countries of origin and transit, which has been intensified in recent months. This policy should therefore be continued, further developed and fully implemented. Vigilance on all existing and emerging routes should be maintained, in particular in view of recent increases on the Western and Eastern Mediterranean Routes.

6. As regards the internal policies, the European Council invites the co-legislators to rapidly conclude negotiations on the European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG). It welcomes the agreement reached at the level of the Council on 6 December 2018 with regard to enhancing the EBCG's mandate in the area of return and cooperation with third countries. It also calls for further efforts to conclude negotiations on the Return Directive, on the Asylum Agency and on all parts of the Common European Asylum System, respecting previous European Council conclusions and taking into account the varying degree of progress on each of these files.

IV. OTHER ITEMS

External relations

7. The European Council discussed preparations for the upcoming summit with the League of Arab States on 24 and 25 February 2019.

8. The European Council expresses its utmost concern regarding the escalation at the Kerch Straits and the Azov Sea and Russia's violations of international law. It reconfirms its commitment to international law, the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine and the EU's policy of non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea. There is no justification for the use of military force by Russia. The European Council requests the immediate release of all detained Ukrainian seamen as well as the return of the seized vessels and free passage of all ships through the Kerch Straits. The EU stands ready to adopt measures to strengthen further its support, in particular in favour of the affected areas of Ukraine.

9. The European Council warmly welcomes the positive vote in the European Parliament on the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement and looks forward to its imminent entry into force.

Climate change

10. Further to the presentation of the Commission Communication "A Clean Planet for all" and taking into account the outcome of COP24 in Katowice, the European Council invites the Council to work on the elements outlined in the Communication. The European Council will provide guidance on the overall direction and political priorities in the first semester of 2019, to enable the European Union to submit a long term strategy by 2020 in line with the Paris Agreement.

Security and Defence

11. The European Council welcomes the significant progress made in the area of security and defence, including in implementing Permanent Structured Cooperation, in improving military mobility, in implementing the European Defence Industrial Development Programme and in the negotiations on the proposed European Defence Fund. It endorses the Civilian CSDP Compact. These initiatives contribute to enhancing the EU's strategic autonomy and its capacity to act as a security provider, while complementing and reinforcing the activities of NATO and strengthening EU-NATO cooperation, in full respect of the principles of inclusiveness, reciprocity and decision-making autonomy of the EU.

Disinformation

12. The spread of deliberate, large-scale, and systematic disinformation, including as part of hybrid warfare, is an acute and strategic challenge for our democratic systems. It requires an urgent response that needs to be sustained over time, in full respect of fundamental rights. The European Council:

- stresses the need for a determined response, that addresses the internal and external dimensions and that is comprehensive, coordinated and well-resourced on the basis of an assessment of threats;
- calls for the prompt and coordinated implementation of the Joint Action Plan on disinformation presented by the Commission and the High Representative so as to bolster EU capabilities, strengthen coordinated and joint responses between the Union and Member States, mobilise the private sector and increase societal resilience to disinformation;
- calls for swift and decisive action at both European and national level on securing free and fair European and national elections.

13. The Council is invited to continue work on this issue and to report back to the European Council in March 2019.

Fight against racism and xenophobia

14. The European Council condemns all forms of antisemitism, racism and xenophobia, and underlines the importance of combating intolerance. It welcomes the adoption on 6 December 2018 of the Council Declaration on the fight against antisemitism.

Citizens' Dialogues and Citizens' Consultations and Preparations for the Strategic Agenda

15. The European Council welcomes the holding of Citizens' Dialogues and Citizens' Consultations, which was an unprecedented opportunity to engage with European citizens and which could serve as an inspiration for further consultations and dialogues. The joint report prepared by the current and the incoming Presidency, together with the different national reports and input from the other European institutions, identify a number of concerns and expectations on the part of the participating citizens in terms of concrete results from the EU. At their informal meeting in Sibiu on 9 May 2019, Heads of State or Government will discuss priorities for the next institutional cycle, with a view to agreeing on the next Strategic Agenda in June 2019.