European Council

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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	European Council meeting (21 and 22 October 2021) – Conclusions

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

I. COVID-19

1. Vaccination campaigns around Europe have brought about significant progress in the fight against COVID-19. Nevertheless the situation in some Member States remains very serious. In order to further increase vaccination rates throughout the Union, efforts to overcome vaccine hesitancy should be stepped up, including by tackling disinformation, notably on social media platforms. It is necessary to remain vigilant regarding the emergence and spread of possible new variants.

2. In light of the development of the epidemiological situation, the European Council calls for further coordination to facilitate free movement within, and travel into, the EU, and for a revision of the two Council recommendations. It encourages the Commission to accelerate its work regarding mutual recognition of certificates with third countries.

3. Based on the experiences of the COVID-19 crisis, the EU's resilience to and horizontal preparedness for crises must be strengthened. To ensure better prevention of, preparedness for and response to future health emergencies in the EU, the European Council calls for the conclusion of the negotiations on the Health Union legislative package and for ensuring that Member States are adequately involved in the governance of the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA). It recalls the need to swiftly take work forward on access to medicines across Member States.

4. The European Council reiterates the EU's continued commitment to contributing to the international response to the pandemic and to ensuring access to vaccines for all. It calls for the rapid removal of obstacles hampering the global roll-out of vaccines, and invites the Commission to further engage directly with manufacturers in this respect. This will allow Member States to speed up the delivery of vaccines to countries most in need. The EU will continue to support the production and uptake of vaccines in partner countries.

5. In the context of the upcoming G20 meeting and in view of the special session of the World Health Assembly in November, the European Council underlines its support for a strong, central role of the World Health Organization in future global health governance and for the objective of agreeing an international treaty on pandemics.

II. DIGITAL

6. The European Council recalls the EU's goal to ensure Europe's digital transformation that will drive our economic growth, job creation and competitiveness and strengthen our digital sovereignty in a self-determined and open manner. This will reinforce our resilience and facilitate the green transition. To this end, the European Council underlines the need for inclusive and sustainable digital policies, and in particular to focus on digital skills and education.

7. The European Council calls for the swift examination of the Commission's proposal for a Decision establishing the 2030 Policy Programme "Path to the Digital Decade", implementing the Digital Compass.

8. The European Council reviewed progress on the digital agenda and key legislative files. It encourages the co-legislators to reach agreement on the Roaming Regulation by the end of the year, and invites them to continue work on the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act proposals with a view to reaching an ambitious agreement as soon as possible. Furthermore, the European Council stresses the importance of making rapid progress on other existing and future initiatives, in particular:

   – unlocking the value of data in Europe, notably through a comprehensive regulatory framework that is conducive to innovation and facilitates better data portability, fair access to data and ensures interoperability;

   – implementing the remaining measures necessary to establish specific sectoral data spaces, as set out in the European strategy for data of February 2020, and establishing a roadmap for this process;

– establishing an innovation-friendly regulatory framework for artificial intelligence in order to accelerate the uptake of this technology by both the private and public sector while ensuring safety and the full respect of fundamental rights;

– setting common standards for and agreeing on a coordinated approach for a European Digital Identity framework; and

– promoting the creation of a cutting-edge European microchip ecosystem across the whole value chain, and building further resilience, including in terms of raw materials, since this is critical to avoid shortages which hamper our digital transformation. In this context the European Council looks forward to the upcoming proposal on the European Chips Act.

9. The European Council addressed the marked increase in malicious cyber activities aimed at undermining our democratic values and the security of the core functions of our societies. It reiterates its unwavering commitment to pursuing democratic values, both online and offline. In this context, the European Council reaffirms the EU's commitment to an open, free, stable and secure cyberspace and urges countries around the globe to adhere to and enforce these norms. It calls for advancing work on the proposal for a revised Directive on Security of Network and Information Systems, the proposed Directive on the Resilience of Critical Entities and the Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox. It stresses the need for effective coordination and preparedness in the face of cybersecurity threats. In this context, it underlines the importance of further developing the EU cybersecurity crisis management framework and an efficient EU-level response to large-scale cybersecurity incidents and crises, including through exercises and by exploring the potential of a Joint Cyber Unit initiative. It emphasises the necessity to reinforce action in the fight against cybercrime, in particular ransomware attacks, and enhance cooperation with partner countries, including in multilateral fora. The European Council looks forward to the outcome of the ongoing revision of the EU Cyber Defence Policy Framework.

10. The European Council stresses the importance of digital connectivity, including through assessing the feasibility of further developing secured space based connectivity.
A European trusted connectivity model, based on EU values, trust, transparency and accountability, should be developed and promoted. Partnerships with like-minded countries play a central role in advancing our interests and values on the global stage. The Trade and Technology Council is an important step in strengthening transatlantic cooperation in the digital field.

III. ENERGY PRICES

11. The European Council addressed the recent spike in energy prices and considered the impact of the price rises on citizens and businesses, especially our vulnerable citizens and SMEs, striving to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

12. The toolbox presented in the Commission Communication on tackling rising energy prices contains useful measures for both the short and the longer term.

13. The European Council invites:

– the Commission to study the functioning of the gas and electricity markets, as well as the EU ETS market, with the help of the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA). Subsequently, the Commission will assess whether certain trading behaviours require further regulatory action;

– the Member States and the Commission to urgently make the best use of the toolbox to provide short-term relief to the most vulnerable consumers and to support European companies, taking into account the diversity and specificity of situations of Member States;

– the Commission and the Council to swiftly consider medium and long-term measures that would contribute to energy at a price that is affordable for households and companies, increase the resilience of the EU's energy system and the internal energy market, provide security of supply and support the transition to climate neutrality, taking into account the diversity and specificity of situations of Member States; and

– the European Investment Bank to look into how to speed up investment in the energy transition, within its current capital headroom, with a view to reducing future disruption risks and meeting Europe's global connectivity ambitions.

14. The extraordinary meeting of the TTE Council (Energy) on 26 October 2021 will take this work forward immediately. The European Council will keep the situation under review and revert to it in December.

IV. MIGRATION

15. Following the European Council conclusions of 24 and 25 June 2021, and in order to prevent loss of life and to reduce pressure on European borders in accordance with EU and international law, eight action plans for countries of origin and transit have been presented. The Commission and the High Representative, together with Member States as appropriate, should now make those plans operational and implement them without delay, in cooperation with partner countries. The European Council expects the action plans to be underpinned by concrete timelines and adequate financial support; it reiterates its request to the Commission to report to the Council on its intentions in this respect.

16. The European Council calls on the Commission to urgently present proposals and mobilise financing for actions on all migratory routes in line with the EU's increased ambition, and to report regularly to the Council in this regard. The best possible use should be made of at least 10% of the NDICI financial envelope, as well as funding under other relevant instruments, for actions related to migration.

17. In line with its March 2021 statement and its June 2021 conclusions, the European Council reiterates its expectation that the financing for Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and other parts of the region, including Egypt, under relevant instruments will be mobilised in a timely manner.

18. The European Council calls on Turkey to ensure the full and non-discriminatory implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement of 2016, including vis-à-vis the Republic of Cyprus.

19. The European Council will not accept any attempt by third countries to instrumentalise migrants for political purposes. It condemns all hybrid attacks at the EU's borders and will respond accordingly.

20. The European Council invites the Commission to propose any necessary changes to the EU's legal framework and concrete measures underpinned by adequate financial support to ensure an immediate and appropriate response in line with EU law and international obligations, including the fundamental rights.

21. The EU will continue countering the ongoing hybrid attack launched by the Belarusian regime, including by adopting further restrictive measures against persons and legal entities, in line with its gradual approach, as a matter of urgency.

22. The European Council recalls the need to ensure effective returns and full implementation of readmission agreements and arrangements, using the necessary leverage.

23. The EU remains determined to ensure effective control of its external borders.

24. Efforts should be sustained to reduce secondary movements, and to ensure a fair balance between responsibility and solidarity among Member States.

V. TRADE

25. The European Council held a strategic discussion on EU trade policy.

VI. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

26. The European Council discussed the preparations for the upcoming ASEM Summit on 25-26 November 2021. In this context, it supports the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region and invites the Council to ensure its swift implementation.

27. The European Council also discussed preparations for the Eastern Partnership Summit, which will be held on 15 December 2021. The EU's relations with this region remain of key strategic importance. The European Council reiterates its call on the Belarusian authorities to release all political prisoners.

28. Ahead of COP26 in Glasgow, the European Council calls for an ambitious global response to climate change. It is essential to keep the 1.5°C global warming limit within reach. The European Council therefore calls upon all Parties to come forward with, and implement, ambitious national targets and policies. It urges in particular major economies that have not yet done so to communicate or update enhanced and ambitious nationally determined contributions in time for COP26 and to present long-term strategies towards reaching net zero emissions by 2050. The European Council recalls the commitment by the EU and its Member States to continue scaling up their climate financing. It calls on other developed countries to urgently increase their contribution to the collective climate finance goal of USD 100 billion per year through to 2025.

29. The European Council also took note of preparations for the meeting of COP15 on biological diversity in Kunming. It calls for an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework in order to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

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Following the Council declaration of 6 December 2018 on the fight against antisemitism and the development of a common security approach to better protect Jewish communities and institutions in Europe and the Council declaration of 2 December 2020 on mainstreaming the fight against antisemitism across policy areas, the European Council welcomes the EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life adopted by the Commission on 5 October 2021. The Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism on 13 October 2021 is a reminder that no effort must be spared in fighting all forms of antisemitism, racism and xenophobia.