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Cohesion

Luxembourg, 12 April 2018

President **Tomislav Donchev**
Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria

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¹ • 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>).
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ITEMS DEBATED

Strategic context and priorities of cohesion policy post-2020

The Council discussed the future of cohesion policy after 2020.

The debate will feed into the Commission's preparations for the presentation of its proposals on the legislative package for cohesion policy post-2020.

Ministers focused on a number of key political issues including the following:

– ***Priorities for cohesion policy in the next programming period***

Regarding the set of areas to be prioritised, a number of member states referred to the absence of an overarching EU strategy replacing Europe 2020. Against this background, other sources of inspiration for the setting of thematic objectives were mentioned, such as the Treaty objectives for cohesion policy (Article 174 TFEU) and the UN Sustainable Development Agenda. Some member states suggested rolling over the current 11 objectives under Europe 2020 to the next period.

Many member states stressed that priority should be given to objectives with European added value.

Among the priority areas, several member states referred to innovation, combating climate change and fostering growth and jobs. Other areas mentioned included digitalisation, research, connectivity, migration, social inclusion, the fight against poverty and youth unemployment, education and training, cross-border cooperation, urban matters, demographic change and structural reforms in line with the country-specific Recommendations under the European Semester.

Most member states were also in favour of continuing with a certain degree of 'thematic concentration', which leads to a higher concentration of financial support on fewer areas that bring the greatest added value. At the same time, there were also calls to make the system simpler and more flexible to ensure that member states would be able to respond to their specific needs and emerging challenges during the programming period.

– ***The type of regions to be covered, categories of regions and co-financing rates***

Several delegations pointed out that their positions on these topics depended on the Commission proposal for the next multiannual financial framework (MFF), expected to be tabled in early May.

Regarding the future beneficiaries of the funds, most member states expressed the view that all EU regions should continue to benefit from cohesion policy, with a focus on the less developed regions in line with the Treaty objectives. Some member states also noted, however, that this would depend on the overall budget allocation for cohesion policy.

Several member states also expressed their preliminary positions on the categorisation of the regions. Some were in favour of maintaining the current system, while many others were open to discussing changes to it.

Diverging views were expressed on the rise of the threshold for transition regions. Several member states took the view that a buffer mechanism was needed for regions which change category in order to avoid shocks and not jeopardise the progress already achieved.

Regarding allocation criteria, delegations broadly agreed that GDP per capita had proven its value and should remain the main indicator in the future. At the same time, they were also open to discussing the introduction of one or more additional indicators, provided that the allocation method remains simple and transparent.

– ***Ways to make cohesion policy more effective in the next period and speed up its implementation***

Member states highlighted a number of factors which could help speed up implementation and make cohesion policy more effective.

There was a consensus on the need for a significant simplification of the procedures for the implementation of cohesion policy. Some member states referred in this context to the outcome of the work of the High-Level Group on monitoring simplification for beneficiaries of the European structural and investment funds.

Several member states stressed the importance of ensuring a smooth transition between programming periods.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT****Delivery and implementation of cohesion policy after 2020**

The Council adopted conclusions on the delivery and implementation of cohesion policy after 2020.

In those conclusions, the Council considers that the future implementation of cohesion policy should rely as much as possible on national rules and authorities, in line with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The Commission should focus on the objectives and strategic aspects of programming, monitoring output and results, and ensuring, together with the member states, effective management and control systems and sound financial management. It should explore ways of transferring more responsibility to member states with regard to the operational aspects of implementation.

The Council also reiterates its call for simpler rules at both EU and national level. This includes a harmonisation of the rules and procedures applicable to the different funds under direct and shared management, while taking account of their specificities and ensuring continuity whenever appropriate. Synergies between structural funds and EU programmes in other policy areas should be increased and programming should be flexible in order to accommodate the specific needs of member states and their regions.

The conclusions also highlight the need for the Commission and the member states to cooperate closely and start preparations at an early stage in order to ensure a smooth transition to the next programming period. While the use of financial instruments should remain optional, where it is deemed appropriate, the relevant provisions should encourage member states and regions to deploy them. The Council also supports maintaining the current territorial instruments post-2020, taking the view that their use should be optional, based on territorial strategies and become considerably simpler.

[Text of the conclusions](#)

JASPERS initiative

The Council adopted conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 1/2018 on the JASPERS initiative (Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions).

JASPERS is a technical assistance partnership between the European Commission, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. It provides independent advice to beneficiary countries to help them prepare projects to be co-financed by European structural and investment funds.

The conclusions acknowledge the positive impact of JASPERS on the preparation of projects and their overall quality. The Council also considers, however, that certain aspects of the initiative could be improved. It calls on the Commission, among other things, to strengthen its coordination and controlling role over JASPERS, to improve the strategic planning of JASPERS operations, and to explore mechanisms to increase the transfer of know-how from JASPERS to national and regional administrations.

[Text of the conclusions](#)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS**Sanctions on Iran in response to serious human rights violations**

The Council extended until 13 April 2019 its restrictive measures in response to serious human rights violations in Iran. Those measures consist of:

- a travel ban and an asset freeze in respect of 82 individuals and one entity.
- a ban on exports to Iran of equipment which might be used for internal repression and of equipment for monitoring telecommunications.

[EU restrictive measures against Iran](#)

Sanctions on the Democratic Republic of Congo

The Council amended the statements of reasons relating to two persons under restrictive measures in view of the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Council had initially adopted sanctions against the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 12 December 2016 in response to attempts to obstruct a consensual solution to the crisis together with serious human rights violations. Those sanctions consist of an asset freeze and a travel ban. They currently target 16 persons.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

EUCAP Somalia: opening negotiations on status of mission agreement

The Council authorised the opening of negotiations with Somalia for an agreement on the status of one of the EU's two CSDP missions in Somalia, the civilian European Union Capacity Building Mission in Somalia (EUCAP Somalia).

The mission is tasked with enhancing Somalia's maritime civilian law enforcement capacity, for example by reinforcing Somalia's capacity to carry out fisheries inspections, counter smuggling and fight piracy, by supporting the Somali authorities in developing the necessary legislation and by strengthening the criminal justice chain in the maritime domain, as well as by providing training and equipment.

EUCAP Nestor (now EUCAP Somalia) was launched in July 2012. Its mandate was to assist countries in the Horn of Africa and Western Indian Ocean regions in developing a self-sustaining capacity for continued enhancement of maritime security, including counter-piracy and maritime governance. It was decided that the mission should focus on Somalia, and this is now reflected in the renaming of the mission. The head of the mission is Maria-Cristina Stepanescu (Romania).

[EUCAP Somalia](#)

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Georgia - Macro-financial assistance

The Council adopted a decision providing up to EUR 45 million in macro-financial assistance to Georgia ([7294/18](#) + [PE-CONS 7/18](#)).

The assistance will help cover the country's financing needs, supporting economic stabilisation and its agenda for structural reforms.

Georgia's economy is considered to be vulnerable due to a large current account deficit and high external debt, while its foreign reserves have become inadequate.

This is the third operation for Georgia since the country's military conflict with Russia in August 2008.

For details, see [press release](#).

Court of Auditors reports - Bank crisis management and bank resolution

The Council adopted conclusions on two Court of Auditors reports:

- special report no. 23/2017 on the Single Resolution Board for banks;
- special report no. 2/2018 on the operational efficiency of the European Central Bank's crisis management for banks.

AGRICULTURE

Newcastle disease

The Council amended Directive [92/66/EEC](#) in order to simplify and streamline the procedures regarding the control of Newcastle disease ([PE-CONS 6/18](#)).

Directive 92/66/EEC lays down EU control measures to be taken in the event of an outbreak of Newcastle disease in poultry, racing pigeons and other birds kept in captivity.

TRANSPORT**Cross-border parcel delivery**

The Council adopted a regulation on cross-border parcel delivery services ([PE-CONS 69/17](#)). A provisional agreement on the directive was reached with the European Parliament on 13 December 2017.

For more information, see press release:

[Council adopts cross-border parcel delivery rules to boost e-commerce](#)

Training for HGV and bus drivers

The Council adopted a directive revising the current rules on training for professional HGV and bus drivers ([PE-CONS 71/17](#)). A provisional agreement on the directive was reached with the European Parliament on 12 December 2017.

The Italian delegation abstained and the Luxembourg and Austrian delegations voted against.

For more information, see press release:

[Updated rules on training for lorry and bus drivers adopted by the Council](#)

Railway statistics

The Council approved a recast version of Regulation 91/2003 establishing common rules for the production of rail transport statistics at EU level ([PE-CONS 8/18](#)).

Regulation 91/2003 has been recast in the interests of legal clarity given that it has been substantially amended several times.

Statistics on railways are necessary in order to contribute to the monitoring and development of the common transport policy.

Railway safety - supervision by national authorities

The Council decided not to object to a Commission regulation establishing common safety methods for supervision by national safety authorities after the issue of a single safety certificate or a safety authorisation pursuant to Directive 2016/798 and repealing Commission Regulation 1077/2012 ([6381/18](#) + [ADD 1](#))

The regulation is a delegated act pursuant to Article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the act can enter into force, unless the European Parliament objects to it.

Satellite positioning - cooperation with Ukraine

The Council adopted the decision authorising the opening of negotiations on an agreement between the EU and Ukraine on the terms and conditions for the provision of satellite-based augmentation services in Ukraine based on the European Satellite Navigation programme EGNOS.

Satellite positioning - participation of Switzerland in the European GNSS Agency

The Council adopted the decision authorising the Commission to open negotiations with Switzerland on an agreement laying down the terms and conditions for that country's participation in the European GNSS (Global Navigation Satellite System) Agency.

CULTURE

EU Youth Orchestra

The Council adopted a regulation on the EU Youth Orchestra, thereby securing the Orchestra's funding until the end of 2020. The funding will come from the Creative Europe programme ([PE-CONS 5/18](#)).

The Youth Orchestra was founded in 1976 and brings together talented young musicians from the whole of Europe, working to the very highest musical standards.

[See press release](#)

EDUCATION

Europass

The Council adopted a decision on a new Europass framework. The new Europass framework will offer people a wider range of services such as an enhanced tool for creating CVs and skills profiles in a user-friendly manner, free self-assessment tools to help individuals evaluate their skills, tailored information on learning opportunities across Europe, and information and support to help individuals secure recognition of their qualifications ([PE-CONS 70/17](#))

[See press release](#)

RESEARCH

ITER fusion reactor project - Council conclusions

The Council adopted conclusions on a reformed ITER project ([7110/18](#) and [7110/18 ADD1](#)).

The text of those conclusions welcomes the progress made on the project and on the construction site. It also calls on all stakeholders to pay utmost attention to both risk management and improved cost control in order to avoid delays in the future.

Furthermore, it instructs the Commission to approve the new ITER baseline at an upcoming ITER Council meeting.

On 14 June 2017, the Commission published its [communication on the EU contribution to a reformed ITER project](#).

[ITER](#) is the world's largest scientific partnership, and aims to demonstrate that fusion is a viable and sustainable source of energy. It was launched in 2005 and currently has seven participating partners: China, the EU, India, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the USA.

INTERNAL MARKET**Tractors - Type-approval requirements**

The Council decided not to oppose the entry into force of a Commission regulation supplementing Regulation 167/2013 as regards environmental and propulsion unit performance requirements for agricultural and forestry vehicles and their engines ([6117/18](#) and [6117/18 ADD1](#)).

This regulation introduces requirements of Stage V engine pollutant emissions for tractors as well as transitional provisions from the currently applicable Stage IV.

The Council also decided not to oppose the entry into force of a Commission regulation adapting to technical progress requirements for type-approval of tractors as regards anti-lock braking systems, high pressure energy storage devices and hydraulic connections of the single-line type ([6253/18](#) and [6253/18 ADD1](#)).

Type-approval requirements applicable to agricultural and forestry vehicles are set out in [Regulation 167/2013](#).

These two new Commission regulations are delegated acts, which may now enter into force unless the European Parliament objects.

Construction products - Metal-faced sandwich panels

The Council decided not to object to a Commission decision on the system to assess and verify the constancy of performance of metal-faced sandwich panels for structural use, pursuant to [Regulation 305/2011 on the marketing of construction products](#) ([6312/18](#) and [6312/18 ADD1](#)).

The Commission decision is a delegated act pursuant to Article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. It can now enter into force unless the European Parliament objects.