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President **George Ciamba**
Romanian Minister Delegate for European Affairs

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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>).
 • 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

Multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027

The presidency presented the state of play on discussions on the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027 and set out the provisional work programme up to April. Ministers exchanged views on the organisation of the work ahead.

The Council has been actively examining the Commission proposals on the next MFF at technical and political level since they became available in May and June. In this context, the previous presidency prepared a [draft Negotiating Box](#).

The draft Negotiating Box brings together those elements which are most likely to require political guidance from the EU leaders with a view to the Council reaching its position. It is a tool for structuring and facilitating the negotiations on the MFF. Early versions are prepared under the responsibility of the presidency. The draft Negotiating Box is discussed and constantly updated as negotiations move forward.

At their meeting on 13-14 December 2018, EU leaders welcomed the intensive preparatory work carried out during the Austrian presidency. They called on the Romanian 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.

The shared objective is to provide the June European Council with a streamlined draft Negotiating Box, with a view to reaching agreement in the European Council in autumn 2019.

At the same time intensive work will also continue on the various sectoral proposals.

March European Council

The Council started preparations for the European Council meeting on 21-22 March 2019 by discussing an [annotated draft agenda](#).

At their meeting in March, EU leaders will discuss jobs, growth and competitiveness. In particular, leaders will discuss the future development of the Single Market, the Capital Markets Union, industrial policy and European digital policy in preparation for the next Strategic Agenda. They will also address priorities for the 2019 European Semester and will be invited to endorse the Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area.

The European Council will also discuss the climate. Leaders will provide guidance on the overall direction and political priorities, to enable the European Union to submit a long-term strategy by 2020 in line with the Paris Agreement.

As regards external relations, leaders will prepare the EU-China summit to be held on 9 April 2019, and will potentially discuss other foreign policy topics in the light of events.

Finally, the European Council will review progress in tackling disinformation and the need to protect the democratic integrity of European and national elections across the EU.

Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030

The Council held an exchange of views on the steps to be taken to ensure a sustainable Europe by 2030. The discussion was based on the Commission's [reflection paper](#) 'Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030', presented on 30 January 2019.

The reflection paper focuses on the key policy foundations for the transition towards a sustainable Europe, based on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These include moving from a linear to a circular economy, correcting the imbalances in our food system, future-proofing our energy, buildings and mobility, and making sure that this transition is fair, leaving no one and no place behind.

The paper also concentrates on the horizontal enablers which need to underpin the sustainability transition, such as education, science, technology, research, innovation and digitisation; finance, pricing, taxation and competition; responsible business conduct, corporate social responsibility and new business models; open and rules-based trade; and governance and policy coherence at all levels. Finally, it emphasises the importance of blazing the trail for the sustainability transition globally as our policies will only have a limited impact on the planet if others pursue opposing policies.

Ministers discussed the key enablers for the transition towards a sustainable Europe and expressed their views on the following three scenarios set out by the Commission in its reflection paper to stimulate the discussion on how to follow up on SDGs within the EU:

- an overarching EU SDGs strategy to guide all actions by the EU and member states;
- continued mainstreaming of the SDGs in all relevant EU policies by the Commission, but not enforcing member states' action;
- an enhanced focus on external action while consolidating current sustainability ambition at EU level.

Ministers stressed the importance of taking action to support sustainable development domestically, regionally and globally in a coherent way in order to achieve the implementation at EU level of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The discussion will serve as input into the preparation of Council conclusions setting out the Council's response to the Commission's reflection paper and feed into the preparation of the sessions of the High-Level Policy Forum on Sustainable Development due to take place in July and September 2019.

Rule of law in Poland

Ministers discussed the state of play of the Article 7(1) TEU procedure concerning Poland.

The Commission provided the Council with an update on the latest developments regarding judicial reform in Poland.

Member states considered that recent legislative changes concerning the Supreme Court law were a positive development and encouraged the Polish authorities to address the remaining issues raised by the Commission.

The Council will return to this procedure, taking into account the views expressed by member states.

[Reasoned proposal under Article 7\(1\) TEU regarding Poland](#)

Respect for EU values in Hungary

Ministers discussed the state of play of the Article 7(1) TEU procedure concerning Hungary, and the next steps.

The Commission provided an update on the state of play in relation to Hungary.

The Council will return to this procedure, taking into account the views expressed by member states.

[Reasoned proposal under Article 7\(1\) TEU regarding Hungary](#)

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Conclusions on securing free and fair elections

The Council adopted, without discussion, conclusions on securing free and fair European elections.

The conclusions cover a number of non-legislative actions to be taken in order to tackle disinformation campaigns from inside and outside the EU and increase cybersecurity in the run-up to the European elections in May 2019.

For further information, please refer to the [press release](#).

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Conclusions on Switzerland

The Council adopted, without discussion, conclusions on EU relations with the Swiss Confederation.

The conclusions assess the development and overall state of EU relations with the Swiss Confederation since the adoption of previous conclusions on the matter in February 2017.

For further information, please refer to the [full text of the conclusions](#).

Facility for refugees in Turkey

The Council adopted conclusions on the Court of Auditors' [Special Report No 27/2018](#) entitled 'The Facility for Refugees in Turkey: helpful support, but improvements needed to deliver more value for money'.

The Facility for Refugees in Turkey is a mechanism for coordinating and streamlining aid from the EU and its member states in support of refugees in Turkey. The audit of the Court of Auditors examined whether the Facility effectively supported the refugees in Turkey by focusing on the management of the first tranche of the Facility and on the results achieved so far under the humanitarian strand.

In its conclusions the Council broadly welcomes the overall conclusion of the Court that the Facility provided a swift response to the refugee crisis in a challenging context and that the humanitarian projects have provided helpful support to refugees to address their basic needs. Nevertheless, it also notes that the Facility could have been more effective, and that it could achieve more value for money.

The Council invites the Commission to regularly report to the Council and the Steering Committee of the Facility on the issues raised by the Court of Auditors' Special Report and the implementation of the aforementioned recommendations, and to ensure that they are fully and systematically addressed.

[Full text of the conclusions](#)

AGRICULTURE

Negotiations on a legally binding agreement on forests in Europe

The Council agreed to support a draft ministerial decision on resuming negotiations on a legally binding agreement (LBA) on forests in Europe.

Formal and active negotiations on the LBA were carried out from February 2012 until November 2013 on the basis of a Council decision ([10984/11 + ADD1](#)), but were then put on hold.

Pesticides: maximum residue levels for various substances

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending Regulation 396/2005 as regards maximum residue levels for azoxystrobin, bicyclopyrone, chlormequat, cyprodinil, difenoconazole, fenpropimorph, fenpyroximate, fluopyram, fosetyl, isoprothiolane, isopyrazam, oxamyl, prothioconazole, spinetoram, trifloxystrobin and triflumezopyrim in or on certain products ([5379/19](#)+ [ADD 1 + ADD 1 COR 1 + ADD 2](#)).

Regulation 396/2005 establishes the maximum quantities of pesticide residues permitted in products of animal or vegetable origin intended for human or animal consumption. These maximum residue levels (MRLs) include, on the one hand, MRLs which are specific to particular foodstuffs intended for human or animal consumption and, on the other, a general limit which applies where no specific MRL has been set. MRL applications are communicated to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) which issues a scientific opinion on each intended new MRL. Based on the EFSA's opinion, the Commission proposes a regulation such as those listed above to establish a new MRL or to amend or remove an existing MRL, modifying the Annexes to Regulation 396/2005 accordingly.

TRANSPARENCY

Public access to documents

On 19 February 2019, the Council approved the reply to confirmatory application No 01/c/01/19 ([5169/19](#)).
