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General Affairs

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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**

Ministers held a policy debate on the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027 (MFF). They provided their views on the measures envisaged in the MFF on climate mainstreaming and migration, and in particular on the following issues:

- Climate mainstreaming: whether the proposed framework (including the 25% target) is adequate to ensure a result-oriented approach or whether additional elements are required;
- Migration: how to ensure the coordination and consistency between various funding possibilities in the area of migration (EU budget, trust funds), and how the June 2018 European Council conclusions, followed by the debate in the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting of October 2018, are reflected across headings in the draft negotiating box.

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 2018. In this context, the previous presidency prepared a draft negotiating box. The shared objective under the Romanian presidency is to provide the June European Council with a streamlined draft negotiating box, with a view to achieving an agreement in the European Council in autumn 2019.

The Presidency also presented to ministers a [progress report](#) outlining developments achieved in the negotiations on MFF-related sectoral proposals. The Council endorsed the letter to be sent by the Presidency to the European Parliament together with the progress report and the list of achieved common understandings.

Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)

The Council agreed its position (partial general approach) on the draft Regulation establishing the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) for the period 2021–2027.

IPA III is a part of the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027. It supports EU partners in adopting and implementing key political, institutional, social and economic reforms to comply with EU values and to progressively align to its rules, standards and policies.

The agreed text does not cover financial and horizontal issues which will depend on the overall agreement on the next multiannual financial framework.

The Commission has proposed an overall budget for the programme of €14,5 billion in current prices for the period 2021-2027.

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

March European Council

The Council finalised preparations for the European Council meeting on 21-22 March by discussing the draft conclusions, prepared by the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, in cooperation with the Romanian presidency and the Commission.

At their meeting in March, EU 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 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.

Leaders will prepare the EU-China summit to be held on 9 April 2019, and may 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 the European and national elections across the EU.

European Semester

The Council examined a presidency [synthesis report](#) on the contributions of other Council configurations involved in the current European Semester exercise.

The report notes that the European economy is entering its sixth year of uninterrupted growth. Real convergence has resumed, with higher growth rates recorded in member states with lower levels of GDP per capita. However, the growth of the economy is still not benefitting all citizens and countries in the same manner and growth remains vulnerable to global instability and medium- to long-term challenges. Investment and structural reforms need to focus even more on boosting productivity and growth potential.

The European Semester involves simultaneous monitoring of the member states' fiscal, economic and employment policies over a six-month period every year. In the light of the guidance provided by the European Council, the member states will prepare their national reform programmes (economic and employment policies) and stability or convergence programmes (fiscal policies) for this year.

The Council also agreed to forward a draft recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area to the European Council.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Preventing misuse of personal data in EP elections

The Council adopted new rules aimed at preventing European political parties from misusing personal data in EP elections.

The rules will allow for financial sanctions to be imposed on European political parties and foundations that deliberately influence, or attempt to influence, the outcome of EP elections by taking advantage of breaches of data protection rules.

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

Brexit-related measures (*GENERAL AFFAIRS, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY, TRANSPORT AND FISHERIES*)

The Council adopted without discussion a series of legislative acts as part of its contingency preparations for a "no-deal" Brexit scenario:

- Regulation to allow for the continuation of the PEACE and INTERREG VA programmes ([7134/19](#) + [PE-CONS 12/19](#))
- Regulation for the export of certain dual-use items from the EU to the UK and Northern Ireland ([7132/19](#) + [PE-CONS 23/19](#))
- Regulation to allow for the continuation of ongoing learning mobility activities under the Erasmus+ programme ([7143/19](#) + [7143/19 ADD 1](#) + [PE-CONS 55/19](#))
- Regulation on contingency measures in the field of social security coordination ([7163/19](#) + [7163/19 ADD 1](#) + [PE-CONS 62/19](#))
- Regulation amending the Connecting Europe Facility regulation ([7173/19](#) + [PE-CONS 22/19](#))
- Regulation ensuring basic road freight and road passenger connectivity ([7164/19](#) + [7164/19 ADD 1](#) + [PE-CONS 67/19](#))

- Regulation amending the regulation on ship inspection and survey organisations ([7172/19](#) + [PE-CONS 13/19](#))
- Regulation on certain aspects of aviation safety ([7145/19](#) + [7145/19 ADD1](#) + [PE-CONS 17/19](#))
- Regulation ensuring basic air connectivity ([7165/19](#) + [7165/19 ADD 1](#) + [PE-CONS 68/19](#))
- Regulation amending regulation 508/2014 on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund ([7140/19](#) + [7140/19 ADD 1](#) + [PE-CONS 35/19](#))
- Regulation amending regulation 2017/2403 as regards fishing authorisations for EU fishing vessels in the UK waters and fishing operations of UK fishing vessels in EU waters ([7136/19](#) + [7136/19 ADD 1](#) + [PE-CONS 36/19](#))

The aim of these acts is to limit the most severe damage caused by a disorderly Brexit in specific sectors where it would create a major disruption for citizens and businesses, such as social security, youth mobility, transport and fisheries.

These measures are temporary in nature, limited in scope and adopted unilaterally by the EU. They are in no way intended to replicate the full benefits of EU membership or the terms of any transition period, as provided for in the withdrawal agreement. In some areas, they are conditional upon the UK's reciprocal action.

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

[Brexit – background information](#)

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Cybersecurity

The Council adopted the conclusions on cybersecurity capacity and capabilities building in the EU:

"The Council of the European Union,

1. RECALLING its Conclusions on Resilience, Deterrence and Defence: Building strong cybersecurity for the EU;

2. RECALLING its Conclusions on EU Coordinated Response to Large-Scale Cybersecurity Incidents and Crises ;
3. RECALLING its Conclusions on external cyber capacity building ;
4. REITERATING that a high level of security of network and information systems can be provided by enhancing the cybersecurity capacity and capabilities of the Member States and the EU institutions, agencies and bodies, and by the subsequent strengthening of their cyber resilience;
5. WELCOMING the progress achieved by Member States in strengthening Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs);
6. COMMENDING the establishment of the CSIRTs Network by the Member States with the active support of the Commission and ENISA as well as the strengthened cooperation at strategic level through the NIS Cooperation Group, composed of the Member States, the Commission and ENISA;
7. EMPHASISING the key role of the NIS Cooperation Group in providing the necessary guidance to align as much as possible the approach in the transposition of the NIS Directive across the EU as well as in tackling relevant cybersecurity issues;
8. ACKNOWLEDGING the existing support being provided by the Commission to the Member States for capacity-building CSIRTs through the Connecting Europe Facility;
9. ACKNOWLEDGING the support provided to law enforcement authorities for capacity building in fighting cybercrime through the Internal Security Fund and CEPOL;
10. WELCOMING the update of the EU Cyber Defence Policy Framework to further support the development of cyber defence capabilities of EU Member States;
11. COMMENDING the progress achieved in the implementation of the NIS Directive by the Member States;

12. NOTING that cybersecurity is a complex, interdependent and continuously changing domain requiring the adaptation of the political and legal framework to new technological trends and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain and quantum computing;
13. EMPHASISING that cybersecurity related training and education programmes as well as information and awareness raising on security threats for end users are key to decreasing cybersecurity risks;
14. UNDERLINING that cyber exercises are effective tools for assessing and further improving the level of preparedness of the EU and its Member States for countering large scale cybersecurity incidents and crises;
15. REITERATING that cyberspace has no borders, which means that cross-border and cross-sector perspectives and cooperation are an unwavering principle of cyber capacity-building activities and initiatives;
16. STRESSING the importance of cooperation between the public sector, the private sector and academia, in particular through collaborative projects;
17. STRESSING the importance of civil-military cooperation, working towards common goals in the cyber field to ensure a coherent and effective response to cyber threats;
18. NOTES the progress achieved by a group of Member States in developing Cyber Rapid Response Teams to deepen voluntary cooperation in the cyber field through mutual assistance;
19. WELCOMES the ongoing discussion in the Council on the Commission's Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre and the Network of National Coordination Centres;
20. ENCOURAGES active participation in the ongoing work of the NIS Cooperation Group, in particular with regard to cyber capacity-building;
21. ENCOURAGES the ongoing work of the NIS Cooperation Group on EU coordinated response to large-scale cybersecurity incidents and crises;

22. INVITES the Member States to build on their national cybersecurity strategies and mainstream cybersecurity, taking into account sector-specific requirements;
23. INVITES the Member States to perform continuous monitoring, evaluation/assessment of the impact of measures taken to strengthen cyber resilience and enhance cyber capabilities and capacities at national level;
24. INVITES the Member States to mainstream cybersecurity and digital literacy in curricula at all levels of education (primary, secondary, tertiary, lifelong learning) based, where relevant, on established and future job profiles;
25. INVITES the Member States to carry out cybersecurity awareness and cyber hygiene initiatives for the public and end users, targeting public sector employees;
26. ENCOURAGES the Member States to conduct cybersecurity exercises at national level as well as to conduct and/or participate in cybersecurity exercises at EU level in order to test and train for strategic and technological aspects, as well as to develop the necessary skills effectively and on a practical level;
27. INVITES the Member States to further develop the cybersecurity technical and operational capabilities of their CSIRTs in incident prevention, mitigation and incident response;
28. CALLS on the Commission and ENISA to continue their support in developing the capacity and capability of the Network of CSIRTs by Member States to better cooperate, share information on incidents and respond effectively to large-scale cross-border incidents;
29. INVITES the Member States to continue to help law enforcement authorities develop specific competences in coordination with the competent European authorities in order to effectively fight cybercrime at EU level;
30. INVITES the Member States to increase investment in cyber capacity building;
31. CALLS on the Commission and ENISA to carry out cybersecurity awareness programmes and training targeting employees of the EU institutions, agencies and bodies;

32. CALLS upon the EU and its Member States to share information and best practices on a voluntary basis in order to contribute to the identification and tackling of the main cyber capacity building needs at national and EU level;
33. INVITES the EU and its Member States to support cybersecurity research and to promote cybersecurity as an issue in other fields of study, bringing various branches of cybersecurity-related research and development together into an integrated whole, and to foster excellence in cybersecurity research;
34. INVITES the EU and its Member States to develop cybersecurity research reflecting societal needs and integrating the research results into the market;
35. CALLS upon the EU and its Member States to take cybersecurity into consideration in calls for ICT procurement, as appropriate."

European Border and Coast Guard Agency: EU-Montenegro agreement

The Council adopted a decision ([6845/19](#)) approving the signing of a status agreement with Montenegro on actions carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in Montenegro ([6846/19](#)). It also decided to forward the draft decision on the conclusion of this agreement to the European Parliament for its consent ([6847/19](#)).

The purpose of such an agreement is to allow the European Border and Coast Guard Agency to coordinate operational cooperation between member states and a third country with respect to management of the external borders. In this respect, the agency can carry out actions at the external borders involving one or more member states and a third country neighbouring at least one of those member states, subject to the agreement of the neighbouring country, including on the territory of that third country.

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

EEA Agreement - Incorporation of EU legislation

The Council adopted a decision establishing the EU position to be taken in the Joint Committee of the European Economic Area (EEA) concerning an amendment to Annex IX (Financial Services)([6353/19](#)).

The aim of the decision is to incorporate Regulation (EU) No 575/2013 on prudential requirements for credit institutions and investment firms and Directive 2013/36/EU on access to the activity of credit institutions and the prudential supervision of credit institutions and investment firms into the EEA Agreement.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**Delegated acts**

The Council confirmed that it had no intention to object to the following delegated acts:

- Commission Delegated Regulation amending Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 481/2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 with regard to specific rules on eligibility of expenditure for cooperation programmes;
- Commission Delegated Regulation amending and correcting Delegated Regulation (EU) No 480/2014 as regards the provisions on financial instruments, simplified cost options, audit trail, scope and content of audits of operations and methodology for the selection of the sample of operations and Annex III;
- Commission Delegated Regulation amending Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/2195 on supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 on the European Social Fund, regarding the definition of standard scales of unit costs and lump sums for reimbursement of expenditure by the Commission to Member States;
- Commission Delegated Regulation supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 with regard to the form of financing which is not linked to costs of the relevant operations.

These regulations can now enter into force unless the European Parliament objects.

TRANSPARENCY**Public access to documents**

On 19 March 2019, the Council approved the reply to confirmatory application No 04/c/01/19 (doc. [6883/1/19 REV 1](#)).