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Environment

Brussels, 19 December 2019

President

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Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Finland

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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.

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ITEMS DEBATED

EU environment and climate policy in the new legislative term

The Environment Council had an exchange of views on the EU environment and climate policy in the new legislative term. This discussion highlighted member states' positions on the priorities and initiatives in environment and climate policy from 2020, including the European Green Deal.

At the European Council meeting of 12 December 2019, EU heads of state and government tasked the Council with taking work forward to pursue the goal of achieving a climate-neutral EU by 2050.

The Strategic Agenda for the EU for 2019-2024 adopted by the European Council establishes the transition to climate neutrality, fighting against biodiversity loss, improving the environment and ensuring the sustainability of the economy as cross-cutting priorities of the work of the EU member states and institutions. The EU can and must lead the way, by engaging in an in-depth transformation of its own economy and society that takes into account the diversity of situations in the various regions of the Union.

Drawing on the Strategic Agenda's focus on interinstitutional cooperation, and with a view to responding and providing input to the commitments already announced under the European Green Deal, as well as anticipating further actions, ministers exchanged views on the actions needed and the way forward on EU environment and climate policy in the new legislative term. Commissioner Frans Timmermans and Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius were present at this discussion.

In their interventions, ministers named the commitments which should be prioritised at EU level in 2019-2024, in order to catalyse the necessary transformative change to reverse climate and environmental degradation and ensure the sustainability of our society and economy.

The discussion was also the first opportunity for ministers to discuss the European Green Deal.

The Presidency concluded that it was more important than ever to put environment and climate policies at the heart of the EU's work.

[Recording of the debate](#)

[Presidency note](#)

[European Council conclusions of 12 December 2019](#)

[Strategic agenda adopted by the European Council on 20 June 2019](#)

[European Green Deal](#)

Biodiversity

The Environment Council adopted conclusions on biodiversity, agreed by unanimity, which offer political guidance for the ongoing preparations of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Member states stressed the need for urgent global action at all levels to halt biodiversity loss. The Council called upon the Commission to develop without any delay an ambitious, realistic and coherent 2030 EU biodiversity strategy as a central element of the European Green Deal.

The Council has started preparing for the UN biodiversity conference (CBD COP15) in October 2020 in Kunming, China.

The Council reaffirmed that the EU and its member states will lead and step up efforts to halt biodiversity loss and restore ecosystems.

[Council conclusions on biodiversity](#)

[Press release](#)

[Recording of the debate](#)

[2020 UN biodiversity conference](#)

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

– *European Green Deal*

The Commission presented the European Green Deal to ministers.

[Recording of the debate](#)

[Information from the Commission](#)

– *Report on main recent international meetings*

The Presidency and the Commission informed ministers on the following recent international meetings:

- Third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury (COP 3) (Geneva, 25-29 November 2019)
- COP 25 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Madrid, 2-13 December 2019)
- COP 21 Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (Naples, 2-5 December 2019)

[Recording of the debate](#)

Information from the Presidency and the Commission ([15172/19](#), [5149/1/19 REV 1](#), [15055/19](#))

[Closing statement by the Finnish Presidency and the European Commission on behalf of the EU and its Member States at COP25](#)

– ***Report on the second EU clean air forum***

The Slovak delegation informed ministers on the outcome of the second EU clean air forum which was held in Bratislava on 28 and 29 November 2019.

[Recording of the debate](#)

[Information from the Slovak delegation](#)

– ***Fitness check on air quality***

The Commission informed ministers on a fitness check which assesses the performance of two EU ambient air quality directives. These directives set air quality standards and spell out the concentration levels of pollutants in the ambient air which must not be surpassed.

[Recording of the debate](#)

[Information from the Commission](#)

– ***EU action to address risks related to poly- and perfluorinated alkylated substances (PFAS)***

The Danish, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Swedish delegations informed ministers on the issue of risks related to poly- and perfluorinated alkylated substances (PFAS).

[Recording of the debate](#)

[Information from the Danish, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Swedish delegations](#)

– ***Management of large carnivores***

The Slovenian delegation informed ministers on the issue of appropriate management of large carnivores.

[Recording of the debate](#)

[Information from the Slovenian delegation](#)

– ***EU action to protect and restore the world's forests***

The German delegation informed ministers on EU action to protect and restore the world's forests.

[Recording of the debate](#)

[Information from the German delegation, supported by the French and Luxembourg delegation](#)

[EU action to protect the world's forests - Council adopts conclusions \(press release, 16 December 2019\)](#)

– ***Report on EU implementation of the Aarhus Convention***

The Commission informed ministers on a report on the EU implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the area of access to justice in environmental matters.

[Recording of the debate](#)

[Information from the Commission](#)

– ***Fitness check on water and the REFIT check on urban waste water treatments***

The Commission informed ministers on a fitness check on legislation related to water.

[Recording of the debate](#)

Information from the Commission [15101/19](#), [15135/19](#)

– ***Work programme of the incoming Presidency***

The Croatian delegation informed ministers on its work programme regarding environment and climate change.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**ENVIRONMENT****Conclusions on Environmental Economic Accounts**

The Council adopted conclusions on the European Court of Auditor's Special Report No 16/2019 entitled 'European Environmental Economic Accounts: usefulness for policymakers can be improved'.

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING its conclusions on improving the examination of special reports drawn up by the Court of Auditors in the context of the discharge procedure

1. WELCOMES the Special Report No 16/2019 by the European Court of Auditors entitled 'European Environmental Economic Accounts: usefulness for policymakers can be improved';
2. TAKES NOTE of, and WELCOMES, the conclusions and recommendations of the Special Report;
3. RECOGNISES the key role of the European Environmental Economic Accounts (EEEEA) for policy-making and their importance as a source of information for environmental policies; NOTES that the EEEA describe the relationship between the environment and the economy, allowing policy-makers to assess the interaction of environmental and economic issues;
4. HIGHLIGHTS that policymakers need to have access to up-to-date and reliable information to monitor environmental progress towards sustainable development;
5. AGREES therefore, that the usefulness of the EEEA could be improved in line with the recommendations of the Special Report;
6. NOTES that there is demand at both national and international level for integrated environmental economic data to feed into several national and Union policies such as climate change, the circular economy, natural capital, including biodiversity and inland and marine waters, the SDGs, the European Semester and Green Finance;

7. HIGHLIGHTS the key role of Member States in filling the data gaps; UNDERLINES the need for appropriate guidance to be provided to Member States and cooperation between the actors involved in the compilation of EEEA; POINTS OUT, in this regard, that, when bridging the data gaps identified in the Special Report, the needs and burdens of Member States, as well as the resource constraints of the national statistical institutes should be taken into account;
8. WELCOMES the work that is already ongoing to improve analysis of policy needs, priority setting and timeliness of EEEA data, the relevance of EEEA modules, as well as the action plan for the implementation of the European Strategy for Environmental Accounts; CONSIDERS that this work and the implementation of the recommendations of the Special Report would benefit Member States in their work, thus allowing for improved quality of the EEEA;
9. INVITES the Commission to implement the recommendations outlined in the Special Report within the timeframes suggested.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Cooperation Arrangement between the EEAS and Bahrain

The Council authorised the signing of a cooperation arrangement between the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the ministry of foreign affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain. This arrangement does not create any legal obligations on either side under domestic or international law.

[Bahrain and the EU](#)

[The EU and the Gulf, factsheet](#)

[EU delegation to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman](#)

Commitments to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse in the international aid sector

The Council approved the Commitments made by donors to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the international aid sector and authorised the Commission to sign the Commitments on behalf of the Union.

The Commitments are the outcome of the meeting ‘Putting people first: tackling sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector’ during the International Summit on 18 October 2018. They do not create any legal obligations on either side under domestic or international law.

[EU and humanitarian aid \(policy page\)](#)

EU-China Strategic Cooperation Agenda 2025

The Council approved the entering into negotiations by the European External Action Service (EEAS) on the 'EU-China Strategic Cooperation Agenda 20205' ('Agenda 2025').

At the 20th EU-China Summit on 16 July 2018, the EU and China agreed to start "discussions on a new cooperation agenda to further expand and deepen exchanges and cooperation between the EU and China beyond 2020". This was reconfirmed at the 21st EU-China Summit on 9 April 2019, with the aim of adopting a new cooperation agenda by the next EU-China Summit.

[21st EU-China summit, 9 April 2019](#)

[EU-China relations, factsheet](#)

EU-India Joint Agenda for Action 2025

The Council approved the entering into negotiations by the European External Action Service (EEAS) on a 'EU-India Joint Agenda for Action 2025', a non-binding document to guide the work on the EU-India strategic partnership over the coming five years.

[India: Council adopts conclusions on a new EU strategy, press release 10/12/2018](#)

[14th EU-India summit, 6/10/2017](#)

EPA's negotiations with ACP countries

The Council adopted a decision amending the negotiating directives for the negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and regions, to the extent that they fall within EU competence ([14899/19](#)).

The representatives of the governments of the member states adopted a decision authorising the European Commission to negotiate Economic Partnership Agreements with African Caribbean and Pacific countries and regions, to the extent that they fall within the competences of the member states ([14900/19](#))

On 17 June 2002, the Council authorised the Commission to negotiate Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and regions and adopted directives for those negotiations.

Concluded EPAs with the ACP countries and regions include rendez-vous clauses for the future review of those agreements. The amendment of the negotiating directives is necessary to frame new negotiations more accurately in light of recent EU policy initiatives and priorities as trade evolves worldwide.

The Commission should also be authorised to negotiate, on behalf of the member states, Economic Partnership Agreements with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and regions to the extent that they fall within the competences of the member states, on the basis of amended negotiating directives.

[Overview of Economic Partnership Agreements, December 2019](#)

[Economic Partnership Agreements](#)

Russia - economic sanctions

Today, the Council prolonged the economic sanctions targeting specific sectors of the Russian economy until 31 July 2020.

This decision follows an update by President Macron and Chancellor Merkel to the European Council on 12 December 2019 on the state of implementation of the Minsk agreements, to which the decision on maintaining sanctions is linked. Given that the Minsk agreements are not fully implemented, the European Council unanimously took the political decision to renew the economic sanctions against Russia.

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

Response to the removal of the head of the EU delegation to Benin

The Council today decided that the head of the mission of the Republic of Benin to the European Union will be declared persona non grata.

This is a response to the decision by the Beninese government to declare the head of the EU delegation to Benin as persona non grata. The EU considers this declaration as wholly unwarranted and contrary to the EU's objective of developing relations and building partnerships in third countries.

[Delegation of the European Union to Benin](#)

Global reporting mechanism on illicit conventional arms and their ammunition (iTrace IV)

The Council endorsed the budgetary impact statement and adopted a decision in support of a global reporting mechanism on illicit conventional arms and their ammunition to reduce the risk of their diversion and illicit transfer (iTrace IV).

iTrace IV is the fourth phase of the global, reporting mechanism on illicit conventional arms and their ammunition. It contributes to Europe's collective security in line with the EU Global Strategy.

[iTrace website](#)

Exercise Specifications for MILEX 20

The Council approved the Exercise Specifications (EXSPEC) for the EU Crisis Management Military Exercise in 2020 (MILEX 20).

MILEX 20 is a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) planning exercise at the military strategic and operational levels. Its aim is to further enhance the EU decision-making military capacity and to strength coordination among EU actors to implement an efficient EU integrated approach.

The exercise will be conducted from 8 to 19 June 2020.

[Common Security and Defence Policy, EEAS website](#)

Commitments to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse in the international aid sector

The Council approved the Commitments made by donors to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the international aid sector and authorised the Commission to sign the Commitments on behalf of the Union.

The Commitments are the outcome of the meeting ‘Putting people first: tackling sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector’ during the International Summit on 18 October 2018. While seeking to pursue the EU interest in implementing a zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, the Commitments do not create any legal obligations on either side under domestic or international law.

[EU and humanitarian aid \(policy page\)](#)

EU-Saudi Arabia consultations

The Council approved a text on consultations between the EU and Saudi Arabia.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Schengen evaluation recommendations

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2019 evaluation of Poland on the application of the Schengen acquis in the field of the common visa policy ([15005/19](#)).

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2018 evaluation of Greece on the application of the Schengen acquis in the field of management of the external land border with the Republic of North Macedonia and Bulgaria ([15006/19](#)).

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2018 evaluation of Estonia on the application of the Schengen acquis in the field of management of the external border ([15007/19](#)).

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2019 evaluation of the Czech Republic on the application of the Schengen acquis in the field of management of the external border ([15008/19](#)).

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2019 evaluation of the Czech Republic on the application of the Schengen acquis in the field of data protection ([15009/19](#)).

Civil protection - Presidency report

The Council took note of the report on the main achievements at EU level in the field of civil protection during the Finnish presidency ([14026/19](#))

EU-Belarus readmission agreement

The Council adopted a decision on the signing ([12144/1/19](#)), on behalf of the EU, of an agreement with Belarus on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation ([12160/19](#)).

The Council also decided to forward the decision on the conclusion of the agreement ([12158/1/19](#)) to the European Parliament for its consent.

Hague conventions

The Council agreed that the line to be taken by the EU with regard to the accession of Barbados to the 1996 Hague Convention on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition, enforcement and co-operation in respect of parental responsibility and measures for the protection of children is not to object.

The Council agreed that the line to be taken by the EU with regard to the accession of Guyana to the 2007 Hague Convention on the international recovery of child support and other forms of family maintenance is not to object.

Eurojust - implementing decisions

The Council adopted an implementing decision on a mechanism for compensating the member state whose national member is elected President of Eurojust and which has seconded another person to its national desk for this reason ([14742/19](#)).

The Council adopted an implementing decision ([14614/19](#)) approving the rules of procedure of Eurojust ([14973/19](#) + [14974/19](#))

The adoption of these implementing decisions follows the start of application of the new Eurojust regulation, which took place on 12 December 2019.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Macro-financial assistance to Jordan

The Council adopted a decision to provide up to 500 million euros of macro-financial assistance to Jordan.

The EU assistance will support the restoration of a sustainable external financing situation in Jordan, thereby supporting its economic stability, reform agenda and social development.

The assistance will be available for two and half years. It will be provided in the form of loans, to be disbursed in three instalments. The loans will have a maximum average maturity of 15 years.

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

Excise duties

The Council adopted the following legislative acts:

- directive on general arrangements for excise duty ([14107/19](#))
- regulation on administrative cooperation on the content of electronic register ([14108/19](#))
- decision on computerising the movement and surveillance of excise of goods ([37/19](#))

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

VAT derogations

The Council adopted two implementing decision authorising:

- the United Kingdom to continue to apply a VAT derogation in relation to certain hired or leased cars ([14088/19](#))
- Luxembourg to prolong a VAT derogating measure as regards small businesses ([14766/19](#))

GENERAL AFFAIRS

EU institutions - Ethical frameworks

The Council adopted conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 13/2019 entitled "The ethical frameworks of the audited EU institutions: scope for improvement" ([14548/2/19 REV 2](#)).

Appointment of a member of the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board

The Council adopted a decision appointing Mr Priit Potisepp, head of the finance section of the permanent representation of Estonia to the EU, as a new member of the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) for a term of office of three years.

He will replace Mr Jaume Garcia who resigned before the end of his term of office ([12737/19](#)).

Security rules for protecting EU classified information

The Council adopted a decision amending Decision 2013/488/EU on the security rules for protecting EU classified information ([14796/19](#)). Appendices B and C to that decision are replaced after Sweden notified the General Secretariat of the Council of changes to its security classifications and to its National Security Authorities (NSAs), and after Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Spain, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Finland and the United Kingdom notified the General Secretariat of the Council of changes to their respective NSAs.

BUDGETS

2020 EU budget - contingency measures

The Council adopted a regulation on measures concerning the implementation and financing of the EU budget in 2020 in relation to the UK's withdrawal from the EU ([15045/1/19](#) + [12412/1/19](#)).

The regulation is an extension to 2020 of the contingency framework laid down in Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2019/1197 for the 2019 EU budget.

The aim of the measures is to mitigate the impact of a no-deal scenario for funding in a wide range of areas such as research and agriculture. The regulation would enable the EU, in such a scenario, to continue making payments to UK beneficiaries for contracts signed and decisions made before the withdrawal date or between the withdrawal date and the end of 2019, in application of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2019/1197. This is subject to the condition that the UK continues paying its contribution in the EU budget for 2020 and accepts the controls and audits which cover the entire implementation period of the programmes or actions.

The regulation was adopted in accordance with Article 352(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The Parliament gave its consent on 22 October 2019.

CUSTOMS UNION

Quotas and suspensions on certain agricultural and industrial products

The Council adopted two regulations relating to, respectively, the management and the suspension of autonomous quotas for certain agricultural and industrial products in the EU.

Both regulations aim to ensure a sufficient and uninterrupted supply of goods which are either unavailable or produced in insufficient quantities in the EU, thereby avoiding any disturbances on the market. ([14529/19](#), [14376/19](#)).

Negotiations with Belarus on customs cooperation

The Council adopted a decision authorising the Commission to open negotiations with Belarus for an agreement on customs cooperation and mutual administrative assistance. It also agreed the negotiating directives on the basis of which the negotiations should be conducted ([14483/19](#)).

Rules of origin

The Council adopted a decision on the EU position within the committee on rules of origin of the World Trade Organization and relating to the agreement on rules of origin which entered into force in 1995.

The EU position aims to enhance transparency of laws, regulations and practices regarding non-preferential rules of origin, by means of rules on mandatory or voluntary notification by World Trade Organization (WTO) members of their non-preferential rules of origin, using standardised templates. This will result in clearer and more predictable rules of origin and will facilitate the flow of international trade. ([14929/19](#))

TRADE

CETA joint committee

The Council adopted a decision setting out the EU position to be adopted in the CETA joint committee as regards the list of arbitrators ([14734/19](#)).

Trade relations with Moldova

The Council adopted a decision setting out the EU position within the association committee in trade configuration, in the context of the association agreement signed between the EU and Moldova in 2014.

The position relates to the agreement between the two parties to increase, on a reciprocal basis, the volume of some products subject to annual duty-free tariff rate quotas (TRQs).

The EU has agreed to increase the volume of TRQs for table grapes and plums from Moldova, and to introduce a new TRQ for cherries. Moldova has agreed to gradually increase the volume of the TRQs for pork, poultry, dairy and sugar from the EU ([14642/19](#)).

Scheme of generalised tariff preferences

The Council decided not to raise objections to a delegated act of the Commission relating to the EU scheme of generalised tariff preferences (GSP).

The EU GSP has assisted, since 1971, developing countries in their efforts to reduce poverty, promote good governance and sustainable development by providing preferential access to the EU market and helping them to generate additional revenues through international trade.

The delegated act amends Annex II of the regulation which contains the list of GSP beneficiaries. The Commission has to review this list by 1 January of each year to ensure that GSP is granted to all developing countries which are in a similar stage of economic development and share a common development need.

Nauru, Samoa and Tonga were classified by the World Bank as upper middle-income country in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Accordingly, they no longer fulfill the criteria to benefit from the GSP arrangement and need to be removed from Annex II as from 1 January 2021 ([14542/19](#), [15098/19](#)).

ENERGY**Conclusions on waste management in non-energy uses of nuclear and radiological technologies**

The Council adopted conclusions on waste management in non-energy uses of nuclear and radiological technologies ([14564/19](#)).

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

TRANSPORT**Agreement on Air Transport**

The Council agreed on the position to be taken on the EU's behalf in the Joint Committee set up by the Agreement on Air Transport between Canada and the European Community and its member states concerning the adoption of the rules of procedure of the Joint Committee ([14826/19](#) + [COR 1](#)).

RESEARCH**Euratom programme complementing Horizon Europe**

The Council took note of a progress report concerning the proposed Council regulation establishing the research and training programme of the European Atomic Energy Community for the period 2021-2025 complementing Horizon Europe.

The proposed Euratom Programme will pursue the current programme's key research activities, expand research into non-power applications of ionising radiation and make improvements in the areas of education, training and access to research infrastructures ([14627/1/19 REV 1](#))
