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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: European Council meeting (15 and 16 October 2020)
– Conclusions

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

I. COVID-19

1. The European Council assessed the current epidemiological situation, which is unprecedented and gives rise to very serious concern.
2. It welcomed the progress achieved so far on overall coordination at EU level against COVID-19, including the recommendation on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement. It calls on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to continue the overall coordination effort based on the best available science, notably regarding quarantine regulations, cross-border contact tracing, testing strategies, the joint assessment of testing methods, the mutual recognition of tests, and the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU. The European Council will regularly revert to this matter.
3. Welcoming the work at EU level on the development and distribution of vaccines, the European Council reiterates the need for a robust authorisation and monitoring process, the building of vaccination capacity in the EU, and fair and affordable access to vaccines. The European Council also encourages further cooperation at global level.

II. EU-UK RELATIONS

4. The European Council recalls that the transition period will end on 31 December 2020 and notes with concern that progress on the key issues of interest to the Union is still not sufficient for an agreement to be reached.
5. The European Council reaffirms the Union's determination to have as close as possible a partnership with the United Kingdom on the basis of the negotiating directives of 25 February 2020, while respecting the previously agreed European Council guidelines, as well as statements and declarations, notably those of 25 November 2018, in particular as regards the level playing field, governance and fisheries.

6. Against this background, the European Council invites the Union's chief negotiator to continue negotiations in the coming weeks, and calls on the UK to make the necessary moves to make an agreement possible.
7. As regards the Internal Market Bill tabled by the UK government, the European Council recalls that the Withdrawal Agreement and its Protocols must be fully and timely implemented.
8. The European Council calls upon Member States, Union institutions and all stakeholders to step up their work on preparedness and readiness at all levels and for all outcomes, including that of no agreement, and invites the Commission, in particular, to give timely consideration to unilateral and time-limited contingency measures that are in the EU's interest.
9. The European Council will remain seized of the matter.

III. CLIMATE CHANGE

10. To meet the objective of a climate-neutral EU by 2050 in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement, the EU needs to increase its ambition for the coming decade and update its climate and energy policy framework. In that context, the European Council discussed the Commission's Communication on 'Stepping up Europe's 2030 climate ambition', including the proposed emissions reduction target of at least 55% by 2030, and the actions required to achieve that ambition.
11. Recalling its previous conclusions, the European Council considers that the updated target should be delivered collectively by the EU in the most cost-effective manner possible. All Member States will participate in this effort, taking into account national circumstances and considerations of fairness and solidarity. All relevant EU legislation and policies need to contribute to the new 2030 target and to the fulfilment of the climate neutrality objective, while respecting a level playing field and preventing carbon leakage.

12. The European Council invites the Council to take work on this agenda forward. It invites the Commission to conduct in-depth consultations with Member States to assess the specific situations and to provide more information about the impact at Member States' level. The European Council will return to the issue at its December meeting with a view to agreeing a new emissions reduction target for 2030 and the submission of the EU's updated nationally determined contribution (NDC) to the UNFCCC before the end of the year.
13. The European Council calls upon all other Parties to also submit an updated NDC. It underlines the importance of strong coordinated action through active European climate diplomacy, with a view to joining forces on the global stage to further advance the cause of fighting climate change.

IV. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Relations with Africa

14. The EU attaches high priority to strengthening its strategic relations with Africa and its partnership with the African Union, which remain based on mutual interests and shared responsibility. Africa is a natural partner for the European Union, resulting from our geographical, historical and cultural proximity, as well as common values and commitments. The changing global landscape and the many short- and long-term challenges that both continents are facing underscore the importance of deepening and renewing our political relations and cooperation in all fields.
15. In the current context, solidarity and close cooperation in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, including the development of vaccines and their distribution, are crucial. The European Council is committed to strengthening EU support to health systems and the reinforcement of partners' preparedness and response capacity.

16. To help address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Council is committed to furthering international debt relief efforts for African countries in a coordinated manner within the relevant multilateral frameworks, and asks the Council to prepare a common approach in this respect by the end of November 2020.
17. There are not only challenges but also opportunities. The EU is Africa's biggest trading, investment and development partner. Building on this, we can do more to harness the enormous potential of our relationship. In parallel with its own green and digital transformation, the EU wishes to extend its partnership with Africa on its economic transformation. In this context, the European Council discussed its intention to work with its African partners and boost investment by working together on a comprehensive multi-sector, multi-level and multi-stakeholder investment programme. The European Council sees the following sectors as being key for further cooperation and investment: digital and knowledge economy, renewable energy, transport, health, and agri-food systems. Moreover, recalling the Strategic Agenda and the Council conclusions of 30 June 2020, universal values, non-discrimination as well as equal rights and equal opportunities for all, women's empowerment, youth inclusion, education and skills, social, environmental and economic sustainability as well as good governance and the rule of law would be key cross-cutting themes for EU engagement. Support for economic integration at regional and continent level and for promoting inter-continental economic integration are also of particular importance.
18. Long-lasting peace, security and stability in Africa are a shared objective and key conditions for sustainable development. The EU is ready to continue supporting African efforts on peace and security, good governance and the promotion of human rights. The EU also wishes to engage African partners in addressing mobility and all aspects of migration, including legal migration, combatting illegal migration, readmission, and the fight against migrant-smuggling networks, both within and between the two continents. A mutually beneficial partnership requires a balanced, coherent and comprehensive approach, guided by the principles of solidarity, partnership and shared responsibility.

19. The European Council calls for enhanced cooperation with Africa to advance multilateral solutions in general in the global arena. Consultations with African partners in order to jointly define common priorities are of the essence. By joining forces we will be able to better defend our common interests in an increasingly complex and uncertain world. This requires us to be more united in the stances we take on the global scene, and more determined and effective in exerting our combined influence, including in multilateral fora. The European Council looks forward to the upcoming political meetings with the African Union in order to take the partnership to a higher level.

Southern Neighbourhood

20. In this year of the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona process, the European Council will hold a strategic discussion on the Southern Neighbourhood in December.

Belarus

21. The European Council endorses the Council conclusions of 12 October 2020 and expresses its solidarity with Lithuania and Poland in light of the retaliatory measures by Belarus. It condemns the continuing violence against peaceful protesters.

Turkey

22. The European Council reaffirms its conclusions of 1-2 October 2020 and deplores renewed unilateral and provocative actions by Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean, including recent exploratory activities. The European Council urges respect for UN Security Council Resolutions 550 and 789, underlines the importance of the status of Varosha and reiterates its full solidarity with Greece and Cyprus.
23. The European Council urges Turkey to reverse these actions and work for the easing of tensions in a consistent and sustained manner. It will remain seized of the matter in order to follow-up on its conclusions of 1-2 October 2020.

MH17

24. The European Council calls upon the Russian Federation to continue the trilateral negotiations between Australia, the Netherlands and the Russian Federation with regard to the downing of flight MH17. After more than six years since this tragic event the 298 victims and their next of kin deserve justice. The European Council supports all efforts to establish truth, justice and accountability, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2166.
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