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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Special meeting of the European Council (17 and 18 April 2024)
– Conclusions

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

In the context of the upcoming European elections, the European Council underlines the Union and its Member States' determination to closely monitor and contain any risks stemming from disinformation, including through artificial intelligence, as well as foreign information manipulation and interference in electoral processes. The European Council invites the EU institutions and national authorities to cooperate on such matters.

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I. UKRAINE

1. Recalling its conclusions of March 2024, the European Council reiterates its full unwavering support to Ukraine, its people and its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders.
2. The European Council strongly condemns Russia's continued air and missile attacks against Ukraine's civilians and civilian and critical infrastructure, including the recent intensified targeting of the energy sector. The European Union and its Member States will intensify the provision of humanitarian and civil protection assistance, including equipment such as power generators and power transformers.
3. The European Council underlines the need to urgently provide air defence to Ukraine and to speed up and intensify the delivery of all the necessary military assistance, including artillery ammunition and missiles. It calls on the Council, notably at its upcoming meeting, and on Member States to ensure the necessary follow-up. The European Council welcomes progress on the proposals to direct extraordinary revenues stemming from Russia's immobilised assets for the benefit of Ukraine and calls for their swift adoption.

Military support will be provided in full respect of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and taking into account the security and defence interests of all Member States.

II. MIDDLE EAST

4. The European Council strongly and unequivocally condemns the Iranian attack on Israel and reiterates its full solidarity with the people of Israel and commitment to Israel's security and to regional stability. The European Council calls on Iran and its proxies to cease all attacks and urges all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and to refrain from any action that may increase tensions in the region. The European Union will take further restrictive measures against Iran, notably in relation to unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and missiles. The European Union remains fully committed to contributing to de-escalation and security in the region.
5. The European Council recalls its conclusions of March 2024 in all their elements, and reiterates its commitment to work with partners to end the crisis in Gaza without delay and implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 2728, including through reaching an immediate ceasefire and the unconditional release of all hostages, as well as providing full, rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian aid at scale for Palestinians in need. The European Union remains firmly committed to a lasting and sustainable peace based on the two-state solution.

6. The European Union stands ready to work with all partners to avoid further escalation of tensions in the region, notably in Lebanon. It recalls its strong support for Lebanon and the Lebanese people and acknowledges the difficult circumstances Lebanon is experiencing domestically and as a result of regional tensions. The European Council calls on all parties to commit to the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701. In this context, the European Union remains committed to the stability of Lebanon, including through supporting much-needed reforms, and to strengthening its support to the Lebanese Armed Forces.
7. The European Council confirms the EU's determination to support the most vulnerable people in Lebanon, including refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities in need, as well as providing support to combat human trafficking and smuggling. The European Council reaffirms the need to achieve conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified returns of Syrian refugees, as defined by UNHCR.
8. In view of the eighth Brussels Conference on Syria, the European Council invites the High Representative and the Commission to review and enhance the effectiveness of EU assistance to Syrian refugees and displaced persons in Syria and in the region. It calls on all donors to maintain or increase their level of assistance to them.

III. TÜRKİYE

9. The European Council held a strategic debate on EU-Türkiye relations, taking note of the Joint Communication of the High Representative and Commission on the state of play of EU-Türkiye political, economic and trade relations. The European Union has a strategic interest in a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Türkiye. The European Council tasks Coreper, respecting the competences of the relevant institutions, to advance work on the recommendations of the Joint Communication in line with previous European Council conclusions and in a phased, proportionate and reversible manner, subject to additional guidance from the European Council. Türkiye's own constructive engagement will be instrumental in advancing the various areas of cooperation identified in the Joint Communication.

10. In this regard, the European Union attaches particular importance to resumption of and progress in the Cyprus settlement talks in further enhancing EU-Türkiye cooperation. Recalling its previous conclusions, the European Council remains fully committed to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem, within the UN framework, in accordance with the relevant UNSC resolutions and in line with the principles on which the Union is founded and the *acquis*. The European Council welcomes the appointment of María Angela Holguín Cuéllar as the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy on Cyprus. The European Union is ready to play an active role in supporting all stages of the UN-led process, with all appropriate means at its disposal.

IV. A NEW EUROPEAN COMPETITIVENESS DEAL

11. In the face of a new geopolitical reality and increasingly complex challenges, the European Union is committed to acting decisively to ensure its long-term competitiveness, prosperity and leadership on the global stage and to strengthen its strategic sovereignty.
12. Recalling its conclusions of March 2023 and June 2023, the European Council will ensure an integrated approach across all policy areas to increase productivity and sustainable and inclusive growth throughout Europe, build a robust, innovative and resilient economy and advance Europe's unique social and economic model that will boost the Union's competitive transition towards digital sovereignty in a self-determined and open manner and towards climate neutrality. The green deal aims at staying competitive globally and increasing energy independence. This will increase real income and purchasing power, thereby improving living standards for all EU citizens.
13. Over the past 30 years, the Single Market and its four freedoms have been a powerful engine of convergence and growth in the European Union and its Member States, promoting a highly competitive social market economy, economic, social and territorial cohesion, and a level playing field based, inter alia, on an effective State aid and competition framework. In light of geopolitical tensions and more assertive policy measures taken by international partners and competitors, notably on subsidies, as well as long-term productivity and technological and demographic trends, Europe needs a policy shift, building on its competitive strengths.
14. The European Council welcomes Enrico Letta's presentation of his 'Much More Than A Market' High-Level Report, and invites the current and future Council Presidencies to take work forward on the recommendations therein by the end of the year. The European Council looks forward to the presentation of the upcoming report on Europe's competitiveness. The new Strategic Agenda will provide further guidance and frame the work ahead.

Towards a new European competitiveness deal

15. A new European competitiveness deal is needed, anchored in a fully integrated Single Market. This will require efforts at both Union and Member State levels and across policy areas to close growth, productivity and innovation gaps between the Union and its international partners and main competitors. To that end, policy action must be better put at the service of enhancing Europe's economic, manufacturing, industrial and technological base, thereby securing the Union's economic resilience and industrial renewal, global competitiveness, technological leadership, and attractiveness as a business location. Pursuing a level playing field, both globally and within the Single Market, is essential in that context.
16. Creating the conditions to allow European operators to seize the opportunities of a climate-neutral, digital and circular economy, using the balanced and comprehensive approach set out in Granada, will help the Union deliver sustainable solutions that work for all. To this end, all relevant tools, including public procurement, should be leveraged. Cohesion policy has a key role in reducing disparities and stimulating long-term sustainable growth. Cross-border connectivity and high-quality infrastructure are also crucial. Europe also needs to reduce its strategic dependencies in sensitive sectors identified in Versailles – energy, critical raw materials, semi-conductors, health, digital, food and critical technologies – and in other sectors such as chemicals, biotechnology and space.
17. Investments in key strategic sectors and infrastructures require a combination of both public and private financing working together. The EU budget and the EIB group continue to play an important role. Deepening the Capital Markets Union is key to unlocking private capital. It will provide European companies with access to more diversified financing at lower costs, help channel domestic savings and mobilise the substantial amount of private investment needed to meet the challenges, notably the green and digital transitions and the needs of the European defence industry. Access to capital, including venture and growth capital, should also be facilitated and simplified, especially for SMEs and start-ups.

18. To implement the new European competitiveness deal, the European Council calls for work to be taken forward decisively and swiftly on the following key competitiveness drivers:

Single Market

- a) deepening the Single Market by removing remaining barriers, in line with the 2020 Barriers Report, the ‘Single Market at 30’ Communication, and the Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report, and by fully implementing and enforcing the free movement rules. In light of servitisation and the twin transitions, the focus should be on the cross-border provision of services, notably horizontal and economically significant ones, as well as cross-border movement of goods, including such essential goods as medicines, based on the needs of businesses, public institutions and citizens, while addressing transparency in supply chains;
- b) improving transport links and mobility within the Union by addressing missing links or bottlenecks and upgrading the framework;
- c) tackling unfair commercial practices, such as dual quality of foodstuffs, that undermine EU consumers’ trust in the Single Market;
- d) developing a new horizontal strategy for a modernised Single Market by June 2025. Special focus should be put on addressing challenges affecting the competitiveness of business of all sizes, while paying particular attention to SMEs and start-ups;

Capital Markets Union

- e) advancing work in the Council and the Commission without delay on all identified measures that are necessary to create truly integrated European capital markets which are accessible to all citizens and businesses across the Union, to the benefit of all Member States, especially on:
 - i) harmonising relevant aspects of national corporate insolvency frameworks;
 - ii) fostering investments, including in cross-border equity, through targeted convergence of well-designed corporate systems for capital markets players and mechanisms;
 - iii) relaunching the European securitisation market, including through regulatory and prudential changes, using available room for manoeuvre;
 - iv) improving the convergence and efficiency of the supervision of capital markets across the EU. It invites the Commission to assess and work on the conditions for enabling the European Supervisory Authorities to effectively supervise the most systemic relevant cross-border capital and financial market actors, with the aim of strengthening financial integration and ensuring financial stability, simplifying processes and reducing compliance costs, taking into account the interests of all Member States;
 - v) improving the conditions for institutional, retail and cross-border investment in equity and for the financing and exit options of European scale-ups;
 - vi) ensuring a level playing field in access to private capital for all Member States;

- vii) designing and implementing a simple and effective cross-border investment/savings product for retail investors; developing pensions and long-term savings products;
- viii) creating an attractive and consumer-friendly investment environment and promoting an investor culture among EU citizens, including by strengthening financial literacy of citizens and promoting awareness-raising initiatives;
- ix) reviewing and simplifying the financial market regulation framework to cut red tape;

Industry

- f) developing and implementing an effective industrial policy, in dialogue with stakeholders, that decarbonises our industry in a competitive manner, develops the Union's competitive edge in digital and clean technologies, diversifies and secures strategic supply chains, and strengthens Europe's defence technological and industrial base;

Research and innovation

- g) fostering a more innovation-friendly environment based on excellent science, which accelerates market uptake and the industrial and commercial scale-up of innovation, while increasing investment in research and development to meet the 3 % GDP expenditure target;

Energy

- h) achieving a genuine energy union, by securing the supply of abundant, affordable and clean energy, that serves the dual objective of pursuing European energy sovereignty and climate neutrality. This will require ambitious electrification using all net-zero- and low-carbon solutions, flexibility, and substantial deployment of and investment in grids, storage and interconnections;

Circular economy

- i) increasing circularity and resource efficiency, including by exploiting the potential of the bioeconomy, thereby reducing primary resource dependencies, notably on critical raw materials;

Digital

- j) supporting the digital transformation of business, government and society, which requires a true Single Market in digital services and data, encouraging and facilitating investment in digital infrastructure like 5G and 6G, addressing possible barriers to cross-border activities in the mobile network sector, and the application of game-changing digital technologies such as AI, blockchain, quantum computing and immersive reality technology, and fully exploiting the untapped potential of data in Europe while ensuring privacy and security. The European Council also highlights the need to strengthen the EU's leadership in global digital affairs and invites the Commission and the High Representative to prepare a joint communication on the subject;

Social

- k) fostering high-quality jobs throughout Europe, by stepping up the pursuit of the 2030 headline targets, through reinforced social dialogue, on increased participation in the labour market, reskilling/upskilling and lifelong learning, tackling skills and labour gaps in the context of wider demographic trends, including talent mobility to and within the European Union, and ensuring equal opportunities;

Trade

- l) supporting the core role of the WTO in the multilateral rules-based system; pursuing an ambitious, robust, open and sustainable trade policy that allows fair trade agreements, opens third-country markets to EU companies, defends EU interests, allows resilient and reliable supply chains to develop, guarantees a true level playing field and creates reciprocal market access opportunities.

A better and smarter regulatory framework

- 19. The regulatory framework should ensure legal certainty and predictability, be better integrated, coherent across policy areas, open to innovative approaches and digital by default, while reducing the administrative burden that weighs on companies. Taking into account the economic fabric of the Union, the Commission should apply the ‘Think small first’ principle when designing new legislation.
- 20. The European Council invites the Commission to significantly reduce the administrative and compliance burden on companies and national authorities, prevent over-regulation and ensure the enforcement of EU rules, and highlights the importance of timely and correct implementation of EU legislation by Member States, avoiding over-transposition.

21. Harmonising regulatory frameworks, encouraging mutual recognition, streamlining reporting data, and continuing the initiative to reduce reporting by at least 25 % will contribute to that objective. In particular, ensuring the simplification of procedures for permits and licenses, eliminating unnecessary reporting, and preventing the introduction of overlapping obligations will also be important. The Commission should provide high-quality, timely and thorough impact assessments and competitiveness checks, including of cumulative effects, for legislative proposals with significant impact.

A competitive, sustainable and resilient agricultural sector

22. A competitive, sustainable and resilient agricultural sector is a key strategic interest of the Union. Farmers need a stable and predictable framework, including to accompany them in tackling environmental and climate challenges. In line with its previous conclusions, the European Council calls for a swift adoption of the amendment to the CAP regulation and encourages the Council and the Commission to pursue work especially on:

- a) implementing short- and medium-term measures to reduce the administrative burden and achieve simplification;
- b) strengthening the position of farmers in the food supply chain to ensure a fair income;
- c) ensuring rules-based and fair competition globally and in the internal market;
- d) the proposed extension of the temporary framework on State aid and the possibility to increase the ceiling on de minimis aid for agriculture;
- e) imposing further tariffs on certain imports into the European Union of Russian and Belarusian agricultural products, while taking into account the impact on the Single Market and ensuring that the transit of such goods to developing countries remains unaffected.

Review of progress

23. The European Council will regularly review progress on initiatives to enhance the Union's competitiveness, secure its economic resilience and achieve the full potential of the Single Market.
 24. At its meeting in June 2024, the European Council will review progress and discuss additional steps to deepen the Capital Markets Union.
 25. The European Council will keep actions in favour of a competitive, sustainable and resilient agricultural sector under review.
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