



Council of the
European Union

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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: European Council meeting (10 and 11 December 2020)
– Draft conclusions

In accordance with Article 3(1) of the Rules of Procedure of the European Council, delegations will find attached the draft conclusions prepared by the President of the European Council, in close cooperation with the member of the European Council representing the Member State holding the six-monthly Presidency of the Council and with the President of the Commission.

The European Council paid homage to former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who passed away on 2 December 2020. He was a driving force behind the European project, and played a key role in creating the European Council.

I. COVID-19

1. The European Council welcomes the recent positive announcements on the development of effective vaccines against COVID-19 and the conclusion of advance purchase agreements by the Commission.
2. However, the arrival of vaccines does not mean that the pandemic is over. The epidemiological situation in Europe remains worrying, even though the considerable efforts made by all are starting to yield results. We must therefore sustain our efforts to counter the spread of the virus with a view to preventing further waves of infections.
3. The European Council welcomes the coordination of efforts at EU level so far and commits to strengthening this coordination, in particular in preparing for a gradual lifting of restrictions and a return to normal travel, including for cross-border tourism, when the sanitary situation allows for it. It agrees on the need to enhance the sharing of experiences and of plans for the future. Building on the work done over the past weeks, it invites the Commission to present a proposal for a Council recommendation on a common framework for rapid antigen tests and for the mutual recognition of test results. A coordinated approach to vaccination certificates should also be developed.
4. The European Council underlines the importance of preparations for the timely deployment and distribution of vaccines, including the development of national vaccination strategies, to ensure that vaccines are made available to people in the EU in good time. It is important to provide clear factual information on vaccines and to counter disinformation.

5. Vaccination should be treated as a global public good. The EU will continue its efforts to contribute to the international response to the pandemic, including via the COVAX facility for guaranteeing affordable and fair access to vaccines for all.
6. The European Council highlights the need to pursue work to increase resilience in the area of health, including by taking forward the proposals for a Health Union and making full use of the potential of health data in Europe.
7. With a view to better anticipating and managing potential future pandemics, the EU will promote ways to reinforce international cooperation, including through a possible international treaty on pandemics within the framework of the United Nations and the World Health Organization, which is at the centre of international cooperation in health matters.

II. CLIMATE CHANGE

8. 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. To that end, the European Council endorses a binding EU target of a net domestic reduction of at least 55 % in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990. It calls on the co-legislators to reflect this new target in the European Climate Law proposal and to adopt the latter swiftly.
9. We will raise our climate ambition in a manner that will spur sustainable economic growth, create jobs, deliver health and environmental benefits for EU citizens, and contribute to the long-term global competitiveness of the EU economy by promoting innovation in green technologies.

10. The target will be delivered collectively by the EU in the most cost-effective manner possible. All Member States will participate in this effort, taking into account considerations of fairness and solidarity, while leaving no one behind. The new 2030 target needs to be achieved in a way that preserves the EU's competitiveness and takes account of Member States' different starting points and specific national circumstances as well as efforts made. The European Council acknowledges the need to ensure interconnections and security of energy supplies at an affordable price for households and companies, and to respect the right of the Member States to decide on their energy mix and to choose the most appropriate technologies.
11. Public finance and private capital must be mobilised to address the significant investment needs stemming from this increased ambition. The economic response to the coronavirus crisis offers the opportunity to accelerate the sustainable transformation and modernisation of our economies and to gain a competitive advantage. Best use must be made of the MFF/NGEU package, including the Just Transition Mechanism, to achieve our climate ambition. As agreed in July 2020, climate action will be mainstreamed in policies and programmes financed under the MFF and NGEU. An overall climate target of at least 30 % will apply to the total amount of expenditure from the MFF and NGEU and be reflected in appropriate targets in sectoral legislation.
12. The EU should promote the development of common, global standards for green finance. The European Council invites the Commission to put forward a legislative proposal for an EU green bond standard by June 2021 at the latest. It also welcomes the EIB Group Climate Bank Roadmap 2021-2025, which will contribute to meeting the EIB Group's commitment to support EUR 1 trillion of climate and environmental investments by 2030.
13. The European Council invites the Commission to assess how all economic sectors can best contribute to the 2030 target and to make the necessary proposals, accompanied by an in-depth examination of the environmental, economic and social impact at Member State level, taking into account national energy and climate plans. The Commission is invited to consider in particular:

- exploring ways to strengthen the ETS system, in particular carbon pricing policies, while preserving its integrity and taking into account the need to address distributional concerns and energy poverty. The Modernisation Fund will address increased investment needs to accelerate the transition to climate neutrality and to modernise energy systems;
 - enhancing the potential for emission reductions in sectors that will not be covered by the ETS;
 - proposing measures that enable energy-intensive industries to develop and deploy innovative climate-neutral technologies while maintaining their industrial competitiveness;
 - proposing a carbon border adjustment mechanism to ensure the environmental integrity of EU policies and avoid carbon leakage in a WTO-compatible way.
14. The EU's nationally determined contribution will be updated according to the new binding target and submitted to the UNFCCC secretariat by the end of the year. Ahead of COP 26, the European Council reiterates that international engagement is crucial to success in addressing climate change. It calls upon all other Parties, in particular major economies, to come forward with their own ambitious targets and policies. It underlines the importance of strong coordinated action through active European climate diplomacy.
15. The EU will ensure that its trade policy and its trade agreements are consistent with its climate ambition.
16. The European Council looks forward to the stepping up of international efforts to protect biodiversity ahead of the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity which will be organised in China next year.

III. SECURITY

17. The European Council firmly condemns the recent terrorist attacks across Europe. It extends its deepest condolences to the families and friends of the victims and stands in solidarity with the people of Austria, Germany and France. We are united in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. In the face of these attacks on fundamental rights and freedoms, the EU will uphold the common values that underpin our pluralist societies and continue to pursue with determination its joint efforts to defend them. In that context, it is important to fully implement existing decisions. The European Council also welcomes the Commission's presentation of a new EU agenda on counter-terrorism and calls for work on this to be taken forward.

18. The European Council condemns all forms of attacks on the freedoms of expression and religion or belief, including antisemitism, racism and xenophobia, and underlines the importance of combating incitement to hatred and violence as well as intolerance. It welcomes the adoption of the Council Declaration on the fight against antisemitism.

19. It is essential to prevent radicalisation and address the ideologies behind terrorism and violent extremism, including online. The European Council calls for the following:
 - stepping up the fight against illegal content online. In that regard it looks forward to an ambitious Commission proposal to reinforce the responsibilities of online platforms under the Digital Services Act;
 - swiftly adopting the proposal on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online;
 - ensuring that religious education and training are in line with European fundamental rights and values, and addressing foreign influencing of national civil and religious organisations through non-transparent financing;

- supporting initiatives to better understand the spread of extremist ideologies. Europe-wide comprehensive exchanges of scientific knowledge, research and expertise must be enhanced.
20. It is essential that law enforcement and judicial authorities are able to exercise their lawful powers to combat serious crime both online and offline. The European Council stresses the need to advance work on the retention of data to combat serious crime, in the light of the latest European Court of Justice case law and in full respect of fundamental rights and freedoms.
21. To further support law enforcement across the EU and the proper functioning of the Schengen area, the implementation of agreed measures should be stepped up substantially, and police and judicial cooperation and coordination should be strengthened.
22. The European Council:
- calls on Member States to step up their efforts to make full use of European databases and information systems, in particular as regards entering in the databases relevant data on persons who are assessed by individual Member States as posing a serious terrorist or violent extremist threat;
 - stresses the importance of ensuring that all persons crossing the Union’s external borders are checked against the relevant databases as required by the relevant EU legislation;
 - invites the co-legislators to examine the proposal on the strengthening of Europol’s mandate with a view to its rapid adoption;
 - underlines the overall importance of police and judicial cooperation in all its aspects.

IV. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

EU-US relations

23. Following elections in the United States, the European Council held a discussion on EU-US relations. It highlighted the importance of a strong strategic transatlantic partnership based on common interests and shared values. This is especially important in light of the need to tackle pressing global challenges. The EU looks forward to working together with the United States, in particular to reinforce the global response to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, tackle climate change, enhance the economic recovery, cooperate on digital and technological matters, strengthen mutual trade, address trade disputes, and reform the WTO, promote multilateralism as well as peace and security. We stand ready to discuss shared priorities with the new President of the United States.

Southern Neighbourhood

24. A democratic, more stable, greener and more prosperous Southern Neighbourhood is a strategic priority for the EU. Twenty-five years after the launching of the Barcelona Process, we are determined to relaunch and further highlight and develop this strategic partnership built on a shared geography and history.
25. We want to jointly fight the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthen the resilience of our economies and societies, preserve our collective security, take up the challenge of mobility and migration and offer perspectives to the youth on both shores of the Mediterranean.
26. Work will be guided by the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 and the key principles of our Neighbourhood policy, and supported by an effective use of all our instruments. We will develop a new Agenda for the Mediterranean based on shared priorities and a focus on specific Mediterranean responses and shared management in areas such as environment, connectivity, education and culture, and natural resources. In this respect, it is essential to provide for a strong role for the civil society.

27. The European Council looks forward to the upcoming Joint Communication of the Commission and the High Representative on a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood. This should trigger a new level of political dialogue across the Mediterranean and lead to reinforced cooperation in order to tackle common challenges and take advantage of shared opportunities.

Turkey

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Ostrovets

28. With regard to the Belarusian Ostrovets Nuclear Power Plant, the European Council reiterates the importance of ensuring nuclear and environmental safety.
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