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#### **OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council

On: 26 November 2018

To: Delegations

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Subject: Implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan II in 2017: Strengthening gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action  
- Council conclusions (26 November 2018)

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Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan II in 2017: Strengthening gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action, as adopted by the Council at its 3654th meeting held on 26 November 2018.

**Council conclusions on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan II in 2017:  
Strengthening gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action**

1. Significant progress has been made globally towards achieving gender equality, the full enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls and their empowerment. Nonetheless, achievements remain uneven across regions and within countries. In many parts of the world, girls and women continue to be systematically left behind and discriminated against. The level of women's political participation remains low in many countries. Persistent, and in some cases unprecedented, violations and abuses of human rights of women and girls occur on a daily basis.
2. In almost all countries women are still not on an equal footing with men regarding income, quality education, vocational training and access to health or technology. Women often do not have the same access to, or control over, productive resources such as land. Women and girls continue to disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid care work. The lack of water, sanitation and hygiene makes it disproportionately harder for women and girls to lead safe, productive and healthy lives. Gender-based inequalities cause women and girls being disproportionately affected by poverty, hamper their full enjoyment of all human rights and deprive them of opportunities for well-being.
3. Conflict, the impact of climate change, natural disasters and forced displacement exacerbate the situation. Sexual and gender-based violence is used for political, economic and military ends. In this context, the Council strongly welcomes the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to those working to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict. Women and girls are being trafficked, enslaved and even sold as merchandise. Harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as well as child, early and forced marriages persist, constituting a serious violation of human rights.

4. Against this background, and in line with the EU acquis, the Council reaffirms the EU's and Member States' commitment to promote women's and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a priority across all areas of action. The promotion, protection and fulfilment of human rights for women and girls, gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are overarching EU priorities and objectives. The EU Gender Action Plan is an essential tool to contribute to achieving these goals. A number of hurdles still need to be overcome. Not only must progress be accelerated, but achievements to date require preserving and safeguarding against any deterioration or backlash.
5. The Council recalls the commitment of the EU and its Member States to achieve the 17 SDGs by 2030, and reaffirms that gender equality and women's and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights and their empowerment are at the core of the 2030 Agenda, both as a standalone goal and as a cross-cutting priority consistent with the principle of "leaving no one behind". In this context, the Council welcomes the progress achieved in 2017, in particular as regards SDG 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, SDG 1 on poverty eradication, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, as well as SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. The EU Gender Action Plan contributes to implementing the European Consensus on Development as part of the overall EU response to the 2030 Agenda across all areas of external action.
6. The Council recalls its Conclusions of 26 May 2015 on Gender and Development as well as its Conclusions of 26 October 2015 on the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020<sup>1</sup> (GAP II) and of 11 December 2017 on the Annual Implementation Report 2016 of the EU Gender Action Plan II and reiterates the importance of ensuring its strategic and efficient implementation, as well as monitoring, evaluation, reporting and follow-up in all EU external relations.

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<sup>1</sup> 13201/15

7. The Council welcomes the progress made in the implementation of the GAP II as presented in the second annual implementation report<sup>2</sup>, and recognises the progress made across the institutional culture shift objectives, such as more dedicated political and management leadership, strengthened use of internal and external gender expertise and of gender analyses, enhanced gender mainstreaming, especially regarding budgetary processes, across both existing and new initiatives and the increase of dedicated funds. The progress on the implementation of the institutional culture shift objectives should be continuously strengthened and reported on.
8. The Council is pleased to note the regional dimension of the reporting that will facilitate the assessment of regional progress made in the implementation, the identification of good practices and needs for improvement. It also very much welcomes the broadening scope of the report which includes, for the first time, information from areas such as research and innovation, trade, and international mobility, and encourages the Commission to continue these efforts. In addition, the Council welcomes the increased attention to specific themes reported on, such as combating trafficking in human beings, political participation of women, their access to financial services, and economic empowerment of women and girls.
9. While recognising the positive trend, the Council reaffirms that the Commission, the High Representative and Member States must substantially increase efforts to reach the five minimum standards of performance<sup>3</sup> indicated by the GAP II as a starting point for a gender-sensitive and transformative approach in all EU external action and international cooperation. Meeting these five standards is an essential condition for reaching the 85% target<sup>4</sup> set by the GAP II, including for Member States.

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<sup>2</sup> 13188/18 + ADD1+2 - SWD(2018) 451 final

<sup>3</sup> The minimum standards of performance are: (1) OECD/DAC Gender Marker 0 (a marker which attributes a score to projects based on how significant its gender dimension is) is always justified; (2) gender analysis is done for all priority sectors; (3) sex-disaggregated data is used throughout the project and programme cycle and programming; (4) gender expertise is available and used timely in the programme cycle and programming; (5) GAP II objectives are selected to be reported on.

<sup>4</sup> To mainstream gender across 85% of all new EU initiatives by 2020.

10. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services. The Council welcomes the detailed reporting on EU activities on sexual and reproductive health and rights as outlined in the new European Consensus on Development, and stresses the need to improve the global reporting methodology. Furthermore, the Council stresses the importance to continue mobilising additional funds and supporting stakeholders in this area.
11. Furthermore, the Council calls upon all EU actors, including Member States, to remain committed to preventing, combatting and prosecuting all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage, as well as conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, sexual harassment and abuse, online violence and bullying. In this context, the Council stresses the need for victim assistance and recalls the EU's commitment to prevent, combat and prosecute all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including against men and boys, without discrimination on the basis of the survivor's sexual orientation and gender identity. Sexual and gender-based violence constitutes both a cause and result of gender inequality. Specific attention should be paid to women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including migrants, refugees as well as women and girls with disabilities.

12. The Council welcomes the renewed opportunity provided by the GAP II implementation for enhanced cooperation between the Commission services, the EEAS and Member States, demonstrating progress towards improved coherence and strategic coordination among EU actors in partner countries, including through enhanced political and human right dialogues. It is crucial to maintain such coherence and coordination in international debates and fora, in particular the UN Human Rights Council, the Third Committee of the General Assembly and the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the Security Council Open Debate on Women Peace and Security as well as in the framework of political dialogues and Human Rights Dialogues with partner countries.
  
13. The Council reaffirms the strong EU commitment and support to effective multilateralism and a rules-based global order, as illustrated for example by the partnership initiated with the Spotlight Initiative, an EU–UN initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls worldwide. Furthermore, the Council welcomes the leading role that the EU and its Member States are playing in supporting international initiatives to promote women's and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and calls for continued cooperation and strategic partnerships with the UN, other multilateral organisations and civil society as crucial partners of the EU in this respect. The Council reiterates the EU's strong commitment to the full implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 and its follow-up resolutions. The Council reaffirms its commitment to increasing women's participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, in peace negotiations, mediation and in peace-building, particularly through promoting women's leadership and supporting the role of civil society and grassroots women's organisations. The Council refers to and underlines the synergies with the EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security.

14. The Council welcomes the more prominent integration of gender equality in EU political positions and dialogues with partner countries and calls for a regular incorporation of gender dimensions into actions and all policy and political dialogues on other important sectors, such as employment, trade, public finance management, public administration reform, transport, energy, agriculture, environment, education, health, infrastructure, and ICT.
15. The Council underlines the importance of a strong cooperation with civil society in implementing the GAP II and more generally in achieving the SDGs. In this regard, the Council calls on the Commission services and the EEAS to continue and strengthen their cooperation and consultation with civil society organisations working towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. This should be done at all levels in the implementation of the GAP II, including in gender analysis, and throughout the programming and policy cycles. The need for enhanced safety and security for women's organisations and women human rights defenders should be duly taken into account.
16. At the same time, the Council reiterates the need to engage men and boys in eliminating gender inequalities, raise their awareness about the impact of gender inequalities and to promote their active and meaningful role in supporting behavioural change, addressing discriminatory social norms and combating gender stereotypes.
17. The Council invites the Commission services, the EEAS and Member States to systematically use gender analysis, gender mainstreaming, sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators in identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes throughout all EU external action. This is a precondition for realising the gender-transformative approach in EU external action and international cooperation. Consideration should be given to provide both financial and technical support to partner countries for the production and use of gender statistics.

18. Keeping in mind the GAP II report's objective to monitor the implementation of the Gender Action Plan by all EU actors on a yearly basis, the Council welcomes the Commission services' and the EEAS' intention to include qualitative data in the next reporting phase. This analysis could be the first step towards the final evaluation of the GAP II implementation, as requested by the GAP II itself which will form the basis of the continuation of the GAP II. The final evaluation, including its recommendations, should encompass a selected number of objectives set out in the GAP II, in particular those related to the institutional culture shift and women's economic empowerment. The evaluation should also analyse the contribution of the GAP II towards SDG 5 and the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, the Council encourages the Commission Services and the EEAS to continue to explore a simplified user-friendly reporting mechanism and questionnaires, and to promote communication and exchange on that matter.

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