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Subject: Stepping up Joint Programming
- Council conclusions (12 May 2016)

1. Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on stepping up Joint Programming, as adopted by the Council at its 3462nd meeting held on 12 May 2016.

Council conclusions on stepping up Joint Programming**Progress and challenges**

1. The Council welcomes the progress made on Joint Programming of external assistance by the EU and its Member States. By pursuing Joint Programming the EU and its Member States collectively contribute to implementing the policy commitments made at global and EU level¹. In this context the Council recalls its conclusions on the EU Common Position for the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness² which set the framework for joint multiannual programming, its conclusions on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy³ emphasising the need for full involvement of Member States in the European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as other regions, and its conclusions Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change⁴.

2. The EU and its Member States are committed to strongly support partner countries in delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and recognise the value of a Joint Programming approach, notably to strengthen a coordinated and strategic EU response. If properly implemented Joint Programming offers concrete opportunities to contribute to Policy Coherence for Development.

¹ The Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in Busan, December 2011, the European Consensus on Development, the Agenda for Change, and the Joint Communication on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

² 16773/11.

³ 8087/15.

⁴ 9369/12.

3. Since 2011 Joint Programming has focused on 55 partner countries with 25 EU Joint Cooperation Strategies currently in place or being finalised. Joint Programming has the potential for strengthening the efficiency, coherence, transparency, predictability, and visibility of the external assistance of the EU and its Member States. Implementing Joint Programming at country level can facilitate a more effective division of labour and reduced aid fragmentation.
4. Joint Programming can also be an effective tool to enhance EU coordination at country and sector level and can reinforce coordinated policy dialogue, as well as joint analysis, information sharing, joint implementation initiatives, joint monitoring and joint evaluation. Yet there remain challenges that need to be addressed. In some cases transaction costs are still high. The synchronisation of programming cycles between EU participants and receiving countries should be improved, where possible. Strong commitment by all actors at country level and in EU capitals is key for success.

Consolidating and expanding Joint Programming

5. Joint Programming should be promoted and strengthened, while being kept voluntary, flexible, inclusive, and tailored to the country context, and allow for the replacement of EU and Member States Programming documents with EU Joint Programming documents. In countries where Joint Programming has yet to start, the Council calls on the Commission services and the EEAS to assess the potential with Member States missions for Joint Programming and for developing a roadmap. Partner country engagement, appropriation and ownership are essential for this process. Joint Programming should be led by the partner country's development strategy.
6. The Council recognises the added value that Joint Programming can have in terms of avoiding duplication, reducing transaction costs (including for partner countries), and further strengthening EU coordination and EU visibility. This process should meet EU and Member States' requirements and should align with partner countries' development priorities.

7. The Council stresses the opportunity of expanding Joint Programming including in fragile situations and conflict-affected countries, as well as in prevention or post-conflict contexts. In this context the Council recalls its conclusions⁵ on the EU's comprehensive approach, noting that the starting point of the comprehensive approach must be early, coordinated and shared analysis. This provides a strategic basis for conflict-sensitive EU programming. This also contributes to the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. The Council also invites the Commission services and the EEAS to consider ways in which Joint Programming can accompany countries in transition to higher income levels, as part of a wider relationship going beyond external assistance.

The way forward

8. In addition, the Council considers that renewed effort and commitment by the EU and the Member States are necessary for Joint Programming to fully deliver its benefits, in particular in countries where participating parties have recognised its potential to become the preferred approach. The EU and the Member States should mobilise political and technical support to ensure adequate capacity at both field and headquarters levels. Joint programming should take into account EU and Member State thematic and sector initiatives and cross-cutting policies notably on human rights, gender equality, good governance and civil society.
9. In line with the EU Comprehensive Approach, Joint Programming documents should evolve to include strategic issues such as migration, climate change, fragility, security and democracy. The Council looks forward to the continued implementation of the EU Comprehensive Approach Action Plan and calls for better coordination and greater coherence of the EU response, including through Joint Programming. Trust Fund activities should also take account of the Joint Programming dimension.

⁵ 9644/14.

10. Efforts to reduce fragmentation and promote coherence and synergies between the EU and the Member States should also be part of the implementation phase. The Council therefore calls on the Commission services and the EEAS to continue promoting EU and Member States-financed joint implementation activities, which also contributes to increasing the visibility of the EU and its Member States on the ground, for example through co-financing and delegated cooperation, paying particular attention to development actors from the EU and the Member States. Cooperation between Member States development actors should also be encouraged in the framework of joint implementation.

11. The Council encourages the EU and Member States to strengthen their efforts to raise awareness among partner governments and other stakeholders of Joint Programming in order to strengthen and encourage ownership and alignment by timely consultations and dialogue. Joint Programming should continue to be open also for other donors when assessed relevant at country level, by EU and Member States representations.

12. The Council invites the EEAS and the Commission services to report back on EU Joint Programming processes on a regular basis and looks forward to the ongoing Evaluation of the EU Joint Programming Process of Development Cooperation and its findings and recommendations which could be of key importance to improve Joint Programming processes and procedures and guide further steps. The Council invites the EEAS and the Commission services to also take forward the work on Joint Programming including, in the light of the orientations from the upcoming EU Global Strategy, the revised Neighbourhood Policy and any future revision of the EU's development policy.
