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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Council conclusions on a strategic partnership with the Gulf

Delegations will find attached the Council conclusions on a strategic partnership with the Gulf approved by the Council at its meeting on 20 June 2022.

**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON A STRATEGIC
PARTNERSHIP WITH THE GULF**

1. The Council welcomes the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative as a timely and operational roadmap towards a strategic partnership with Gulf partners and calls for its swift and efficient implementation. Building a strategic partnership with the Gulf Cooperation Council and its Member States, as part of enhancing EU engagement in the broader region, is a key priority for the European Union. Involvement of other key Gulf countries in the partnership may also be considered as relations develop and mature.
2. Close and effective cooperation between the European Union and Gulf partners is essential to achieve key objectives of the European Union, notably peaceful and prosperous Gulf and Middle East regions, a strong economic recovery, sustainable, affordable and secure energy supplies for European consumers, a strong collaboration on green transition between Europe and its partners, to contribute to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and a strong response to global humanitarian and development needs.
3. A stable secure, green and prosperous Gulf region is a shared strategic priority and fundamental interest for both the EU and its Gulf partners. At a time of insecurity and significant challenges to the rules-based international order both in Europe and in the Gulf region, and as the world faces the consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the sustainable post-COVID-19 economic recovery, the green transition and the climate crisis, the digital transition, and the need for sustainable conflict resolution, the Council underscores the mutual interdependence and the need for close cooperation. In the spirit of a strategic partnership, stronger joint action including in multilateral fora will lead to enhanced prosperity and security of both regions, and ensure that global and regional challenges can be meaningfully addressed.
4. Promoting peace and stability and achieving de-escalation of tensions in the wider Gulf region as well as in the broader Middle East are key priorities for the EU and constitute a shared interest with Gulf partners. Any efforts to build confidence should be inclusive. Iran is central to security in the region, though its direct and indirect support to political and

military proxies as well as the ballistic proliferation and transfer of missiles and weapons to state and non-state actors remain an important source of regional instability. Recent positive steps, including the restoration of GCC unity, the normalisation agreements with Israel, the initiatives by GCC countries to resume or develop dialogue with Iran, and the recent agreement on a truce and on confidence building measures in Yemen as a major development, offer opportunities for improved wider regional security and stability. The restoration and full re-implementation of the JCPoA has the potential to contribute positively to regional prosperity and security. It could further encourage a constructive approach in the region as well as offer a platform for further efforts to build and consolidate confidence. While such efforts should be region-led, the EU remains ready to engage with all actors in the region in a gradual and inclusive approach, in full transparency and with the ultimate objective to facilitate a dialogue process that can help to develop confidence building measures and arrangements, which provide for greater security in the Gulf region. The regional Baghdad Conference on Cooperation and Partnership, and its follow-up process with EU involvement, could serve as a useful example for region-led processes. The EU underscores its commitment to the respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law, including universal principles, such as good-neighbourly relations and peaceful resolution of conflicts and disputes. The Council welcomes the proposal to appoint an EU Special Representative for the Gulf and requests preparatory bodies to start work in this regard.

5. The Council is ready to step up EU efforts to build confidence and promote maritime safety and security in the wider Gulf region and in dialogue with littoral states. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and fundamental principles of freedom of navigation must also be fully respected. This would include enhanced coordination and cooperation between ongoing EU and Member State maritime security operations in the region, while fully respecting their separate mandates and operational activities (EUNAVFOR Somalia Operation ATALANTA, and European-led Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) initiative) as well as other CSDP activities in the region. The Council recalls its Conclusions and related Decision in February 2022 to establish a Coordinated Maritime Presence in the North West Indian Ocean, which offers a platform for this work. Disaster preparedness and response, nuclear safety, conflict prevention, and mediation as well as counter-terrorism, cyber security and judicial and law enforcement cooperation offer other areas of possible confidence building initiatives, to be developed in the framework of various EU instruments.

6. In light of the active role of Gulf countries in the Middle East, North Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, the Council agrees that the EU should step up its bilateral political dialogue and operational engagement, as well as its cooperation with Gulf countries within existing international formats, notably as regards Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Libya, the Middle East Peace Process and Lebanon, as well as Afghanistan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and the Sahel. The EU and the GCC and its Member States share a rich experience and expertise in international mediation and should strengthen their cooperation in this field.
7. Supporting the rules-based international order is a common interest of the EU and the Gulf partners. The EU appreciates GCC Member States' vote in favour of the UN General Assembly resolutions of 2 March 2022 and 24 March 2022 demanding that Russia immediately end its military aggression against Ukraine and calling for civilian protection and humanitarian access in Ukraine, as well as humanitarian support to Ukrainian refugees. The EU emphasizes the joint interest in condemning Russia's clear violation of international law. The EU relies also on GCC Member States' assistance to prevent the circumvention of EU measures adopted in response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Furthermore, the EU is concerned by Russian state-sponsored disinformation and massive information manipulation used to justify and support its military aggression against Ukraine as well as undermine the EU's position on this issue. With a view to global developments, the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which led to the blockade of Ukrainian ports, also significantly contributed to the deterioration of food security in many countries, especially in Africa and in the Middle East.
8. Ongoing societal and economic transformations in the Gulf region offer a wealth of opportunities for cooperation, including on human rights and democratisation challenges. The EU expresses its readiness to support Gulf partners' in strengthening the rule of law and the full enjoyment of civil and political as well as economic, social, and cultural rights of all persons. Attention will be paid to the fight against all forms of discrimination, and the EU will continue to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief. Particular focus will be put on gender equality and promoting women's and girls' empowerment and full enjoyment of human rights, as well as on the human rights of LGBTI persons. The Council highly values human rights dialogues with GCC partners which offer an important platform to have constructive exchanges on strengthening the protection and promotion of human rights, the respect for international humanitarian law, the abolition of the death penalty, human rights defenders, individual cases, and the situation of migrant workers. Moreover, the EU is interested in engaging further with the GCC and its Member States on digital and media

rights, as well as human rights online and data protection. The continued dialogue with Gulf partners on enhancing freedom of expression and freedom of media will be important in this regard. Positive and constructive developments with regards to human rights and democratisation would also serve to further strengthen the potential for enhanced cooperation between the EU and the GCC countries.

9. The Council notes the increasing global humanitarian needs posing unprecedented challenges to the international humanitarian system. Recognising and welcoming Gulf countries' significant bilateral contributions, the Council encourages Gulf donors to step up their engagement and multiannual funding towards the UN-coordinated global humanitarian system and the relevant UN agencies and other humanitarian actors. In addition, the Council promotes respect for International Humanitarian Law and humanitarian principles, including protection of humanitarian space, to facilitate effective delivery of humanitarian assistance, and encourages the Gulf countries to do so as well. The Council looks forward to the organisation of an EU-GCC Ministerial meeting on humanitarian assistance in 2023.
10. The Council, acknowledging the importance of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, is ready to step up policy dialogue and donor coordination with Gulf donors at multilateral level, notably within the OECD Arab-DAC dialogue on development framework. In this context, the EU intends to step up its relations with regional organisations and Gulf financial institutions and calls for the identification of joint initiatives, including through triangular cooperation.
11. Combatting climate change and accelerating a fair transition towards climate neutrality are major shared challenges and fields for close cooperation, notably in view of UNFCCC COP 27 and COP 28 to be held respectively in Egypt and in the United Arab Emirates. The Council acknowledges the importance of coordinating efforts with the GCC to achieve successful outcomes at COP27 and COP28. The EU encourages Gulf partners to update their Nationally Determined Contributions, communicate long-term climate strategies, accelerate ambitious climate action and step up the green transition in line with achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. In particular, keeping the global warming limit of 1.5°C will also decrease adaptation needs and losses and damages due to climate change worldwide and specifically in vulnerable regions. Moreover, given the post-2025 goal on climate finance and the need for large-scale investments in order to secure net zero by 2050 and adequate climate adaptation, as well as the long-term goal of making financial flows consistent with the temperature goal and climate-resilient development, the EU encourages

Gulf partners to participate actively in the International Platform on Sustainable Finance. Further organisations and platforms, such as the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the Saudi Green Initiative, the Middle East Green Initiative, the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate, and the Global Methane Pledge, represent meaningful settings to coordinate action towards achieving the Paris Agreement goals. The EU expresses its readiness to work closely with Gulf partners in view of forging sustainable investments in the broader Middle East, notably infrastructure interconnections, using the possibilities offered under its Global Gateway. Close involvement of European and Gulf-based financial institutions as well as of the private sector will be promoted via the identification of tangible initiatives.

12. Close cooperation between the EU and the Gulf is also essential for achieving the ambitious biodiversity objectives of the UN Agenda 2030, in view of the Convention on Biological Diversity's COP15 later this year. Furthermore, the conservation and the sustainable use of marine biodiversity and resources, including reducing emissions from maritime transport is a common priority also given the high volume of shipping in the Gulf region. Waste management, circular economy, recycling, building sustainable and environmentally friendly food systems, combatting desertification and developing arid climate agri-technology are also critical areas in which the EU and Gulf partners should share expertise and work closely together.
13. Furthermore, in line with the European Council Conclusions of 30 and 31 May on the European strategy to REPowerEU and the complementing EU External Energy Engagement Strategy, a strong EU-GCC partnership is also essential in the context of energy security and the green transition – globally and in our respective regions. As a first measure addressing both challenges, the EU and the Gulf countries can both gain in adopting energy savings and efficiency to reduce energy intensity, where EU countries can provide technologies and skills with special reference to storage and transport. Gulf partners are reliable Liquefied Natural Gas providers to international markets, including to the EU, which remains key in the short term, to limit the volatility of global markets, and ensure a smooth transition. The EU and Gulf partners can work together to support global efforts on methane emission reduction, contributing to the decarbonisation of the oil and gas sector. In light of their remarkable potential to lead the transition towards decarbonisation and become prime exporters of renewable energy, and renewable hydrogen, cooperation would be mutually beneficial. While noting the importance of indigenous energy sources for the security of supply, the EU and Gulf partners should explore how to build renewable hydrogen markets

that enable a future in which Gulf countries could become a reliable supplier of renewable energy to the EU, when needed, including by sharing knowhow on standards and regulatory frameworks and by ensuring undistorted trade and investment. Given the importance of regional energy integration, opportunities will also be explored for regional investments and triangular cooperation with Gulf partners, inter alia based on the future Mediterranean Green Hydrogen Partnership as well as building upon existing projects in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean.

14. In order to profit from the new opportunities offered by and address challenges related to the green transition and in order to better operationalise shared objectives and identify concrete joint initiatives in that regard, the Council endorses the Commission proposals to set up a dedicated EU-GCC energy and climate expert Group and to hold annual EU-GCC sectorial ministerial meetings on those aspects.
15. While EU-GCC trade relations are already strong, a privileged trade and investment relationship between the EU and the GCC and its members is a key shared interest. The Council invites the Commission to explore ways to deepen the economic partnership and to strengthen the existing EU-GCC Trade and Investment Dialogue. In this context, the Council encourages the Commission to accelerate the exploratory work to determine whether conditions are in place to reach a common understanding on possible negotiations for a free trade agreement, which would address issues of mutual interest, such as an enhanced trade and investment environment, regulatory and customs cooperation, including the fight against counterfeiting and smuggling, as well as sustainable development objectives, which include environmental and labour rights. The Council welcomes the proposals to step up regional and cross-regional co-operation in aviation, railways, maritime safety, and connectivity.
16. Digitalisation, cyber, new technologies, as well as research and development are additional fields offering potential for cooperation, notably in view of the opportunities these offer in terms of creating new markets and jobs as well as in light of their contribution to the economic diversification and recovery as well as the climate and energy transitions and the tackling of global health issues. Developing a human centric and data protection approach to digitalisation, including in terms of connectivity, infrastructure development and digital transition, skills and development of innovation hubs are key objectives for EU-GCC co-operation, using also the EU's 5G toolbox. The Council encourages the Gulf Partners to join efforts in building resilience and coordinating responses to counter hybrid threats. In the

same spirit, the Council encourages measures addressing disinformation and misinformation. The EU's global approach to research and innovation as well as Horizon Europe could offer useful platforms. In light of GCC countries recent active role in the field of space, cooperation in this field, notably as regards Egnos, GPS and Galileo, should also be strengthened.

17. Education, which responds to the changing needs of society, opens up future prospects for youth and is key to the prosperity of society. The Council calls for stepping up EU-GCC cooperation in the fields of vocational training, education, and research, including in the context of the Erasmus+ programme and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, taking also into consideration bilateral university cooperation programs. The EU is also interested in exchanging best practices on youth empowerment.
18. The spread of radical and extremist ideologies can create a breeding ground for violent extremism, and can lead to violent acts. Deepening counterterrorism engagement with Gulf partners can be envisaged on issues such as preventing and countering violent extremism, its financing and means of dissemination both online and offline. The Council welcomes the efforts of the GCC partners in counterterrorism and underlines that all such efforts must be carried out in accordance with international law including human rights and international humanitarian law. There is value in intensifying its cooperation with the GCC partners through transparent and regular dialogue and exchange of best practices, notably in the framework of the bilateral cooperation arrangements. Particular attention must be paid to the fight against money laundering and terrorist financing, as well as to violent and extremist ideologies dissemination leading to foreign undesirable influence on civil and religious organisations within the EU notably through non-transparent funding.
19. Promoting people-to-people contacts and notably among the youth should be at the heart of the cooperation between the EU and the GCC and its Member States. The Council therefore welcomes ongoing discussions in the visa file and took note of the Commission proposal to exempt further GCC Member States from the visa requirement to enter the Schengen Area. It emphasises the importance of regional coherence in this context, and looks forward to progress in the discussions, based on the modalities and criteria of the process. The Council welcomes the Commission's launching of technical discussions with the remaining GCC Member States, to achieve the final objective of visa free Schengen access for the citizens of all GCC Member States, once all relevant conditions are fulfilled.

20. In light of the recent increased political momentum, the Council underscores the need to further strengthen and enhance political dialogue and institutional cooperation between the EU and the GCC. Closer cooperation goes hand in hand with increased high-level contacts. The Council further welcomes the resumption of the Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting on an annual basis and welcomes the proposal of organising sectoral ministerial meetings in order to ensure the swift implementation of key aspects of the new strategic partnership, with an initial focus on green transition / climate change and humanitarian affairs. The Council agrees to explore the possibility of an EU-GCC Summit to provide political guidance for the renewed EU-Gulf Strategic Partnership. In terms of institutional set-up, the Cooperation Agreement between EU and GCC concluded in 1989, and the joint activities of both organisations, including the 5-year EU-GCC Joint Programme of Cooperation endorsed at the 26th EU-GCC Joint Council in February 2022, offer the framework to further develop such a joint strategic partnership. The Council welcomes the proposal to nominate an EU Ambassador to the GCC. Based on this regional framework as well as the cooperation arrangements between EEAS and the GCC Member States' Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Council also invites the EEAS and the Commission to explore the possibility of negotiating bilateral agreements with individual GCC Member States. In this regard, the Council also welcomes the opening of new EU Delegations in the region.
21. The EU will use all its tools and instruments, including the NDICI-Global Europe and Global Gateway, to ensure the efficient, effective and swift implementation of this new strategic partnership with the Gulf. In addition, the Council stresses the importance to ensure adequate visibility of the political engagement and cooperation with GCC partners, including in GCC and EU Member States, through outreach, public diplomacy initiatives, and joint efforts of EU institutions and Member States in the spirit of Team Europe approach. In this vein, it calls for further strengthening of public diplomacy and EU strategic communication with the Gulf, in close coordination with Member States, to further raise the profile of the European Union and its Member States in the region.