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Subject:	Council Conclusions on the EU's engagement to the Black Sea regional cooperation

Delegations will find attached Council conclusions on the EU's engagement to the Black Sea regional cooperation as adopted by the Council (Foreign Affairs) on 17 June 2019.

**Council Conclusions on the EU's engagement to the
Black Sea regional cooperation**

1. The Council reaffirms its long-standing commitment to fostering prosperity, stability and resilience in the Black Sea area. Recalling that the Black Sea Synergy Initiative remains the basis for the EU's engagement in the region, the Council welcomes its review in March 2019 by the High Representative and the European Commission, which confirms its practical value and positive contribution to regional cooperation in the Black Sea area.
2. The Council emphasises the increasing strategic importance of the Black Sea area for the EU and calls for enhanced engagement to the regional cooperation there, in line with the principles of the EU Global Strategy and the revised European Neighbourhood Policy. In particular, it highlights the importance of harnessing the new opportunities for economic development, resilience and connectivity in the region and beyond.
3. The Council remains concerned about the security challenges in the Black Sea area. In this context, the Council reiterates that respect for international law, including the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, including freedom of navigation, as well as EU policy decisions and its non-recognition policy on the illegal annexation of Crimea are fundamental to the EU's approach to regional cooperation in the Black Sea area.
4. The Council welcomes the sector-oriented and pragmatic cooperation within the Black Sea Synergy initiative that aims to build confidence, foster regional dialogue and deliver tangible results to the benefit of both the region and the EU. The Council recognises the added-value of the bottom-up approach to project development and of the inclusive and voluntary nature of the Black Sea Synergy and its implementation. An enhanced EU engagement on regional cooperation in the Black Sea area should build upon the lessons learned during the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy.

5. The Council particularly commends the commitment, achieved with EU support, of the six littoral states and the Republic of Moldova to work together towards a more sustainable blue economy. The Council welcomes the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea of 21 May 2019, a sea basin cooperation agenda agreed during a Ministerial meeting in Bucharest, and which builds upon the Burgas Ministerial Declaration of 31 May 2018; and the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea, launched in Bucharest, on 8 May 2019, continuing the Burgas vision paper of 31 May 2018. These two Agendas represent a significant step towards an enhanced regional cooperation in the Black Sea on maritime affairs and fisheries, with focus on blue economy. These include environment sustainability, smart ports, tourism, research and innovation, support for small and medium enterprises, and blue skills and careers. The Council invites the High Representative and the European Commission to continue guiding and actively supporting the implementation of these two Agendas in the years to come. The Council encourages the concerned states to take into account the priorities of these Agendas for their transnational, cross-border and national programmes.
6. The Council reiterates the importance of stimulating regional cooperation and dialogue among the civil society organisations in the Black Sea region with a view to facilitating sustainable development and increasing societal resilience. Creating space for civil society remains a constant priority for the EU. The Council calls for active engagement with representatives of civil society and for supporting the successful Black Sea NGO Forum.
7. The Council underlines the importance of continued close cooperation with local communities, academic and business representatives. The Council supports the cross-border cooperation for the Black Sea, particularly the Joint Operational Programme Black Sea Basin, as an important driver for cooperation among local and regional stakeholders, with tangible results on the welfare of the coastal communities.
8. The Council acknowledges that enhanced Black Sea regional cooperation would contribute to the implementation of the EU Strategy for Connecting Europe and Asia, and its four priorities in terms of transport, energy, digital and people-to-people. The Council encourages the High Representative and the European Commission to further substantiate the 'bridging role of the Black Sea basin' and to further ensure its interconnectivity.

9. The Council encourages better links between the Black Sea Synergy and other EU policies and strategies relevant for the region, in particular with the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. Joint actions in environment, transport and energy areas are especially relevant.
10. The Council welcomes the cooperation between the EU and the main regional and international organisations active in the Black Sea area, in particular the Organization for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean. The Council reaffirms the EU's aim to become a full member of the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution. The Council particularly takes into account the need for enhanced international cooperation for addressing the environmental and climate challenges in the Black Sea. The Council also stresses the important role played by Member States in these regional formats, as members and observers in promoting EU engagement and in supporting regional cooperation in the Black Sea area.
11. The Council encourages the exchange of experience and lessons learned with other relevant related forms of regional cooperation, such as the Northern Dimension, the cooperation around the Atlantic Ocean, as well as the Baltic, the Adriatic and Ionian, and the Mediterranean Seas.
12. The Council invites the High Representative and the European Commission to regularly report on the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy. The Council will consider a more substantial review of the EU's policy towards the Black Sea, when needed and based on the results of regional cooperation in the Black Sea area and the further development of EU's objectives there.
13. The Council encourages the High Representative and the European Commission to give due consideration to the Black Sea Synergy in the future programming of financial and technical cooperation; to strengthen synergies between various funding instruments for sustainable regional development; as well as, to cooperate with financial institutions in encouraging investment and blending of funds for projects in the Black Sea area.
14. The Council underlines the importance of developing a communication plan to support the EU's contribution to regional cooperation in the Black Sea area, and to increase the visibility of the work by the EU and its Member States.