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Subject: Council conclusions on Digital Diplomacy

Council Conclusions on Digital Diplomacy

1) The Council notes that the exponential development of digital technologies provides tremendous opportunities for social and economic development and for the protection of the planet, while also posing new challenges and risks especially in the areas of human rights, security, privacy, fair competition and employment. The current COVID-19 pandemic has further underlined the need to accelerate the digital transition in Europe and across the globe. It has highlighted once again the importance of free, fair, secure and open access to digital technologies and services for all and the importance of overall improvement of digital skills, as well as the key role that the tech industry should play to promote responsible and trustworthy digitalization. Bridging technology gaps, including the gender digital divide, is more crucial than ever during and after the pandemic. Digital is already a key element of the transformative agenda for an inclusive, sustainable recovery at global level and will become an even more prominent driver.

2) With the building of a truly Digital Single Market, the European Union has taken a leading role in the development of an open and transparent, rules-based and secure, trustworthy and human-centric global digital economy accessible to all. Seizing the opportunities of the digital transition is crucial to strengthening Europe's economic base, ensuring technological sovereignty and reinforcing global competitiveness. The added value that the Union brings to the digital field is widely recognised at the international level building on best practices, such as the guiding principles set in the Tallinn Declaration of 2017. The EU will leverage the full range of its policies, instruments and regulatory powers to help shape global rules and standards and advance EU common values and interests in cooperation with likeminded partners. This includes the work done under international agreements, as well as arrangements concluded or discussions underway in international organisations and multilateral fora such as the United Nations and its specialized agencies, the OECD, the WTO, the OSCE, the International Organization for Standardization, the Council of Europe, and the G20, together with EU Member States. Subject to the adoption of the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework and the related legal basis this may be complemented by EU-supported financing for investments in digitalisation, including digital connectivity and digital technologies as one of the priority areas of the EU's international cooperation and partnership framework and one of the four pillars of the EU's approach to sustainable connectivity.

3) The European Union will remain a strong supporter of digital cooperation in the broader UN system, notably on human rights, capacity building, new technologies, trade facilitation, sustainable development and affordable connectivity, which can only be achieved with the involvement of all relevant actors, including the private sector, civil society and academia, through a multi-stakeholder process. The EU also remains a strong supporter of the open multi-faceted, non-fragmented, and bottom-up nature of the Internet. The EU has played a prominent role in contributing to the UN Secretary General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation of June 2020 and highlights the importance of the fundamental link between digital and human rights. Digital development must safeguard in particular EU common values and principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the Rule of Law, and guarantee gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, non-discrimination, privacy, trust and security, freedom of expression, the rights and safety of consumers, and opportunities for all and enhance social participation and inclusion. It must also include a sustained effort to safeguard the integrity and contribute to the quality of public dialogue and democratic processes as well as address the issues of disinformation, foreign interference and manipulation. The EU recalls also the Joint statement by the EU Home Affairs ministers of November 13 on the recent terrorist attacks in Europe in this context.

- 4) The Council underlines the need for transparent, effective and inclusive digital cooperation with and among multilateral fora, governments, the private sector, and civil society to ensure a safe, secure and inclusive digital future for all, in line with international law and other commitments. The Council welcomes the establishment of the informal Digital Diplomacy Network incorporating the foreign ministries of the Member States under the auspices of the European External Action Service. The first meeting of the Network took place in May 2020.
- 5) The Council looks forward to contributing to the upcoming Global Digital Cooperation Strategy to be proposed in 2021, and will revert to the discussion on the geopolitics of cyber and emerging technologies at one of its next meetings.
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