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Subject:	Special Report No 17/2022 by the European Court of Auditors: External consultants at the European Commission – Scope for reform - Council conclusions (13.10.2022)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' special report 17/2022 entitled "External consultants at the European Commission – Scope for reform", approved by the Council (Justice and Home Affairs) at its 3899th meeting held on 13 October 2022.

**Council conclusions on Special Report No 17/2022 by the European Court of Auditors:
External consultants at the European Commission – Scope for reform**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:

1. WELCOMES the Special Report No 17/2022 by the European Court of Auditors (hereafter referred to as “the Court”) and the replies of the European Commission to the Report;
2. TAKES NOTE that the Commission contracts about EUR 1 billion in operational spending each year on external consultants’ services, using them to support it in a wide range of consultancy, study, evaluation and research activities and that more than half of the total value of the contracts was financed under heading 4 “Global Europe” of the previous MFF;
3. ACKNOWLEDGES the findings of the report and REGRETS notably that:
 - the Commission’s management of the use of external consultants did not ensure that it maximizes value for money nor fully safeguards its interests;
 - the Commission did not consistently assess the performance of external consultants and, apart from studies and evaluations, did not share information about these assessments across its directorates-general;
 - the Commission does not systematically report information on its use of external consultants’ services and there is no reporting at corporate-level;
 - the Commission’s framework governing the use of external consultants had significant gaps, in particular regarding consultancy and research, which represent the bulk of the amount contracted out to external consultants;

4. SHARES the Commission's opinion that the audit findings do not make a case for a fundamental reform of the use of external consultancy services, but WELCOMES the fact that the Commission has accepted all the Court's recommendations and outlined, in its answers, concrete improvements of the existing framework;
5. INVITES the Commission, when implementing the Recommendations, in particular Recommendation 1, of the report, to consider, among other things, the budgetary implications of outsourcing activities and processes against keeping them as tasks for its own staff, while ensuring the optimization of staff resources at the current level and seeking efficiency gains, including by deepening interinstitutional cooperation. Reporting should be improved via the documents provided in the Commissions' Statement of Estimates. Furthermore, ENCOURAGES the Commission, when implementing Recommendation 2, to avoid concentration and overdependence, including, where appropriate, by undertaking measures to widen the pool of available experts;
6. EXPECTS the Commission, as recommended by the Court, to make sure that the results of external consultancy are used to the fullest and disseminated throughout its services and to share them with the other EU institutions in a timely manner, and ENCOURAGES the Commission to find ways to make these results available to the general public for the benefit of transparency towards the citizens, with full respect of data protection requirements and confidentiality.
