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RELEX 999  
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SOC 806  
ONU 83  
COHOM 113  
COHAFA 74  
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**NOTE**

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From: Presidency  
On: 16 December 2020  
To: Delegations

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Subject: Presidency conclusions on the Gender Action Plan (GAP) III 2021-2025  
- An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in  
EU external action

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Guided by the discussion among EU Development Ministers on 23 November 2020, the Working Party on Development Cooperation (CODEV) examined draft Council conclusions prepared by the Presidency in response to the Joint communication on the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III – An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of the discussion, the Presidency concluded that it was not possible to reach a consensus on the draft conclusions. However, the Presidency was in a position to conclude that 24 delegations supported the text in its entirety as annexed to this document.

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<sup>1</sup> ST 13343/20 + ADD 1 - JOIN(2020) 17 final and SWD(2020) 284 final

Delegations from the following Member States supported the annexed text as of 15 December 2020:  
Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany,  
Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania,  
Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

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**Presidency conclusions on the Gender Action Plan (GAP) III 2021-2025**

**- An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action**

**CONTEXT**

1. Gender equality and the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls and their empowerment are at the core of European values and enshrined within the EU legal and political framework. The year 2020 marks a number of important milestones for gender equality and women and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights and their empowerment – such as the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the 5th anniversary of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN Women. In addition, 2019 marked the 40th anniversary of the UN-Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
2. Significant progress has been made towards gender equality under EU GAP II (2016-2020), even though pace and progress have been uneven. We welcome and endorse the EU GAP III and its accompanying staff working document<sup>1</sup>. Building on the findings and recommendations of the GAP II Evaluation Report, GAP III complements and supports the implementation of the following Commission documents: the EU Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025), the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy (2020-2025), the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025, the EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation as well as the EEAS document on the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). We further recall the Council Conclusions on the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 and on the EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

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<sup>1</sup> ST 13343/20 + ADD 1 - JOIN(2020) 17 final and SWD(2020) 284 final

3. Achievements made on gender equality and women and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights and their empowerment must be safeguarded against any deterioration and backlash. We express our deep concern and regret that gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and their full enjoyment of all human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights and equal rights for LGBTIQ persons, are threatened, questioned and pushed back against amid shrinking civil, democratic and civic space globally. We are deeply concerned that women human rights defenders and women in politics face gender-specific threats and gender-specific violence.
4. We are deeply concerned that instability, fragility, conflicts, climate change, environmental degradation, natural and man-made disasters, forced displacement and lately the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbate existing gender inequalities and threaten hard-won gains. They lead to an increase in sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination, to diminished educational prospects, especially for women and girls, to a sharp decline in employment and livelihoods, including the right to accessing health services and Water Sanitation and Hygiene, and hamper inclusive economic growth. These severe impacts on women and girls' rights undermine the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
5. At the same time, women and girls in all their diversity across the world are key agents of their own empowerment and of global change, across all aspects of society. They contribute decisively and visibly on the frontline to fight the pandemic and need to participate in deciding how to respond to the crisis. The post COVID-19 recovery must be an opportunity to address structural inequalities and build more inclusive and gender equal societies.
6. Full coherence between external and internal action increases EU credibility, and contributes to better results and impact, in line with the principle of policy coherence for sustainable development.

**THE MEMBER STATES, THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE AND THE COMMISSION  
ARE INVITED, WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE,**

7. To mainstream and accelerate progress on gender equality in the response to the pandemic and when recovering better and greener. Gender equality is key to the success of efforts geared towards poverty reduction, sustainable growth, peace, security, human rights, democracy, the rule of law and the building of inclusive and resilient institutions and societies. A gender transformative approach needs to be taken throughout the humanitarian-development-peace nexus whilst respecting international humanitarian law; this approach includes addressing the multiple discriminations faced by women and girls in vulnerable and marginalised situations.
8. To affirm their commitment to leave no one behind and contribute to a gender equal world for everyone, regardless of one's ethnicity, gender, age, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation and gender identity, migration status or other factors.
9. To work together with partners to eliminate all forms of sexual and gender based violence as well as multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including harmful practices particularly child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
10. To ensure EU leadership in promoting gender equality, women and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights and their empowerment in international fora and at multilateral, regional and country levels.
11. To continue working better together, with the United Nations and their agencies, partner countries and relevant stakeholders at all levels, to achieve and uphold relevant international commitments and to reinforce an institutional gender equality culture. Among those commitments figure those enshrined in the 2030 Agenda, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and their review conferences, the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and its follow-up resolutions, as well as the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Multilateral partnerships and multi-stakeholder alliances such as the Generation Equality Forum and the Equal Pay International Coalition are essential for fulfilling international commitments on gender equality, social justice, non-discrimination and human rights.

12. To support comprehensive actions across all sectors of EU external action, including trade and climate change, to achieve gender equality. Policies need to be anchored in a human rights based and gender-transformative approach, pay particular attention to women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and target systemic inequalities, discrimination and exclusion. Particular attention must be paid to women and girls in all their diversity facing multiple and overlapping forms of discriminations, such as the intersectional position of LGBTIQ persons.
13. To act accordingly both individually and jointly at all levels and in particular in partner countries – including as Team Europe and when planning and implementing CSDP missions and operations. Key instruments include the joint set-up of implementation plans based on gender analyses, the mainstreaming of gender perspectives throughout all policy areas, sectors, mandates and activities as well as strategic communication.
14. To endorse the GAP III including the objectives and actions proposed under its five pillars and six key thematic policy areas of engagement. We welcome the selected policy areas, including the fight against all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, the integration of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, strengthening economic and social rights and the empowerment of women and girls, advancing equal participation and leadership, the gender dimension of the green transition and the digital transformation, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, including comprehensive sexuality education.
15. To provide sufficient financial and human resources to implement concrete actions – both individually and jointly, including through a Team Europe approach and in cooperation with the UN, where appropriate, and to explore how to continuously promote and support the effective implementation of GAP III.

16. To further intensify efforts to jointly achieve gender equality in external action by 2030 by
  - a. working towards the relevant targets under the envisaged regulation establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) for actions scoring G1 and G2 on the Gender Equality Policy Marker of the OECD Development Assistance Committee;
  - b. ensuring a joint-up approach in implementation, which maximises results, strengthens ownership and promotes gender equality at all levels and across all external relations;
  - c. consulting and cooperating closely with all relevant partners. These include international and regional organisations, civil society, especially grassroots and girls' and women's rights organisations, youth led organisations and women human rights defenders. To bring about behavioural and societal change more efficiently, it is key to promote equal and meaningful participation, to raise awareness, to include young people as drivers of change, and to engage men and boys;
  - d. leading by example.
17. To increase efforts for the collection of gender, age, disability and sex-disaggregated data and to deliver on their thematic priorities in a coordinated, measurable and transparent way. Member States are strongly encouraged to use the GAP III revised monitoring and reporting framework, which is anchored in the SDG indicator framework. We welcome the impact-oriented and evidence-based approach of GAP III.
18. We commit to and invite all partners to engage in achieving global gender equality, strengthening women and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights, and ensuring their empowerment. It is time for action and delivery.

