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**NOTE**

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| From:    | General Secretariat of the Council   |
| To:      | Delegations  |
| Subject: | Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Brussels, 15 December 2015) |

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Delegations find attached in the Annex the Joint Declaration of the sixth Eastern Partnership Summit, as agreed by the Summit participants on 15 December 2021 in Brussels.

**Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit**

***‘Recovery, Resilience and Reform’***

**Brussels, 15 December 2021**

*The Heads of State or Government of the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, the representatives of the European Union and the Heads of State or Government of its Member States met in Brussels on 15 December 2021. The President of the European Parliament and representatives of the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities of the Eastern Partnership and the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly also contributed to the Summit.*

1. We have come together to reaffirm our strong commitment to our strategic, ambitious and forward-looking Eastern Partnership, which remains firmly based on common fundamental values, mutual interests and shared ownership, responsibility, inclusivity, differentiation and mutual accountability. As a specific dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, our partnership allows to bring the European Union and its Eastern European partners closer together. It seeks to foster stability, prosperity and mutual cooperation, and to advance our commitment to the necessary reforms and to address the global and regional challenges that we face for the benefit of all our citizens.

## VALUES

2. We are bound by our joint determination to further strengthen democracy and the rule of law in our societies. The protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, fostering inclusive societies, promoting gender equality as well as full respect for the principles and norms of international law remain the cornerstones of our partnership and underpin our joint work in all priority areas. The European Union remains committed in its support to the territorial integrity within their internationally recognised borders, independence, and sovereignty of all Eastern partners, with respect for and adherence to the purposes and principles enshrined in the UN Charter, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 Charter of Paris, which are fundamental to our shared vision for a peaceful and undivided Europe.
3. We reconfirm our commitments taken at previous Summits and in bilateral agreements as well as our determination to carry them forward. On this path, our ambitious reform agenda and enhanced cooperation remains the necessary condition for progress and support: increasing prosperity and fostering peace, stability, sustainability and resilience in the region, notably in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our cooperation and support will particularly aim at the delivery of key global policy objectives, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.
4. We remain deeply concerned about the continuous destabilisation and violations of the principles of international law in many parts of the Eastern Partnership region that pose a threat to peace, security and stability. We call for renewed efforts to promote the peaceful settlement of unresolved conflicts in the Eastern Partnership region based on the principles and norms of international law. The peaceful resolution of conflicts, building trust and good neighbourly relations are essential to economic and social development and cooperation. We welcome EU's efforts, enhanced engagement and strengthened role in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, confidence building, in the framework or in support of existing agreed negotiating formats and processes, including through field presence, when appropriate.

5. The scope and depth of our cooperation are determined by our respective agreements and will continue to be shaped by the ambitions and needs of both the EU and the partners as well as by the pace and quality of reforms. We recognise that the EU's conditionality and incentive-based approach ("more-for-more" and "less-for-less") will continue to benefit those partners most engaged in implementing reforms.
6. We reaffirm the sovereign right of each partner to choose the level of ambition and the goals to which it aspires in its relations with the European Union. We stress that this is a constructive partnership, which is not directed against anyone, but is designed to contribute to peace and prosperity for all countries in the neighbourhood. The Eastern Partnership will remain inclusive and flexible, allowing common regional and global challenges to be tackled jointly in a wide range of areas, including through deeper sectoral cooperation and exchanges. We emphasise in this regard our particular objective to enhance and support regional cooperation in the Eastern Partnership region, including strengthening links and transport connectivity.

## PARTNERSHIP

7. We commend the full entry into force of the Association Agreements (AAs) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, the latter following the December 2016 decision by the EU Heads of State or Government.

8. In this context, we acknowledge the European aspirations and the European choice of the partners concerned, as stated in the Association Agreements. The agreements provide for accelerating political association and economic integration with the European Union. We welcome progress so far and encourage the full implementation of these Association Agreements and their Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas. We recall that the effective implementation of the Association Agreements and their DCFTAs, linked to the broader process of regulatory approximation and related necessary reforms, contributes to establishing the conditions for enhanced economic and trade relations with the EU leading towards further gradual economic integration in the European Union Internal Market, as envisaged in the Association Agreements. The EU remains committed to supporting the efforts of the associated partners in this regard.
9. The EU and interested partners commend the entry into force of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the EU and Armenia in March 2021, welcome the progress so far and encourage its full implementation leading to a new level of partnership.
10. The EU and interested partners welcome progress in the ongoing negotiations between the EU and Azerbaijan on a new comprehensive Agreement.
11. The EU regrets the decision of the Belarusian authorities to suspend their participation in the Eastern Partnership and look forward to resuming cooperation with the Belarusian authorities as soon as necessary conditions for peaceful democratic transition are in place to build on a joint agenda based on common values and shared interests. In the meantime, the EU continues engagement with and support for the Belarus citizens, civil society and independent media. The comprehensive plan of economic support for a democratic Belarus, of up to EUR 3 billion, reflects the EU's commitment to support the democratic choice of the Belarusian people. Reiterating previous statements, the EU condemns the instrumentalisation of migrants and refugees by the Belarusian authorities and indeed all incidents of instrumentalisation of migrants for political purposes.

12. In line with the principles of differentiation and inclusivity, the EU acknowledges the initiative of the trio of associated partners Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, to enhance the cooperation with the EU, and takes good note of the increased coordination amongst them on matters of common interest related to the implementation of the Association Agreements and DCFTAs, and on cooperation within the Eastern Partnership. In this context, building on the progress achieved so far, within joint discussions on association-related reforms in order to facilitate full implementation of the AAs/DCFTA, the EU and all interested partners will explore options for enhanced sectoral cooperation, including, but not limited to, the areas of the twin green and digital transitions, connectivity, energy security, justice and home affairs, strategic communication and healthcare. At the same time, the EU continues to stress the importance of the principle of inclusivity, providing equal access to opportunities and resources to all interested partners.
13. We remain open to examining the possibility of cooperation with third countries on a case-by-case basis on the basis of shared values, including in complementarity with other regional formats such as the Black Sea Synergy, where such participation would contribute and bring added value to the objectives of the Eastern Partnership.

## RESILIENCE AND PROSPERITY

14. We will seek to enhance our cooperation including on the basis of the Joint Communication ‘Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing resilience – an Eastern partnership that delivers for all’<sup>1</sup>, and as a result of the comprehensive consultation with and contributions from Member States, Eastern partner countries and other Eastern Partnership stakeholders. Strengthening resilience remains our overriding policy objective under our agenda of ‘Recovery, Resilience and Reform’, structured around the two pillars of governance and investment. We welcome the set of concrete post-2020 priorities summarised in the Annex and highlight in particular the emphasis on generating concrete benefits for the people. The new agenda will be underpinned by the EUR 2.3 billion regional economic and investment plan with a potential to mobilise up to EUR 17 billion in public and private investments for the region, which underpins the future agenda. This multi-country and multi-sector investment plan is for the benefit of the Eastern Partnership region as a whole. Acknowledging the outstanding challenges, we underscore that sustained reform progress in partner countries, and its monitoring, in close coordination with EU Member States, in particular in the areas of common fundamental values and governance, rule of law, justice sector reform, fight against corruption remain key to reach the objectives of the Eastern Partnership and a successful implementation of its agenda, including the Economic and Investment Plan. The EU's support will reflect its conditionality and incentive-based approach and will be conditional upon the implementation of agreed reforms. This will influence structural reforms, particularly in the rule of law and justice reform and anti-corruption.

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<sup>1</sup> JOIN (2020) 7 final, 18.3.2020

15. In order to enhance resilience, we will focus on strengthening rule of law, establishing efficient, transparent and accountable public administration at all levels of government, tackling fraud, corruption and economic crime, combatting organised crime and strengthening security, as well as cyber resilience, including cyber and hybrid threats. We highlight the importance of enhancing, where appropriate, security dialogue and cooperation in the areas of CSDP, and welcome in this regard the partners' valuable contribution to EU missions and operations and the EU's support under the European Peace Facility (EPF). Gradual convergence in the area of foreign and security policy will be promoted, in line with partners' commitments with the EU. We also reconfirm the importance of strengthening strategic communication for building resilience, including the fight against disinformation and information manipulation, and we call for stronger and more strategic approaches as well as enhanced cooperation between the EU and the Eastern partners. We underline the importance of a well-functioning media environment and freedom of speech, recognising the need for enhanced support to independent media. The partnership will work to strengthen the civil society enabling environment and youth participation, as stressed by the 5<sup>th</sup> Eastern Partnership Youth Forum in Slovenia in November 2021, education reform, strengthen independent media, enhance democracy, avoid inflammatory rhetoric and provocative actions, promote and mainstream gender equality, protect human rights, strengthen health resilience, and work to improve legal and labour mobility in line with national competences while jointly tackling irregular migration.



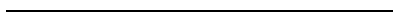
16. We will equally focus on strengthening economic resilience through fostering trade and economic integration, investment and access to finance, enhanced transport connectivity, and investing in people and knowledge societies. In this regard, the EU and interested partners welcome the recent signature of the common aviation area agreements with Armenia and Ukraine. The EU and interested partners also welcome the agreements with Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine for their association to Horizon Europe. The EU and interested partners welcome the completion of the Southern Gas Corridor project, which has contributed to the diversification of gas sources and routes of supply to the EU. As confirmed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> ministerial meeting on environment and climate change in Portugal in June 2021, we will work to enhance environmental and climate resilience by advancing green transition through investments and cooperation on circular economy, green growth and climate adaptation, and strengthening biodiversity. The EU supports an intensification of the efforts by partner countries towards climate neutrality in 2050, by phasing out coal and making more ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions and we will jointly work towards accelerating their implementation in line with the commitments of COP26. We will also join forces in accelerating the process of energy transition to reduce the carbon footprint and further strengthen inclusive sustainable development in the energy sector in line with the European Energy Union strategy, as appropriate. We will step up our work to strengthen energy security under changing circumstances and prevent the use of gas as weapon or geopolitical lever. Nuclear safety will also be strengthened. We will accelerate the shift to sustainable and smart mobility. Furthermore, we will aim at accelerating the digital transformation including investments in digital infrastructure and e-governance. Building on the regional roaming agreement, we will explore further the possibility of a common international roaming space including the economically sustainable reduction of roaming tariffs between the EU and the Eastern partners.

## SOLIDARITY

17. The climate crisis as well as environmental and energy challenges require urgent action from all sides. We recall that post COVID-19 socio-economic recovery and longer-term development provide an opportunity to strengthen resilience by investing in sustainable connectivity and accelerating green and digital transitions within a whole of economy approach, leaving no one behind. We commit to do so with a view to enhancing employability and creating decent job opportunities while pursuing a transition to climate neutral, circular and resource-efficient economies by 2050.
  
18. We stand together in solidarity in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, which represents an unprecedented challenge for our healthcare systems, economies and societies. Following the rapid Team Europe support package of over EUR 2.5 billion mobilised since 2020, we acknowledge continued commitment of the EU's and its Member States to support partner countries in addressing the pandemic, the vaccination process, to fight against anti-vaccine disinformation and to foster longer term health resilience. We welcome that more than 13 million vaccine doses were donated to partner countries via the COVAX Facility and through the EU Vaccine Sharing mechanism, and we appreciate the additional EU support under the Team Europe initiative on COVID-19 vaccine sharing for the Eastern Partnership, which is expected to boost further deliveries in the coming months. We welcome mutual recognition of the COVID-19 digital certificates in place for Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and soon for Azerbaijan, allowing for safer and easier travel to and from the EU. We call for global solidarity, intensified international cooperation and effective multilateralism to contain, mitigate and overcome the pandemic and its consequences, which combined with the continuation of vaccination efforts, also through contributing to global vaccine equity and effective vaccine campaigns, are essential to defeat the virus.

## JOINT OWNERSHIP

19. We call for strengthened joint ownership and reaffirm the importance of inclusive engagement of all parts of the society, highlighting the necessity of further engaging with civil society, in particular with the young people, and by promoting gender equality, tolerance and intercultural dialogue. Engagement with civil society, including through the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, and broadened outreach and targeted support to grassroots civil society organisations and social partners, remains an integral part of this partnership. We confirm the importance of the multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership cooperation and call for further work to improve the current architecture in order to adjust to the new priorities and to make it more flexible and efficient. We welcome and wish to further encourage the role of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) as well as of other key stakeholders including the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and welcome a more systematic engagement with think tanks and European and International Financial Institutions.
20. We look forward to the next Eastern Partnership Summit in 2023, which will be the first milestone for the evaluation and review of the implementation of the new generation of priorities and targets.



## Post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities

As stipulated in paragraph 14 of the Joint Declaration, this annex summarises policy objectives and targets for the post-2020 Eastern Partnership agenda on the basis of the Joint Communication ‘Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing resilience – an Eastern partnership that delivers for all’<sup>2</sup>, the Joint Staff Working Document ‘Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities’<sup>3</sup>, and as a result of the comprehensive consultation with and contributions from Member States, Eastern partner countries and other Eastern Partnership stakeholders.

These policy objectives and targets are structured around two pillars: 1) governance and 2) investment (to be supported by the economic and investment plan with country specific flagship initiatives to be taken forward with each of the partner countries). This comprehensive agenda based on the respect for democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and gender equality will be supported through the EU’s tools and modalities of support, including the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation (NDICI) – Global Europe instrument.

A streamlined architecture for the multilateral cooperation within the Eastern Partnership will monitor the implementation of the joint recovery, resilience and reform agenda in a results-oriented, comprehensive and systematic manner. The implementation of the future agenda will ensure joint ownership and commitment as well as complementarity with bilateral priorities. It will be tailored to the needs and interests of each partner country in line with principles of the Eastern Partnership policy. Proposed targets are indicative and based on estimations and past performance.

### 1. Governance pillar

The proposed agenda under the governance pillar includes following priorities and actions:

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<sup>2</sup> JOIN (2020) 7 final, 18.3.2020

<sup>3</sup> SWD (2021)186 final, 2.7.2021

## **Together for accountable institutions, the rule of law and security**

1. Good governance at all levels is key to people's confidence in their governments. The rule of law, successful anti-corruption policies, the fight against organised crime, and strengthened security are the backbone of functioning inclusive and participatory democracies and strong and resilient societies. They are significant preconditions for a sustainable economic and social development of partner countries.
2. As regards judicial reform, the focus will be on aligning partner countries' justice systems and legislative frameworks with European standards to ensure transparent, independent, accountable, efficient and professional delivery of justice to citizens. Improved measurement, monitoring and reporting on justice reform, the safeguarding of the autonomy of prosecution services, the improvement of case management, and the establishment or consolidation of independent training institutions will contribute to this goal.
3. To achieve accountable, transparent and efficient public administration at all levels the establishment of an Eastern Partnership Academy for Public Administration and the stepping up of the EU's job-shadowing scheme are both envisaged, along with the promotion of gender equality and equal access to resources through systematic gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting. Decentralisation efforts empowering local and regional self-government will be supported. The governance, transparency and accountability of public finances will be strengthened. Producing and disseminating independent, reliable, comparable and gender-sensitive and sex-disaggregated statistics will support partner countries with evidence-based policy-making.

4. The verifiable declaration of assets by the public officials is a major target in tackling fraud, corruption and economic crime. Strategic, legal and institutional frameworks will be developed and further consolidated to prevent and combat fraud and corruption in line with European and international standards, including the obligations undertaken under the UN Convention against Corruption. Public procurement quality will be improved by adopting legislation in line with EU standards and implementing mechanisms for greater transparency and public scrutiny. Robust and efficient financial investigation, anti-money-laundering, asset recovery and beneficial ownership frameworks are needed. Swift and effective cooperation between partner countries and relevant EU bodies, such as Eurojust, Europol, the European Public Prosecutor's Office and the European Anti-Fraud Office will be encouraged.
5. As regards combating organised crime and strengthening security, cooperation and information exchange with relevant EU bodies on law enforcement, emergency response, drugs and drug addiction will be enhanced, and threat assessment capability will be improved. Common security challenges and threats will be addressed, including through the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT); moreover, the serious and organised crime threat assessment (SOCTA) methodology will be introduced and applied as appropriate, and national drug observatories and early warning systems will be set up or consolidated. Efforts to tackle trafficking in human beings will be stepped up with particular attention to women and children. The capability to fight the large-scale smuggling of all goods will be improved, with a particular focus on organised crime and product security.

6. The promotion of the peaceful settlement of unresolved conflicts, conflict prevention, and confidence building and reconciliation efforts will be supported. Assistance to conflict-affected populations will be strengthened, along with the role of women and young people in peacebuilding. Security cooperation and dialogues and practical Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) cooperation will also be strengthened in line with the civilian CSDP compact, as well as partners' contributions to the European civilian and military missions and operations, and support from the European Peace Facility (EPF) as appropriate. Exchanges of experience and knowledge-sharing between the EU and partner countries will be facilitated; furthermore, training opportunities and capacity-building on countering hybrid threats and cybersecurity will be provided, possibly including table-top exercises with interested partners. Continued cooperation on civil protection and disaster risk management through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism will be key to enhance prevention of, preparedness for, and response to natural and man-made disasters.
7. As regards cyber resilience and cybercrime, a strengthened framework for identifying and assessing hybrid threats is the key target, along with strengthening partners' capacities to tackle cybercrime and increase cyber resilience, with the Council of Europe's Budapest Convention as a baseline. This will be accomplished through improving alignment with EU legal, institutional and cybercrime policy frameworks, running training programmes on cybercrime and electronic evidence, doubling cybercrime-relevant operations involving partner countries and introducing Europol's internet organised crime threat assessment methodology, where appropriate.

### **Together for resilient, gender-equal, fair and inclusive societies**

8. The promotion of an enabling environment for civil society, including social partners, will entail EU support to 2,500 local civil society organisations and support provided in new areas such as social innovation, social economy and social entrepreneurship. Particular support will be given to organisations operating outside capitals, in conflict-affected regions in local languages, and women's organisations. The number of Young European Ambassadors will be doubled, networking between national youth councils and other representative youth organisations enhanced, and cultural cooperation and intercultural dialogue strengthened.

9. Independent media outlets that produce diverse high quality and fact-based content, including in national and local languages, will be supported by the EU with the aim to hold governments to account and help the countering of disinformation. An improved regulatory environment for independent, reliable and credible media will also be promoted. Skills in media, information, and digital literacy, and critical thinking skills will be enhanced in order to protect people against disinformation.
10. Pluralist, inclusive, participatory and representative democracy in line with OSCE and Council of Europe standards will be promoted, parliamentary oversight improved, political pluralism fostered and the digital challenges to democratic processes addressed.
11. In terms of protection of human rights, in line with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, human rights will be robustly defended, which includes recognising that they are universal, indivisible, and interdependent and must be applied without any form of discrimination. In this context, the role of human rights defenders in the upholding of human rights will be recognised and protected. Timely execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights will be crucial. The legal frameworks for protection of minorities should be safeguarded and further developed. Furthermore, taking note of the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative on the third Gender Action Plan (GAP), gender equality and women's empowerment will be promoted in all policy areas including measures to unleash the potential of women in the labour force, tackling occupational and sectoral segregation and closing the gender pay gap. Female entrepreneurs will receive more training opportunities and 40% of all EU-supported SME loans will target women-led companies. Almost all EU investments will have an important gender equality objective. The Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on violence against women remains open for accession. Regarding the respect of rights of persons belonging to national minorities – as enshrined in UN and Council of Europe conventions and related protocols – substantive dialogue with representatives of persons belonging to minorities and close cooperation with the Venice Commission on the related legislation will be pursued.



12. On mobility, existing visa free regimes should continue to operate effectively ensuring the continuous implementation of the visa liberalisation benchmarks. New visa liberalisation dialogues could be considered where conditions are met. Implementation of agreements on visa facilitation and on readmission with relevant partners should be ensured. Tackling the challenges related to migration, including fighting irregular migration and addressing the issue of unfounded asylum applications will be pursued, as well as enhancing return and readmission and promoting legal migration, including through migration and mobility partnerships, in line with national competences. Capacity building will be strengthened including through cooperation with EU agencies, notably the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. In this vein, effective and integrated border management will be strengthened. We aim at fostering linkages between migration and development, as well as at advancing the partner governments' institutional capacity and policies for effective migration governance while ensuring bilateral and multilateral coordination between countries of origin, transit and destination, in line with national competences, to ensure protection of migrant workers, promote effective integration of migrants and harness the potential of in-/-out migration to advance sustainable development in line with SDGs.
13. Beyond immediate support to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, work on health resilience will include improving health systems to improve affordability and access to health. The aim is to have 850,000 health workers vaccinated and/or benefit from improved therapeutics, equipment and working conditions. Cooperation on digital vaccine certificates will be improved and readiness to deal with health emergencies increased.

### **Strategic Communication**

14. Strengthened campaigns will enhance coherent EU branding in the local context at all levels, and support will be given to partner country strategic communication capabilities, in particular helping them to tackle disinformation through providing citizens with truthful and accurate information. Engagement with targeted multiplier audiences and increased engagement with young people will boost outreach.

15. The Eastern Partnership will deepen exchanges at all levels, including parliaments (through Euronest), local and regional authorities (through CORLEAP) and civil society, particularly through the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

## **2. Investment pillar**

The proposed agenda under the Investment pillar will be underpinned by an Economic and Investment plan for the region including a set of flagship initiatives for each of the partner countries, and will support post-pandemic recovery using specific EU tools, including blending and guarantees.

It includes the following priorities and actions:

### **Together for resilient, sustainable and integrated economies**

16. Triggering the much-needed post-COVID-19 socio-economic recovery and in parallel catering to the dual green and digital transition, the aim is to create economic opportunities, ensuring prosperity and decent work for all.
17. As regards trade and economic integration, priority will be given to strengthening the business environment, and facilitating trade and investment, embracing the opportunities of the green and digital transformations. Continued support will be provided to accelerate the implementation of the deep and comprehensive free trade areas (DCFTAs) and other trade arrangements, and to further deepening economic integration with and among the partner countries, with a view to develop sustainable supply chains. Working together on proofs of origin, authorised economic operator programmes and accession to the Common Transit Convention for interested partner countries as well as promoting good governance in taxation, in particular transparency and exchange of information and fair taxation, and supporting a stronger international role of the euro will be key. In this regard, the EU will continue supporting interested partner countries' efforts to meet the criteria to join the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA). Support of financial markets development will be provided to interested partners.

18. In the area of investment and access to finance, the focus will be on improving access to finance for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) through the provision by the EU of EUR 1 billion of local currency financing, and support to 500,000 SMEs. In addition, investments of EUR 500 million of equity will be provided by the EU to help SMEs, strengthen the start-up ecosystem, sustain economic development, promote women's entrepreneurship, create quality jobs, and pursue the green and digital transitions. Supporting structural reforms, improving economic and labour market governance, attracting foreign direct investment by supporting sound investment environment, promoting international labour standards, reducing corruption and increasing economic resilience will be key in this regard.
19. Strengthening engagement outside capital cities will unleash the economic potential of rural and coastal areas, including by investing in the sustainable agri-food production, creating better opportunities for agricultural lending, supporting diversification of activities, promoting smart specialisation, and a more efficient use of resources and limiting emissions. Support for at least 50 municipalities will help them to respond better to complexity, adapt to uncertainty and climate change, and improve resilience.
20. Sustainable, rules-based and secure transport interconnectivity will be enhanced through the completion of extended indicative core TEN-T network covering all modes of transport (road, rail, air, maritime and waterborne, including inland waterways), and investments to upgrade 3,000 km of priority roads and railways along the extended TEN-T network, with the aim of completing it by 2030. It will be conducted in line with EU standards and in a way that is climate-proof and limits environmental damage, in view of driving economic development, regional integration, trade and mobility. Interconnectivity will also be enhanced through completing the network of common aviation agreements and cooperating on aviation, maritime and road safety, notably through the setting up of a regional road safety observatory. Climate neutral energy transition of partner countries will be supported in order to increase energy security by diversifying from oil and gas imports and decarbonising the energy systems through investments in renewable energy and enhanced energy efficiency and by encouraging energy market integration based on sound legislation with a view to ensure security of supply in the region. Modernisation of national gas transmission systems will be pursued in this context.

21. Investing in people and knowledge societies will be continued and further strengthened with the provision of 70,000 individual mobility opportunities for students and staff, researchers, young people and youth workers. Education reform will remain a strategic priority. Modernisation and innovation efforts at all levels of education and training will be pursued. This includes structured cooperation between EU and partner countries' universities, VET institutions and youth organisations, as well as the promotion of youth employment, employability, entrepreneurship and skills, including addressing brain drain. Support for the implementation of the Eastern Partnership European school in Georgia will be continued. Support for culture and creative industries will be continued. Investing in Research and Innovation (R&I) including through policy reforms, increasing gross R&I expenditure and supporting the green and digital transitions through smart specialisation strategies and technology transfer will be key.

### **Together for environmental and climate resilience**

22. The EU will work together with the partner countries to transform the region into fair and prosperous societies, with modern, resource-efficient, climate neutral, circular and competitive economies, while increasing their environmental and climate resilience, including through more sustainable use of natural resources and decarbonisation.
23. To improve people's health and wellbeing the focus will be on reducing pollution by monitoring and improving air quality in 300 cities, and on further progressing towards universal access to clean water and sanitation with another 3 million people gaining access to safe water services. Environmental information will be improved and environmental assessment of urban development plans undertaken. Public awareness of green and climate change issues, and involvement in environmental initiatives, will be boosted.

24. With an aim to support the circular economy and accelerate green recovery and growth, climate policies and green investment will be strengthened with EU assistance, in line with the European Green Deal, and environmental governance improved with a view to achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and scaling up adaptation to climate change. The EU will support the adoption by partner countries of national mid-century Low-Emissions Development Strategies by COP27. The EU is ready to consider supporting partner countries in introducing effective carbon emissions reduction schemes and/or carbon pricing policies aligned with those of the EU, including in the context of the future Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). Further cooperation related to the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction will be pursued. The EU will promote the Sustainable and Smart Mobility strategy, the Farm to Fork strategy and just transition including of mining-dependent regions. Innovative climate and green financing will be scaled up and more systematic environmental assessments undertaken. EU product and eco-innovation policies will be strengthened, waste management improved and recycling increased.
25. To preserve biodiversity and strengthen the economy's natural assets base, water management will be supported including in the transboundary context by further alignment with the EU Water Framework Directive and relevant international standards. Protected areas will be extended and connected, forest management improved, and maritime administration around the Black Sea will be strengthened including through capacity building in maritime safety and designation of the Black Sea as an emissions control area.
26. In terms of strengthening energy security, the transition to climate neutral energy systems will be supported and energy efficiency promoted. The target is to reduce by at least 20% the energy consumption of 250,000 households. Large-scale comprehensive renovations and capacity building in line with energy-efficiency standards will contribute to this goal. The full potential of renewable energy needs to be realised. The functioning of energy markets will be improved, legislative and regulatory frameworks strengthened, and sustainable regional energy infrastructure capacity developed. The highest level of nuclear safety needs to be ensured. Regional cooperation on renewable hydrogen economy will be supported.

27. To accelerate the shift to sustainable and smart mobility work with International Financial Institutions will be undertaken to introduce new finance mechanisms for cities. Non-fossil fuels-based and low emission public and private transport will be prioritised and older high-emission vehicles replaced, including by implementing pilot projects.

### **Together for a resilient digital transformation**

28. The development of a resilient digital economy and society will require the reinforcement of secure electronic communication infrastructures, further digitalisation of public administrations and private sector actors, and investment in promoting digital innovation and digital skills.
29. The following targets will be pursued: 80% of households with access to affordable high-speed internet; 80% of public services in the EaP available online through interoperability platforms; mutually recognised digital signatures between four partner countries and with the EU; and one million EaP citizens digitally empowered through the creation of a digital education platform.
30. Retail prices for international roaming will be substantially reduced, and 5G networks will be secured by alignment with the EU coordinated approach. In this context, the implementation of roaming and spectrum agreements among the partner countries and where appropriate with the EU, will be supported. Cross-border e-commerce with the EU will be substantially increased and four digital transport corridors will be operational, complementing the TEN-T network. Significant investments will be made to support high performance digital start-ups.
31. To boost cyber resilience and cybersecurity, institutional, policy and legislative frameworks will be put in place and the cyber threat landscape methodology of the EU agency for cybersecurity (ENISA) will be introduced in cooperation with ENISA. Further alignment with EU and international data protection standards will be promoted.