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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 2)/Council
Subject:	European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 21/2023 on the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls - Draft Council conclusions

1. On 11 September 2023, the European Court of Auditors published its Special Report No 21/2023 entitled "The Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls – ambitious but so far with limited impact." ¹
2. The Working Party on Development Cooperation and International Partnerships examined the report in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Council conclusions on the procedure for examining Special Reports drawn up by the Court of Auditors. ²
3. On 15 November 2023, the Working Party reached agreement on the draft Council conclusions prepared by the Spanish Presidency.
4. In view of the above, the Permanent Representatives Committee is invited to confirm the agreement on the text as set out in the Annex to this note and to submit the text to the Council for approval.

¹ This special report is available on the Court's website: <https://www.eca.europa.eu>.

² 7515/00 FIN 127 + COR 1.

DRAFT**Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 21/2023 on the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls**

1. The Council welcomes the publication of the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 21/2023 on the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls and takes good note of the conclusions and recommendations therein. The Council stresses the importance of effective multilateralism and remains committed to strengthening the EU as a lead actor in combating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence globally.
2. The Council emphasises that gender equality and the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls — as well as their empowerment — are at the core of European values and are enshrined within the EU legal and political framework; and recalls the collective commitment in the European consensus on development to vigorously promote the protection and fulfilment of women's and girls' rights as a priority across all areas of action.
3. The Council appreciates the Court's work on drawing up findings, particularly that the initiative set relevant objectives, has achieved outputs, and has benefited women and girls, including in unforeseen situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council further highlights the findings and recommendations related to the increased efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Spotlight Initiative.
4. The Council furthermore takes note of the replies by the Commission services and the EEAS attached to the Special Report and welcomes the fact that the Commission has accepted all of the Court's recommendations, with one partial exception, and has already addressed many of them, including by simplifying the Spotlight model and enhancing the Initiative's flexibility and adaptability to local contexts.

5. The Council concurs with the Court's observation that creating lasting change worldwide on a complex issue requires long-term actions and additional resources, and acknowledges the Commission's commitment to further supporting the Spotlight Initiative. The Council furthermore welcomes the United Nations' selection of the Spotlight Initiative as a High Impact Initiative presented at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit on 17 September 2023, highlighting its crosscutting nature in addressing multiple Sustainable Development Goals.
6. The Council calls on the Commission, the High Representative and the Member States to continue their efforts to ensure the sustainability and long-term impact of actions implemented to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence with a comprehensive and whole-of-society approach, including through the Spotlight Initiative and in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and subsequent resolutions, commonly known as the Women, Peace and Security agenda. To this end, the Council acknowledges the importance of ensuring adequate financing, coherence among EU initiatives and a well-coordinated and context-specific country response through a Team Europe approach ensuring cost effectiveness and efficiency, in dialogue with partner countries, local communities and civil society. The Council furthermore calls for enhanced efforts to support the call of the Secretary-General of the United Nations at the SDG Summit to attract other donors and to promote the mobilisation of domestic resources in partner countries to eliminate all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.
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