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- Council conclusions (14 December 2015)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, adopted by the Council at its 3438th meeting held on 14 December 2015.

**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE REVIEW OF THE EUROPEAN
NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY**

Foreign Affairs Council, 14 December 2015

1. The Council welcomes the Joint Communication of 18 November 2015 on the 'Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy', aimed at better responding to changes and challenges in the neighbourhood. As set out in the April 2015 Council Conclusions, a democratic, stable and prosperous neighbourhood is a strategic priority and a fundamental interest for the EU. Underlining the importance of a special relationship with the EU's neighbours, the stabilisation of the neighbourhood in political, economic and security terms will be the main political priority for the EU in the next years. In doing so, the EU will pursue its interests and promote universal values.
2. The European Neighbourhood Policy is key for both the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and other areas of the EU's external action. The findings of the review should feed in to the development of wider EU policy, in particular the Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy. The Council recalls the importance it attaches to the High Representative and the Commission ensuring better policy coherence with all aspects of EU external action. It encourages enhanced co-ordination between EU Delegations and Member States, and also with international organisations, in partner countries.
3. The Council welcomes that the revised ENP, as set out in the Joint Communication, takes into account interests and needs of the EU and its neighbours, neighbours' commitment to reforms, the level of ambition of the partnership as well as different challenges and the geopolitical environment.

4. Recalling the need to ensure the EU Member States' full involvement in the ENP, the Council will remain seized of the review process and looks forward to a regular dialogue on its implementation. The Council invites the High Representative and the Commission to engage with partner countries on the revised policy and then present progress to the Council for discussion. The Council looks forward to regular high-level dialogue on delivery of the European Neighbourhood Policy.
5. The Council welcomes the engagement and consultation with partner countries in the review process. Enhanced differentiation between and greater ownership by partner countries are key principles for the reviewed ENP. The Council welcomes the proposals set out in the Joint Communication to further develop relations with partners wishing to pursue deeper relations with the EU based on shared values, including by increasing opportunities for political dialogue at ministerial level. The Council underlines the importance of assisting all partners in their reform efforts with a corresponding level of support. The Council confirms the intention to start a new phase of engagement with partners in 2016 which could lead to the setting of new partnership priorities, where appropriate, focused on agreed priorities and interests.
6. The Council underlines that the EU's partnerships under the ENP should be focused on people as well as governments. The Council calls for effective promotion of good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights, which are important for long-term stability. These topics will be discussed with all partners, in mutually agreed formats, as well as in partnership with the wider society. This should include enhanced support to civil society and a renewed focus on the importance of gender equality. The European Endowment for Democracy can play an important role in this regard.
7. The Council stresses the importance of sustainable economic development for stabilisation through investment in economic modernisation with a particular focus on youth, education and employment to boost prosperity. The Council stresses the need for renewed action on connectivity, energy security and climate action.

8. Full and effective implementation of Association Agreements/ Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (AAs/DCFTAs) is a key priority which, accompanied by reforms, will result in relevant partners' comprehensive approximation with international standards and EU legislation and standards. This will lead to the gradual economic integration of AA/DCFTA partners in the EU internal market and therefore to the creation of an economic area. Such a vision will also contribute to the long-term goal of a wider area of economic prosperity based on World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules and sovereign choices throughout Europe and beyond. The Council encourages the Commission to work with all ENP partners in their ongoing and possible future negotiations. For those who do not wish to engage in negotiations for a DCFTA, there should be the opportunity to jointly determine attractive and realistic alternatives to promote economic integration and strengthen trade and investment relations that reflect mutual benefits.

9. The Council welcomes the new proposals to strengthen the security dimension of the ENP, and reiterates its calls for greater coherence of the ENP with the security and foreign policy dimensions of the EU's other actions abroad. This will include measures to reinforce partners' resilience such as countering the terrorist threat and preventing radicalisation, and supporting Security Sector Reform and border management. Such security measures and cooperation will be conducted in full compliance with the rule of law and international law, including international human rights law. The ENP security proposals should be implemented in line with the comprehensive approach and with the external dimension of other relevant EU policies with closer coordination between the security-related work financed under the ENI and wider CFSP/CSDP activities, where appropriate. In addition, the Council will enhance cooperation with partners, including through, where appropriate, CSDP activities or the EU's Special Representatives, to support the management and resolution of conflicts in the neighbourhood including through agreed frameworks. In addition, cross-cultural dialogue, such as that promoted by the Anna Lindh foundation, can play a role in conflict prevention.

10. The Council welcomes proposals for intensified cooperation on both regular and irregular migration. The Council calls on the High Representative and the Commission to continue increasing the support for partner countries receiving and assisting refugees and IDPs. The Council calls for enhanced effective cooperation on returns, readmission and sustainable reintegration and for continued engagement with partners beyond the neighbourhood building on the Valletta Summit and other existing initiatives. Tackling together with partners the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement including of unaccompanied minors should remain priorities. The Council reconfirms that enhanced mobility in a secure and well managed environment and people-to-people contacts should be promoted. Mutually-beneficial regular migration including circular migration should be promoted through better support schemes.
11. The Council reaffirms the importance of the Eastern Partnership and its commitment to continue implementing the shared priorities agreed at Riga and previous Eastern Partnership Summits. The Council supports further strengthening of this regional dimension, including through the regional programmes of the EU and the multilateral framework of the EaP.
12. The Council acknowledges that the Union for the Mediterranean has proved to be a valuable forum for political and economic discussion, as well as for agreeing concrete projects in priority sectors. The Union for the Mediterranean should be considered as a key regional framework for political dialogue and regional cooperation efforts, including through regular ministerial meetings.
13. The Council supports outreach beyond the neighbourhood in order to tackle shared challenges. The High Representative and the Commission in consultation with the Council will develop new Thematic Frameworks with interested ENP partners to offer cooperation on regional issues in the neighbourhood, to state and multilateral actors, as well as to other partners.
14. The Council also recalls the importance of other existing initiatives with EU and Member States involvement such as the Black Sea Synergy and AMICI (A southern Mediterranean Investment Coordination Initiative).

15. The Council supports increasing the flexibility of existing financing instruments in order to improve the EU's capability to respond flexibly to crisis situations. The EU will also preserve the predictability and continuity of its support for implementing the mutually agreed long-term reform goals and other elements required by the ENI regulation. Commitment to and implementation of reform will continue to guide the allocation of funds under the ENI umbrella programme, in line with the incentive based approach. The Council looks forward to examining proposals for more effective delivery of financial support, including those set out in the Joint Communication.

16. The Council recognises the need to improve communication of the ENP, and on ensuring better visibility and outreach for the policy and its outcomes. This should include enhanced strategic communication efforts, including related support to partners and support to independent media in the neighbourhood.

17. The Council welcomes the new approach to reporting, focusing specifically on meeting the goals agreed with partners. This reporting will support the work of Association Councils, Co-operation Councils and other high-level meetings. In addition, the Council invites the High Representative and the Commission to provide regular reporting to track developments in the neighbourhood as required by the ENI regulation.
