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Subject:	European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 14/2023 on Programming the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe - Council conclusions (21 November 2023)
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Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 14/2023 on Programming the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, as approved by the Council at its 3985th meeting held on 21 November 2023.

**Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 14/2023 on
Programming the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument –
Global Europe**

1. The Council welcomes the European Court of Auditors' Special Report 14/2023 on Programming the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe). It particularly welcomes the Court's findings and recommendations. The Special Report offers an important contribution to the ongoing processes of the mid-term evaluation and the mid-term review of the NDICI-Global Europe.
2. The programming exercise of the NDICI-Global Europe has been framed by the programming principles set out in Articles 12, 13 and 19 of Regulation (EU) 2021/947 ('the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation'). These principles have been translated into concrete priority areas, sectors of intervention, specific objectives, expected results and indicative allocations for EU actions at country, multi-country, regional and global levels, which aim to reinforce sustainable development. The Council acknowledges the finding of the Special Report that the Commission services and the EEAS use different methodologies to set financial allocations in Neighbourhood and non-Neighbourhood programmes.
3. In this context, the Council welcomes the completion of the programming exercise for the vast majority of the planned programming documents less than six months after the adoption of the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation and its related delegated act. This has allowed for swift budgetary implementation and full continuity of EU cooperation with partner countries and regions, including through the thematic programmes.

4. The Council underlines that since the completion of the programming of NDICI-Global Europe multi-annual indicative programmes (MIPs), the world has been facing a series of interlocking crises, including Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the ongoing consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. These multiple crises are weakening the capacities of partner countries to tackle the persistent challenges of poverty, climate change and environmental degradation, conflict, food insecurity, growing inequalities and economic downturn, with serious repercussions for migration and forced displacement. Halfway through its implementation period, the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals are at risk, particularly among partner countries in the most vulnerable and fragile situations. Based on the programming process concluded in 2021, the implementation of NDICI-Global Europe in a Team Europe spirit will allow the EU to address geopolitical challenges, while integrating the development priorities and needs of partner countries.
5. The Council reiterates the EU's ambition to engage with partner countries in a strategic way and on an equal basis, through multi-stakeholder dialogue based on the 'policy-first' approach, building strong and mutually beneficial partnerships based on shared values, common interests, joint policy priorities and local ownership of actions. The Council emphasises the need to continuously reinforce the efficiency, transparency and high impact of EU development cooperation with partner countries.
6. The Council welcomes the European Court of Auditors' conclusion that the Commission services and the EEAS designed comprehensive geographical programmes, addressing a broad range of partner country needs and EU priorities. It also welcomes the acknowledgement of the broad, inclusive and comprehensive consultations carried out and subsequently reflected in the choice of priority areas for cooperation and partnerships. The Council urges the Commission services, the EEAS and Member States to improve the coordination between EU Delegations and Member States' Embassies in partner countries, beyond information sharing, to further bolster the Team Europe approach and the coherence of collective action. Particular attention should be paid to the inclusion of the Member States with non-resident Embassies.

7. The Council takes note of the Court's finding that the number of joint programming strategies remains limited and that the objective of the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation to make joint programming the preferred approach for country programming has not yet been achieved, as the focus has shifted towards Team Europe Initiatives. In this regard, the Council urges the Commission to resume the regular mapping of joint programming activities. The Council acknowledges the strong contribution of the Team Europe approach and the Team Europe Initiatives to the 'working better together' principle of the EU's development cooperation.
8. The Council particularly welcomes the Court's recommendation on the need to improve the methodology for allocating funds to Neighbourhood countries and recognises the importance of further documenting and consistently applying the allocation methodology of the non-Neighbourhood programmes. The Council stresses the value of regional integration and the impact of inclusive regional multiannual indicative programmes. The Council calls on the Commission services and the EEAS to consider these recommendations in the ongoing process of the mid-term review of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument and to prepare a sufficiently standardised, comparable, transparent and well-documented allocation methodology for the next programming exercise. The Council invites the Commission services and the EEAS to identify domains in which further standardisation is possible. The Council recalls the importance of minimising methodological differences between regions based on adequate political assessments, in line with relevant legal provisions.
9. The Council recalls the special nature of partnerships with Neighbourhood countries, as per the European Neighbourhood Policy differentiation principle, reflected in the mixed nature of the allocation criteria in NDICI-Global Europe. This encompasses quantitative and qualitative indicators, including commitment to reforms and the level of ambition of the partnerships with the EU.
10. The Council welcomes the introduction of the Global Europe results framework as a key monitoring tool to enable the EU to report on the aggregated results achieved at the level of NDICI-Global Europe. It encourages the Commission to continue working on the definition of key indicators, baselines and targets, and underlines the relevance of regularly presenting aggregated results in the relevant working parties of the Council.

11. The Council welcomes the Court's recommendation on enhancing results-based monitoring. It invites the Commission to further simplify and ensure a consistent use of indicators, aimed at facilitating data aggregation, including by Member States. While it notes that all adopted multiannual indicative programmes have integrated the use of corporate indicators, more than 20 % lack clear baselines or indicators. The Council encourages the Commission services and the EEAS to seize the opportunity offered by the mid-term review of NDICI-Global Europe programming to improve use of indicators.
12. The Council especially welcomes the Court's findings related to the need to further focus the scope of the programming exercise. In this respect, the Council takes note of the Court's recommendation to postpone non-obligatory elements to the implementation phase and invites the Commission services and the EEAS, within their remit, to adopt this focused approach for the next programming exercise, while retaining the flexibility needed for multiannual programming.
13. The Council recognises the importance of further documenting the methodology for establishing the allocations for non-Neighbourhood countries, while still recognising the need for localised qualitative assessments. The Council notes that the methodology for the next programming exercise should be more standardised and comprehensive than the one used for NDICI-Global Europe. The Council calls on the Commission services and the EEAS to uphold transparency and coherence, promote effective mobilisation and use of domestic resources and consider the absorption capacity of partner countries.
14. The Council welcomes the Court's recommendation addressing the need to clarify the methodology for assessing the development impact of EU support in partner countries. In this respect, it invites the Commission services and the EEAS to improve the methodology to better demonstrate the results and effective development impact of EU support to selected priority areas and/or sectors of cooperation. This will be important in the context of the ongoing mid-term review of NDICI-Global Europe, in the programming documents for the next programming exercise and in strategic communication with development partners.

15. The Council stresses the importance of building on the Team Europe Initiatives and the Global Gateway strategy to improve the visibility of EU actions and strengthen political dialogue with partner countries. To this end, it recalls that assessing the impact of EU actions through reliable indicators is essential to better communicate about the EU's achievements and to demonstrate the added value of what Team Europe has to offer.
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