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'I/A' ITEM NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 19/2023: EU efforts for sustainable soil management – unambitious standards and limited targeting
- Approval of draft Council conclusions

1. The Permanent Representatives Committee instructed the Working Party on Financial Agricultural Questions (WP AGRIFIN) to examine the above-mentioned Special Report in accordance with the rules laid down in the Council conclusions of 8 May 2000 on improving the examination of special reports drawn up by the Court of Auditors (doc. 7515/00 + COR 1).
2. At its meeting on 20 October 2023, WP AGRIFIN discussed the above-mentioned Special Report as well as the Commission's replies to that report.
3. In the light of those discussions, the Presidency drew up draft conclusions (doc. 15403/23) and submitted them to delegations for an informal written consultation. Based on the comments received, the Presidency amended the draft conclusions and presented them at the AGRIFIN meeting on 1 December. The meeting agreed to the amended version of the draft conclusions, as set out in the Annex.

4. In accordance with the Council conclusions of 8 May 2000, the Permanent Representatives Committee is hereby invited to suggest to the Council that it approve the draft Council conclusions as set out in the Annex to this note as an 'A' item at a forthcoming session.
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Final draft Council conclusions

European Court of Auditors on its Special Report 19/2023 entitled:

“EU efforts for sustainable soil management: Unambitious standards and limited targeting”

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. NOTES the Court's Special Report No 19/2023 entitled “*EU efforts for sustainable soil management: Unambitious standards and limited targeting*”, which assesses whether the Commission and Member States made effective use of CAP 2014-2022 measures for managing agricultural soils and manure sustainably and whether the actions relevant to manure management undertaken in the implementation of the Nitrates Directive have been effective;
2. TAKES NOTE of the Court's recommendations to the Commission to review and report on the level of ambition of the standards and assess the results of their implementation, to report on the targeting of the CAP voluntary measures on the most pressing local soil problems, to limit the use of derogations and review conflicting objectives in other policy areas and to improve consolidated data at EU level, which the Commission accepts;
3. NOTES that soil preservation is gaining importance in the new CAP period 2023-2027, in particular through enhanced conditionality, new eco-schemes under the first pillar and voluntary measures under the second pillar;
4. AGREES on the importance of the full implementation of the Nitrates Directive and the achievement of its objective in all EU countries, including in the Member States having been granted justified derogations due to their specificities;
5. RECOGNISES the important contribution of the Nitrates Directive in reducing nutrient losses from agriculture and, in this context, TAKES NOTE of the Green Deal Target to reduce nutrient losses by 50% by 2030;

6. NOTES the actions taken by the Commission to address data gaps and to improve the quality of data collected and/or offered voluntarily by the Member States for the period 2020-2023 and until data collection on gross nutrient balances becomes mandatory in 2026.
