



European Council

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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: European Council meeting (14 and 15 December 2023)
– Conclusions

Delegations will find attached the conclusions adopted by the European Council at the above meeting.

I. UKRAINE

1. The European Council reiterates its resolute condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter, and reaffirms the European Union's unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and its inherent right of self-defence against the Russian aggression.
2. The European Council recalls its previous conclusions and confirms the European Union's unwavering commitment to continue to provide strong political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes.
3. The European Union and its Member States will continue to address Ukraine's pressing military and defence needs. In particular, the European Council insists on the importance of timely, predictable and sustainable military support for Ukraine, notably through the European Peace Facility and the EU Military Assistance Mission, as well as through direct bilateral assistance by Member States. The European Council stresses the urgent need to accelerate the delivery of missiles and ammunition, notably under the one million rounds of artillery ammunition initiative, and to provide Ukraine with more air defence systems.

The European Council invites the Council to intensify work on the reform of the European Peace Facility and the further increase of its financing, building on the proposal of the High Representative.

The European Union and its Member States remain committed to contributing, for the long-term and together with partners, to security commitments to Ukraine, which will help Ukraine to defend itself, resist destabilisation efforts and deter acts of aggression in the future.

Following the report by the High Representative, the European Council discussed the EU's future security commitments to Ukraine. It invites the High Representative and Member States to take work forward in the Council. The European Council will remain seized of the matter.

Military support and security commitments will be provided in full respect of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and taking into account the security and defence interests of all Member States.

4. In the face of continued Russian attacks against Ukraine's civil and critical infrastructure, the European Union and its Member States will intensify the provision of further humanitarian and civil protection assistance to Ukraine, as well as assistance to ensure the resilience of its energy sector through the winter. Moreover, the European Union remains committed to supporting Ukraine's repair, recovery and reconstruction, in coordination with international partners, including the demining process and psychosocial rehabilitation.
5. The European Union and its Member States will continue their intensive global outreach efforts and cooperation with Ukraine and partners from all regions of the world to ensure the widest possible international support for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace and the key principles and objectives of Ukraine's Peace Formula, with a view to a future Global Peace Summit.
6. The European Council reiterates its call for decisive progress, in coordination with partners, on how extraordinary revenues held by private entities stemming directly from Russia's immobilised assets could be directed to support Ukraine and its recovery and reconstruction, consistent with applicable contractual obligations, and in accordance with EU and international law. In this context, it takes note of the recent proposals on extraordinary revenues stemming from immobilised Russian assets.

7. Russia and its leadership must be held fully accountable for waging a war of aggression against Ukraine and for other most serious crimes under international law, as well as for the massive damage caused by its war. The European Council encourages further efforts, including in the Core Group, to establish a tribunal for the prosecution of the crime of aggression against Ukraine that would enjoy the broadest cross-regional support and legitimacy, and a future compensation mechanism; it reiterates its support for the Council of Europe's Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation Against Ukraine, as a first tangible step in this direction. It also calls on all states to sign and ratify rapidly the Ljubljana-The Hague Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and other International Crimes. The European Council also reiterates its support for the work of the International Criminal Court and condemns Russia's continued attempts to undermine its international mandate and functioning.
8. The European Council reiterates its urgent call on Russia and Belarus to immediately ensure the safe return to Ukraine of all unlawfully deported and transferred Ukrainian children and other civilians.
9. The European Union is determined to further weaken Russia's ability to wage its war of aggression, including by further strengthening its sanctions, and through their full and effective implementation and the prevention of their circumvention, especially for high-risk goods, in close cooperation with partners and allies. The European Council welcomes the adoption of the 12th package of sanctions. It also welcomes the agreement reached on the Directive on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures. The European Council condemns the continued military support for Russia's war of aggression provided by Iran, Belarus and the DPRK. It also urges all countries not to provide material or other support for Russia's war of aggression. The European Union will continue its intensive work with partners to counter false Russian narratives and disinformation about the war.

10. The European Council stresses the importance of security and stability in the Black Sea. It is vital that Ukraine's grain exports are sustainable and reach world markets. The European Council supports all efforts to facilitate exports of Ukraine's grain and other agricultural products to the countries most in need, notably in Africa and the Middle East. The European Council also underlines the importance of using the EU's Solidarity Lanes to their full potential, and invites the Commission to speed up work with Member States in order to propose new measures with a view to further developing the capacity of the Solidarity Lanes on all routes.
11. The European Union will continue to support the Republic of Moldova and Georgia in addressing the challenges they face as a consequence of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

II. MIDDLE EAST

12. The European Council held an in-depth strategic debate on the Middle East.

III. ENLARGEMENT AND REFORMS

13. Recalling the Granada Declaration, the European Council underlines that enlargement is a geo-strategic investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity. It is a driver for improving the economic and social conditions of European citizens, reducing disparities between countries, and must foster the values on which the Union is founded. Looking ahead to the prospect of a further enlarged Union, both future Member States and the EU need to be ready at the time of accession. Work on both tracks should advance in parallel. Aspiring members need to step up their reform efforts, notably in the area of rule of law, in line with the merit-based nature of the accession process and with the assistance of the EU. In parallel, the Union needs to lay the necessary internal groundwork and reforms, setting the Union's long-term ambitions and the ways to achieve them, and addressing key questions related to its priorities and policies as well as its capacity to act. This will make the EU stronger and will enhance European sovereignty.

14. The European Council endorses the Council conclusions on enlargement of 12 December 2023. Building on the Commission’s enlargement package of 8 November 2023, the European Council takes the following decisions:

Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova

15. The European Council decides to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and with the Republic of Moldova.

The European Council invites the Council to adopt the respective negotiating frameworks once the relevant steps set out in the respective Commission recommendations of 8 November 2023 are taken.

Georgia

16. The European Council also decides to grant the status of candidate country to Georgia, on the understanding that the relevant steps set out in the Commission recommendation of 8 November 2023 are taken.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

17. The European Council will open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria is achieved.

It invites the Commission to report to the Council on progress at the latest in March 2024, with a view to making a decision.

North Macedonia

18. The European Union is ready to complete the opening phase of the accession negotiations with North Macedonia as soon as it has implemented its commitment to complete the constitutional changes as referred to in the Council conclusions of 18 July 2022, in line with its internal procedures. The European Council calls on North Macedonia to accelerate the completion of these changes.

Western Balkans

19. Reaffirming its full and unequivocal commitment to the EU membership perspective of the Western Balkans, the European Council calls for the acceleration of their accession process.
20. The European Council takes note of the Commission's Communication on a new growth plan for the Western Balkans, which aims to accelerate the socio-economic convergence between the Western Balkans and the European Union, based on strict conditionalities, and encourages the region to step up the pace of EU-related reforms and to advance regional economic integration through the Common Regional Market, based on EU rules and standards.
21. The European Council remains committed to advancing the gradual integration between the European Union and the region during the enlargement process itself in a reversible and merit-based manner.

Reforms

22. As the Union enlarges, successful European integration requires that Union policies be fit for the future and financed in a sustainable manner, based on the values on which the Union is founded, and that the EU institutions continue to function effectively.
23. The European Council will address internal reforms at its upcoming meetings with a view to adopting by summer 2024 conclusions on a roadmap for future work.

IV. MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK 2021-2027

24. The European Council discussed the revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 as set out in document EUCO 23/23, which was firmly supported by 26 Heads of State or Government. The European Council will revert to the matter early next year.

V. SECURITY AND DEFENCE

25. In the context of global instability, strategic competition and security threats, the European Council underlines the importance of strengthening European security and defence to deliver an ambitious geopolitical Union. The Union needs to take more responsibility for its own security and defence, pursue a strategic course of action and increase its capacity to act autonomously.
26. Having taken stock of work carried out to implement its previous conclusions, the Versailles Declaration and the Strategic Compass, the European Council underlines that more needs to be done to fulfil the Union's objectives of increasing defence readiness and increasing defence expenditure in a collaborative way, including enhancing defence investment and capability development, and to achieve an effective and integrated market for defence. In particular, the European Council:
- a) calls for the existing measures to be implemented as a matter of urgency to facilitate and coordinate joint procurement and to increase the European defence industry's interoperability and production capacity in order to replenish Member State stocks, notably in light of the support to be provided to Ukraine;
 - b) calls on the High Representative and the Commission, in coordination with the European Defence Agency, to swiftly present a European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS), including a proposal for a European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP), in light of the need to strengthen the European defence technological and industrial base, including SMEs, and to make it more innovative, competitive and resilient;

- c) underlines the importance of further developing an integrated market in the field of defence to reinforce cross-border supply chains, ensure critical technologies and improve the competitiveness of the European defence industry. To that end, the EU's regulatory framework for the defence industrial sector should be adapted to enhance interoperability, standardisation, and harmonisation of certification processes and to allow for faster and more flexible action, in particular with regard to public procurement;
- d) in view of the next Annual Progress Report of the Strategic Compass and in line with the commitments undertaken by the participating Member States in the framework of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), calls for work to be intensified to increase the defence readiness, resilience and security of the Union, including through defence investment, military mobility, regular live exercises, enhancing space security, countering cyber and hybrid threats, addressing foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) based on the recently established toolbox which includes the possibility of exploring new restrictive measures, and reinforcing the collaborative development of the capabilities necessary to conduct the full range of missions and operations, in particular through the implementation of the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity;
- e) calls for an enhanced role of the European Investment Bank Group in support of European security and defence, building on the bank's Strategic European Security Initiative;
- f) calls for continued work to strengthen the new Civilian CSDP Compact, in light of the Council conclusions on civilian CSDP of 11 December 2023.

27. A stronger and a more capable European Union in the field of security and defence will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defence for its members. This is without prejudice to the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States, and takes into account the security and defence interests of all Member States.

VI. MIGRATION AND OTHER ITEMS

Migration

28. The European Council held a strategic discussion on migration and took note of the recent letter by the President of the European Commission.
29. The European Union will continue to pursue a comprehensive approach to migration which combines increased external action, mutually beneficial comprehensive partnerships with countries of origin and transit, addressing the root causes of migration, opportunities for legal migration, more effective protection of EU external borders, resolutely fighting organised crime, human trafficking and smuggling, instrumentalisation of migration as a hybrid threat and stepping up returns.

Hybrid attacks

30. The European Council strongly condemns all hybrid attacks, including the instrumentalisation of migrants by third countries for political purposes, and remains determined to ensure effective control of the EU's external borders. The European Union is determined to counter the ongoing hybrid attacks at its external borders launched by the Russian Federation and by Belarus.

COP28

31. The European Council welcomes the successful conclusion of the COP28 UN Climate Conference and the first Global Stocktake of the Paris Agreement, in particular the agreement to accelerate emission reductions towards net zero by 2050 and the agreement on reducing global emissions by 43 % by 2030 and 60 % by 2035 relative to the 2019 level, in line with the best available science, to keep the 1.5 °C objective within reach. It also welcomes the agreement by all parties to transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems.

VII. EU-TÜRKIYE RELATIONS

32. The European Council takes note of the joint report of the High Representative and the European Commission on the state of play of EU-Türkiye relations, and will revert to the matter at an upcoming European Council meeting.

VIII. FIGHT AGAINST ANTISEMITISM, RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

33. Seriously concerned about recent alarming incidents, the European Council reiterates its condemnation in the strongest possible terms of all forms of antisemitism and hate, intolerance, racism and xenophobia, including anti-Muslim hatred. It recalls in this context the European Union Anti-racism Action Plan and the European Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, the swift implementation of which is essential for the security of Jewish communities.

IX. STRATEGIC AGENDA

34. Following the informal meeting in Granada and subsequent consultations, and taking into account the long-term objectives of making the Union stronger and ready to welcome new members, the European Council will continue its work on the new Strategic Agenda, defining the Union's priorities and ways to achieve them in the coming years and providing guidance for the Union during the next institutional cycle. It will adopt the next Strategic Agenda by summer 2024.
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