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'I/A' ITEM NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	Digital partnerships with Japan, the Republic of Korea and Singapore - Authorisation to negotiate non-binding instruments

1. On 9 December 2021, the Working Party on Telecommunications and Information Society was informed by the European Commission, in a note¹, of its intention to start discussions on individual Digital Partnerships with Japan, the Republic of Korea and Singapore with a view to establishing cooperation on the digital transformation of the economy and society.
2. The Commission clarified that the Digital Partnerships will take the form of non-binding instruments and would therefore have no legally binding effect or financial implications for the European Union. They should address the four pillars of the EU Digital Compass²: infrastructures, skills, digital transformation of businesses and digitalisation of public services, and could include other areas facilitating cooperation in digital and trade.

¹ WK 15233/2021.

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-digital-compass-2030_en.pdf

3. The Commission's objective is to conclude the three Digital Partnerships during 2022. The Commission will regularly inform the Working Group on Telecommunications and Information Society and other relevant groups on the development of the Digital Partnerships during 2022 and will seek input from Member States on the scope and results of each of these partnerships.
4. It is understood that the Commission will revert to the Council at the end of the negotiations to request its authorisation for the signature of each Digital Partnership in accordance with the arrangements on non-binding instruments³.
5. At the meeting of the Working Party on Telecommunications and the Information Society on 10 February, the Commission provided additional information on the Digital Partnerships, in particular the timetable for negotiations and the areas of collaboration identified. At this stage, the Commission has identified several areas of collaboration, namely infrastructures, digital transformation of businesses, digitalisation of public services and digital skills. An initial technical exchange was organised with Japan in January and further technical workshops are planned from March with the Republic of Korea and Singapore.
6. On this basis, delegations did not object to the Commission being authorised by the Council to negotiate Digital Partnerships with Japan, the Republic of Korea and Singapore. In this context, the Presidency invites the Permanent Representatives Committee to suggest that the Council authorise the Commission to negotiate these Digital Partnerships.

³ Arrangements on non-binding instruments concluded by the Secretaries-General of the Commission, the Council and the EEAS in December 2017 (ST 15367/17).