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European Union

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### **OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS**

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Subject: The EU's renewed partnership with Least Developed Countries  
- Council conclusions (20 May 2022)

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Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the EU's renewed partnership with Least Developed Countries, as approved by the Council at its 3870th meeting held on 20 May 2022.

**Council conclusions on  
the EU's renewed partnership with Least Developed Countries**

1. The EU and its Member States are determined to promote ambitious international partnerships and are committed to jointly finding multilateral solutions to global challenges with Least Developed Countries (LDCs), in line with the New European Consensus on Development, and in view of the challenges these countries are facing in terms of achieving Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the objectives of the Paris Agreement. In that regard, the Council recalls the commitment of the EU and its Member States to eradicating poverty, ending hunger, reducing vulnerabilities and addressing inequalities to ensure that no one is left behind.
2. In light of the intensification of geopolitical rivalries and increasing global competition, the Council stresses the need to strengthen effective multilateralism and to collectively promote sustainable international partnerships based on shared values, human rights, gender equality and mutual respect. LDCs are valued geopolitical partners in ensuring a more resilient and safer world, as well as a sustainable and inclusive global recovery in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The Council invites the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to respond to the specific needs of LDCs through the effective implementation of these partnerships to support the acceleration of the implementation of the SDGs.
3. The Council recalls that Official Development Assistance (ODA) remains a major source of financing for the poorest countries, in particular LDCs, which lack the domestic capacity to raise finances from other sources. The EU and its Member States, as the biggest global ODA provider, reaffirm their commitment to collectively meeting the target of 0.20% of gross national income to LDCs by 2030, a key objective of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The Council underlines the importance of the existing differentiated treatment granted to LDCs and welcomes the revision of LDC graduation criteria, which takes account of the particular challenges of LDCs beyond income per capita, including human assets and economic and environmental vulnerability.

4. The Council welcomes that the Doha Programme of Action adopted in March 2022 commits to taking more tangible steps to support LDCs and stresses the importance of the EU's, the Member States' and European development banks and financial institutions' commitments to its implementation. It looks forward to the second part of the 5<sup>th</sup> United Nations Conference on the LDCs scheduled for 2023 and calls for an ambitious result. The Council furthermore recalls the importance of addressing the specific challenges of countries that graduate from the LDC category, to ensure a sustainable and smooth transition process.
5. The Council recalls that the EU's approach to international partnerships is based on sustainable and predictable funding and the principles of effective development cooperation, on shared values and on making the best use of the Team Europe approach. The Council encourages the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to include the specific needs of LDCs in the implementation of regional and global partnerships and strategies, on the basis of inclusive processes, the principle of ownership and shared interests. In this spirit, the Council invites the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to follow up on the commitments made at the EU-AU summit in Brussels on 17 and 18 February 2022, as well as at the EU-Indo-Pacific ministerial forum in Paris on 22 February 2022, and building on the ACP-EU partnership acquis.
6. The Council stresses the importance of effectively addressing the root causes and key drivers of conflict and fragility that affect many LDCs, including inequalities, the lack of democratic and good governance and rule of law, climate change and the fight for natural resources. In that context, the Council also underlines the need to continue addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. These challenges highlight the key role of integrated and sustainable humanitarian-development-peace nexus approaches and the importance of conducting joint conflict analyses. The Council notes that poverty and inequalities, in particular in LDCs, increase the risk of conflict and fragility. In this regard, the Council stresses the need to prevent and react to new crises, to build resilience in order to tackle the drivers of fragility and to promote an inclusive and sustainable recovery, in line with a 'build back better and greener' approach, guided by the SDGs, tackling all types of inequalities and leaving no one behind.

7. The Council notes with deep concern the significant negative impact of the Russian aggression against Ukraine on global food security and food prices. This adds to the already alarming global food security situation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and other global challenges impacting in particular LDCs and those countries most dependent on external food, energy and fertiliser supplies, as highlighted by the United Nations Crisis Response Group. In this regard, the Council reaffirms that timely and effective coordination with international organisations and other relevant partners and initiatives, such as the FAO and other Rome-based agencies, the G7 Global Alliance for Food Security and the FARM initiative, is needed to step up international efforts to address the global food and nutrition security concerns. The Council especially emphasises the need to strengthen LDCs' own sustainable food production capacities, as well as to diversify their food supply chains and limit barriers to open trade in food commodities. In line with the March 2022 Communication on 'Safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems', the EU will continue to support partner countries, in particular the most vulnerable ones, in their transition towards resilient and sustainable food systems.
8. The Council emphasises the very high vulnerability of LDCs with regard to climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation, and their significant role in protecting the climate and conserving biodiversity. With reference to the Paris Agreement and the Glasgow Climate Pact, the Council recognises the specific needs and challenges of LDCs regarding climate change adaptation and mitigation. Furthermore, the Council welcomes the progress made for LDCs at the UNFCCC COP 26 and the recent work by the IPCC, such as its contribution on 'Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability'. It calls for the adoption of an ambitious new global framework for biodiversity at COP 15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, with clear goals and a strong and transparent implementation regime, which will also be accompanied by adequate financial and non-financial resources crucial to LDCs. As in other countries, policies in LDCs on economic and social development, climate change adaptation, preservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, integrated water resource management and the fight against land degradation, deforestation and desertification, as well as disaster preparedness measures, should be implemented in an integrated and coherent manner in order to promote resilience against climate change and favour sustainable natural ecosystem management, as exemplified for instance by the Great Green Wall Accelerator.

9. The Council notes with concern that the COVID-19 crisis has clearly demonstrated the high vulnerability of LDCs to external shocks and caused a setback in the achievement of the SDGs in LDCs, particularly regarding human development. The Council invites the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to put special emphasis on human development in LDCs by following a holistic approach in the areas of health and human rights, food security and nutrition, education, digitalisation, access to social protection and the creation of decent jobs. In that respect, the Council recalls the importance of a transformative approach that addresses the root causes of gender inequalities and also stresses that advancing gender equality, women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming, and addressing the multiple discriminations faced by people that are vulnerable or marginalised, is particularly crucial in LDCs and is an EU priority in all areas of action. The Council recalls that the EU remains committed for more efforts and actions to ensure the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services.
10. The Council invites the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to further support the strengthening of health system capacities and public infrastructures in LDCs in order to achieve universal health coverage. Close attention should be paid to regulatory frameworks and pharmaceutical production capacities, and to improving access to WASH and to basic health services. In this regard, the Council highlights the Team Europe initiatives developed in Africa, covering, for instance, health security and pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, digital health, production of and access to vaccines, medicines and technologies related to health products, and support for public health institutes.

11. The Council stresses the importance of supporting the strengthening of education systems in LDCs to enable equitable and inclusive access to quality education for all, with a special focus on girls and young women, persons with disabilities and those in the most vulnerable situations. The Council stresses the need to pay special attention to the diets that children and adolescents need in order to grow and develop to their full potential, including through school health and nutrition programmes. The Council stresses the importance of young people in shaping their countries' future as well as the need to provide them with prospects for the future based on skills development and better integration in line with the needs of the local labour market. The Council invites the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to support capacity building for basic and secondary education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), as well as higher education and research institutions in LDCs. In this regard, the Council stresses the importance to involve researchers from LDCs in a renewed reflection process on country-specific and region-specific challenges and the appropriate instruments to address them.
12. The Council encourages the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to continue their efforts to strengthen the endogenous capacities of LDC economies, by promoting sustainable development, trade and resilient economies, including through structural reforms particularly focusing on strengthening domestic resource mobilisation, public financial management, good governance and improving the conditions for private sector development and foreign direct investment, as well as responsible business conduct and due diligence standards locally. The Council recognises the role of budget support and capacity building, including European Public Sector Expertise and peer partnerships, in pursuing these objectives, when conditions allow. The Council highlights the structural labour market vulnerabilities in LDCs and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on production and productivity, and stresses the importance of supporting employment and decent work as well as strengthening labour market institutions. In addition, the Council calls for the timely, coordinated and transparent implementation of the 'Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the DSSI' and the initiative related to the voluntary channelling of Special Drawing Rights or freely usable currencies from Member States and from other countries with a strong external position to vulnerable countries in order to support their recovery.

13. The Council invites the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to follow up on the Global Gateway objectives to facilitate public and private investments in sustainable connectivity and quality infrastructure, based on the needs of, and opportunities for, local and regional economies and communities, as identified in dialogues with partner countries, as well as on the EU's strategic interests. The Council also invites the Commission, in coordination with the EEAS, as well as the Member States and European development banks and financial institutions:

- to explore the provision of technical assistance to LDCs, following a Team Europe approach where possible, to support the development of sustainable and bankable projects and the creation of an environment conducive to scaling up sustainable finance and investment;

- to explore ways of innovative and inclusive financing to mobilise private capital for LDCs, taking into account existing best practices and related international initiatives, including the G7 Partnership for Infrastructure and Investment.

Connectivity projects should be planned and implemented according to the highest social, economic and environmental standards.

14. The Council also recognises the key role played in inclusive and sustainable development by local authorities and civil society organisations as independent actors of governance and development both in their own right and as implementing partners. The Council expresses concern on the shrinking space for civil society and emphasises the vital importance of protecting and promoting civic space for civil society in many LDCs. Decentralised cooperation and Public Sector Expertise are also relevant tools for European cooperation policy with LDCs, strengthening institutional capacities and consolidating local economic development and governance.

15. The Council encourages the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to make use of the Team Europe approach for increased cooperation with LDCs and in the implementation of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, NDICI-Global Europe. Under this new holistic and inclusive approach, all the tools available for LDCs should be mobilised, in particular Team Europe Initiatives and the instruments of the European financial architecture for development, such as the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+), via an increased role for European development banks and financial institutions, including the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and in cooperation with local and regional banks as well as other international actors. Particular attention should be paid to the specific challenges in operationalising the modalities and instruments in LDCs, notably the situation of fragility, conflict or post conflict.
16. The Council stresses the importance of increasing the coherence and visibility of the EU's partnership with LDCs, following a Team Europe approach, using for instance the Global Gateway strategy, and notes the need to pursue a coordinated communication strategy to counter disinformation. The Council invites the Commission, the EEAS, the EIB, the EBRD and the Member States to ensure effective communication and diplomatic outreach around the joint efforts made by the EU in a Team Europe approach, including through coordination between EU Delegations and Member States.

