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General Secretariat

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WORKING PAPER

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CONTRIBUTION

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Asia-Oceania Working Party
Subject:	Draft Council Conclusions - A Globally Connected Europe - IT comments

Delegations will find attached comments from Italy on the above.

Italy would like to thank the EEAS and Commission for the Draft Council Conclusions on Globally Connected Europe (WK 7260/2021 INIT).

Italy proposes a reorganization of the text in order to emphasise the vision, principles and goals which characterize the EU Global Strategy on Connectivity.

Draft Council Conclusions – A Globally Connected Europe

1. Context I. Vision, principles and goals

1. ~~The Council considers that ensuring a geostrategic approach to connectivity has long-term implications for advancing the EU's economic, foreign and security interests and promoting the EU's values globally. The Council therefore highlights the importance of implementing the EU connectivity agenda globally, recognizing the worldwide demand for sustainable connectivity.~~

2. The Council recalls the 2018 Joint Communication “Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy” and its following Conclusions, which lay down the fundamental principles of the EU's approach to connectivity, with climate and environmental, social, economic and fiscal sustainability, the level playing field, and a comprehensive rules-based approach at its core, and affirming the importance of both hard and soft connectivity.

3. ~~The Council also notes that connectivity has been~~ The Council considers the strategic approach to connectivity and financing of critical infrastructure in third countries as identified as a key component in numerous EU regional strategies¹. ~~The Council considers that connectivity has an important role to play in contributing to the Commission's priorities for 2019-2024, notably the European Green Deal and the European Digital Agenda.~~

2. ~~The Council considers that connectivity has an important role to play in contributing to the Commission's priorities for 2019-2024, notably the European Green Deal and the European Digital Agenda. In this context, the Council recalls its Data Gateway Declaration as well as the Joint Communications “2030 Digital Compass”, the Updated Industrial Strategy, Trade Policy Review, Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy and the Global Approach to Research and Innovation, which all share the general objective of promoting the Union's values and interests externally, including through sustainable connectivity.~~

4. 3. The Council considers that the Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed the strategic importance of connectivity for economic security and resilience, with particular implications

¹ The 2018 Joint Communication “Connecting Europe and Asia”, the Enhanced EU Security Cooperation in and with Asia- Council conclusions (2018); the Council Conclusions on EU relations with Latin America and the Caribbean “Joining forces for a common future” from 2019; the Joint Communication “The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership” from 2019; the Council Conclusions on the “EU's engagement to the Black Sea regional cooperation” from 2019; the Council Conclusions on Space solutions for a sustainable Arctic from 2019; the Joint Communication “Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa” from 2020; the Joint Communication “Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020” from 2020; the Western Balkans Economic and Investment Plan from 2020; the Council Conclusions on European Union – United States relations from 2020; the Council Conclusions on a renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood “A new agenda for the Mediterranean” from 2021; the Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific from 2021.

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in terms of diversification of value chains and the need for a secure, resilient and high quality digital ecosystem. ~~The Council also notes that other leading economies in the world have developed their own approaches and tools for connectivity.~~

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5.4. The Council considers that investments in connectivity respecting social, climate and environmental, economic and fiscal sustainability can have a transformative effect for economies and societies, strengthening growth, resilience and competitiveness in view of a green and digital transition and, especially in the context of the postCovid-19 recovery, can help build back better. The Council recognises the importance of regulatory cooperation, and technical assistance in order to help partners to create an environment conducive to investment in connectivity, as well as the vast needs for connectivity investment.

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6.5. The Council considers important that all international connectivity initiatives and actions apply high international standards, with the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment as a minimum, contributing to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. Equally, strong and reliable norms and standards are key to creating and securing a level playing field, needed to attract private and public investment in sustainable connectivity.

7.6. The Council highlights the importance of bolstering the benefits of connectivity through Connectivity Partnerships with like-minded partners and in cooperation with countries benefitting from connectivity actions, in order to promote the sustainability and compatibility of the partners' respective activities and to benefit from complementarities in project preparation, implementation and financing, as well as policy and regulatory cooperation and technical assistance. The Council welcomes the EU's partnerships with Japan (September 2019) and India (May 2021), as well as the EU's commitment in December 2020 to strengthen practical connectivity cooperation with ASEAN.

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~~7. For all these reasons, the Council considers that ensuring a geostrategic approach to connectivity has long-term implications for advancing the EU's economic, foreign and security interests and promoting the EU's values globally.~~

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II. Implementation

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~~8. The Council therefore invites the Commission and the High Representative, in accordance with their respective powers, to continue work on implementing the EU connectivity agenda globally, recognising the worldwide demand for sustainable connectivity.~~

8. The Council requests the Commission and the High Representative to prioritize the work on the implementation of the EU connectivity agenda to support and promote the EU's geo-political and geo-economic interests and uphold our common values.

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9. To respond to the challenges and needs identified, the Council finds it important for the EU to incentivise both investments in hard connectivity, particularly from the private sector, and soft connectivity policies and initiatives, and in particular policy and regulatory approaches conducive to sustainable investment, through all appropriate means, in coordination with Member States and their financial and development institutions, as well as with multilateral financial institutions' activities.

10. In particular, the Council invites the Commission and the High Representative, in accordance with their respective powers, to implement the following steps:

i. Extend the scope of the EU connectivity strategy to the global level.

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ii. Encourage a Team Europe approach (EU institutions, Member States, the EIB, and Member States' financial institutions) to implementation of ~~the~~ a EU global Connectivity agenda;

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iii. Identify and implement an initial set of high impact and visible projects and actions globally, by:

- mapping and presenting to the Council the connectivity initiatives and projects being implemented since the adoption of the 2018 Joint Communication;
- continuing policy and regulatory engagement with international partners, in particular with countries benefitting from connectivity actions;
- including new strategic connectivity actions in the programming process for the 2021-2027 MFF, based on priorities identified and agreed with partner countries and regions;
- increasing work towards delivering concrete results and giving better visibility to the EU from the existing Connectivity Partnerships, such as through bilateral and joint initiatives with third parties, including cooperation on possible concrete infrastructure projects;

iv.iii. Incentivise sustainable connectivity investments, based on pooling public and private resources, focusing on:

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- mapping the financial instruments already available for stimulating further investment in sustainable connectivity both on the EU and Member States' level, to facilitate pooling and blending of resources in a Team Europe approach;
- facilitating the participation of other financiers, in particular private investors, European and international development finance institutions (such as EIB and EBRD), national promotional banks and export credit agencies in joint financing structures;
- where appropriate and feasible, complement private investment and funding from international financial institutions, with support from the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 and Next Generation EU and a possible Digital Connectivity Fund;

v.iv. Mobilise the private sector to finance and implement projects, by:

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- launching the Business Advisory Group as an effective coordination platform, as envisaged in the 2018 Joint Communication;
- advancing work on sustainable finance and export credits as tools for crowding in private investment;
- ensuring an adequate level playing field for the private sector in market access and foreign direct investments;
- using innovative public financing tools, such as loans and guarantees, to crowd-in private capital;

- create a visible coordination platform and complement the existing structures with additional resources to enhance business participation;

vi. Ensure visibility of the EU's global connectivity actions through coherent strategic communication, by:

- developing a unifying narrative for actions taken by all relevant actors in a Team Europe approach, including an appealing new "brand name" for the EU connectivity strategy, and supported by a communication campaign for greater visibility;
- hosting regular further editions of the Europa Connectivity Forum;

vii. Keep the Council closely informed through its structures dealing with connectivity in all its geographic and sectorial dimensions.

11. The Council will revert on the implementation of the EU Connectivity Strategy. The Council invites the institutions to allocate the needed resources and quickly proceed with the implementation of aforementioned steps. The Council will subsequently discuss the implementation of the EU connectivity strategy on an annual basis. Progress should be reported regularly to the Council.

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