

10228/15

(OR. en)

**PROVISIONAL VERSION**

PRESSE 46  
PR CO 38

## OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3401st Council meeting

### General Affairs

Luxembourg, 23 June 2015

President **Edgars Rinkēvičs**  
Latvian Minister for Foreign Affairs

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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**ITEMS DEBATED**

**Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:

- "1. Reaffirming its conclusions regarding the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia adopted in December 2014 and in April 2015, the EU commitment under the Thessaloniki agenda and the candidate status of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Council reiterates its grave concern at the situation in the country, in particular the ongoing political crisis.
2. The Council notes positively the efforts by local party leaders in recent meetings to seek and reach solutions and in this context welcomes the facilitation by Commissioner Hahn as well as by Members of the European Parliament.
3. The Council notes, as a significant first step in addressing the political crisis, the agreement facilitated in Skopje on 2 June 2015. This agreement sets out commitments by the leaders of the main political parties to address serious rule of law concerns and to remain committed to the country's EU accession process and democratic principles, including by maintaining good inter-ethnic relations through the full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and by strengthening good neighbourly relations. The Council considers the 2 June agreement the basis for future discussions. The Council urges the political parties - in the interest of the citizens and the country - to assume their respective responsibilities and take immediate measures towards a sustainable solution, constructively engage in political dialogue and continue efforts to restore trust in the institutions.
4. The Council calls upon all parties to honour their 2 June agreement and implement all recommendations of the Commission, starting with the urgent reform priorities, in relation to systemic rule of law issues confirmed by or arising out of the current crisis, including in relation to breaches of fundamental rights, judicial freedom, media freedom, elections, corruption, politicisation of state institutions and state/party blurring and failures of oversight. The implementation of these recommendations will be closely monitored by the Commission. Electoral reform in line with recommendations by OSCE/ODIHR is urgently required and will, in conjunction with initial systemic reforms, contribute to ensuring a level playing field ahead of future elections, the free and fair conduct of which will be an important indicator of reforms in this regard. It is, moreover, necessary to ensure as soon as possible a thorough and independent investigation of the material revealed and any criminal wrongdoing, with full regard for due process, the principle of the independence of the judiciary and the presumption of innocence.

5. The Council looks forward to the session of the Stabilisation and Association Council in July where it will expect detailed reporting on concrete actions undertaken and foreseen in the next months.
  
6. Stressing the need for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to make swift and tangible progress towards fulfilling urgent reform priorities in the framework of the established conditionality and in line with its 16 December 2014 and taking into account its 21 April 2015 Conclusions, the Council reaffirms the continued EU engagement, including through regular reporting by the Commission and the EEAS on the situation in the country, *inter alia* urgent reform priorities, and on the country's commitment to the EU agenda, and to the enlargement process emanating from its candidate status. The Council remains seized of this issue and will revert to it in the next months."

## Preparation for the June European Council

The Council examined revised draft conclusions for the European Council meeting to be held on 25-26 June.

The European Council will focus on:

- **Migration:** leaders are expected to focus on relocation, resettlement and return policy. They should also look forward to the Valletta Conference with countries of origin and transit in Africa.
- **Security challenges:** this will include discussions on EU internal security, such as counter-terrorism, the EU's strategy on foreign and security policy, as well as capabilities and Europe's defence industry.
- **Economy:** the European Council will conclude the 2015 European Semester and welcome the agreement reached on the European Fund for Strategic Investments. The heads of state or government will further discuss and provide orientations on the digital single market and the 4 Presidents report on better economic governance in the euro area.

## **European Semester**

As part of the European Semester, the Council approved draft country's specific recommendations (CSR's) and transmitted them to the European Council for endorsement. The draft CSR's have also been discussed in EPSCO and ECOFIN.

The European Semester involves simultaneous monitoring of the member states' fiscal, economic and employment policies during a six-month period every year. In the light of the guidance provided by the European Council, the member states will prepare their national reform programmes (economic and employment policies) and stability or convergence programmes (fiscal policies) for this year.

Council website: [European Semester](#)

**Better regulation agenda**

The Council exchanged views on the better regulation agenda proposed by the Commission on 19 May 2015.

Ministers took stock of work in the Council, particularly as regards the interinstitutional agreement to be negotiated among the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission. Ministers also discussed the content of the wider better regulation agenda from the particular perspective of business and citizens. One of the main aims of the better regulation agenda is to ensure that EU policies and laws achieve their objectives at minimum cost.

The objective of the incoming Luxembourg presidency is to conclude the negotiations on the interinstitutional agreement by the end of 2015.

Commission First Vice-President Frans Timmermans informed ministers that the Commission will present its annual work programme for 2016 in October 2015.

The incoming Luxembourg presidency informed the Council about its intention to invite ministers for European affairs at their informal meeting in July 2015 to discuss notably the handling of the Commission work programme for 2016. The General Affairs Council in September 2015 will be called upon to exchange views on the Commission's work programme for 2016 on the basis of a Commission's letter of intent.

The following presidency documents formed the basis of the discussions:

- [a presidency report outlining the state of play on the draft inter-institutional agreement on better law making](#)
- [a presidency note on the entire better regulation agenda](#)

The better regulation agenda consists of the two following key documents

- [a draft inter-institutional agreement](#)
- [a communication on "better regulation on better results"](#)

**Any other business**

– *Informal meeting of EU cohesion ministers*

The Council took note of the information provided by the presidency on the informal meeting of EU ministers responsible for cohesion policy and for territorial cohesion and urban matters which took place in Riga on 9-10 June 2015 ([9625/15](#)).

**OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

**GENERAL AFFAIRS**

**Reform of General Court\***

The Council adopted its first-reading position on a proposal to reform the General Court, aimed at enabling it to face an increasing workload and ensuring that legal redress in the EU is guaranteed within a reasonable time.

The General Court is one of three courts of the European Court of Justice, the other two being the Court of Justice itself and the Civil Service Tribunal. The General Court is the court of first and last resort for the majority of decisions taken by the Commission and other EU organs, in all areas where the European Union holds competences.

The UK delegation voted against and the Belgian and Netherlands delegations abstained ([10043/1/15 REV 1 ADD 1](#)).

For details, see [press release](#).

**European citizens' initiative**

The Council took note of a presidency summary of the comments made within the Council's working party on general affairs on a Commission report on the application of the European citizens' initiative ([9832/15](#)).

**INSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**

**Committee of the Regions: new members from Poland for the next five years**

The Council appointed [new members of the Committee of the Regions from Poland](#) for the period from 26 January 2015 to 25 January 2020.

The Council had previously adopted two decisions for the renewal of the Committee of the Regions:

- on 26 January 2015: [Appointment of new members for the next five years](#), and
- on 5 February 2015 ([List of new members from Germany and the UK](#)).

The term of office of the Committee of the Regions expired on 25 January 2015 and the governments of the member states had to communicate their candidates before that date. However, not all member states had sent a complete list of candidates before the closing date.

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for technical assistance**

The Council adopted a decision mobilising an amount of €0.6 million out of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF). The objective of the technical assistance is to finance activities related to monitoring, information exchange, creation of a knowledge base, administrative and technical support, networking and conducting an evaluation of the EGF.

The EGF helps workers find new jobs and develop new skills when they have lost their jobs as a result of changing global trade patterns, e.g. when a large company shuts down or a factory is moved to outside the EU. Support from the EGF consists in financing measures such as job-search assistance, career advice, tailor-made training and re-training, mentoring and promoting entrepreneurship. It also provides one-off, time-limited individual support, such as job-search allowances, mobility allowances and allowances for participating in lifelong learning and training activities.

**COHESION POLICY**

**Implementation challenges of the cohesion policy 2014-2020**

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the implementation challenges of the cohesion policy 2014-2020 ([9622/1/15 REV 1](#)):

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- (1) RECALLING that the mission of Cohesion policy is set out in the Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).
- (2) RECALLING the Council conclusions on the Sixth Report on Economic, social and territorial cohesion.
- (3) RECALLING the Investment Plan for Europe launched by the European Commission and the role that Cohesion policy plays in supporting long-term investment to enhance growth and jobs and in improving the investment environment<sup>1</sup>.
- (4) RECALLING the ECOFIN Council conclusions on the Annual Growth Survey and the Alert Mechanism Report.<sup>2</sup>

**Implementation of Cohesion policy reform**

- (5) REITERATES the relevance of the main elements of the Cohesion policy reform agreed for the 2014-2020 programming period, aligning investments with the priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy, the European Semester and in particular the strong focus on increased effectiveness and results orientation.
- (6) UNDERLINES the importance of fully exploiting the potential of this reform to reinforce Cohesion policy as the main EU investment policy promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion in all EU regions while concentrating interventions in the less developed regions and contributing to other European objectives.
- (7) WELCOMES the fact that ERDF and ESF thematic concentration has been achieved and, in a number of cases, exceeded the requirements of the legislative framework and that Europe 2020 strategy priorities have been clearly addressed in programming documents.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2014) 903.

<sup>2</sup> 5957/1/15 REV 1.

- (8) RECOGNISES the importance of the established measures linked to sound economic governance and their implementation in practice. UNDERLINES that, by addressing relevant country specific recommendations arising from the European Semester, Cohesion policy investments have an important role to play in supporting structural reforms which encourage favourable framework conditions for ESI Funds interventions and improve the overall investment environment in Member States and regions.
- (9) RECOGNISES the important role of ex ante conditionalities in reinforcing the effectiveness of investment and the potential positive spill over effects to Member State's administrations. TAKES NOTE that, overall, ex ante conditionalities have been fulfilled in a majority of programmes and Member States. Nonetheless, NOTES that there are variations in the degree of fulfilment across Member States.
- (10) CALLS on Member States to strive for an effective and rapid implementation of their action plans related to ex-ante conditionalities, along the lines defined in the regulation, and to ensure that programme implementation starts as soon as possible and the reformed policy is effectively delivered on the ground. STRESSES the need for the Commission to work closely with Member States in the process of monitoring ex-ante conditionalities and their fulfilment progress. CALLS on the Commission and Member States to finalise the adoption of the remaining operational programmes.
- (11) WELCOMES the fact that the intervention logic in programmes has generally gained in clarity and that a clear definition of changes to be achieved through the investments of ESI Funds has been provided in programmes.
- (12) WELCOMES the integrated approach to territorial development and use of integrated territorial investments and community-led local development in order to achieve better results in addressing complex territorial challenges.
- (13) INVITES Member States to use to the full potential of the recent increase of the pre-financing for the Youth employment initiative in 2015 to speed-up the implementation.

**Financial instruments**

- (14) RECOGNISES the potential effectiveness of using financial instruments to increase the impact and leverage of ESI Funds, underpinned by an ex-ante assessment as well as by specific objectives defined in operational programmes, and additional to and coordinated with already existing regional, national and EU level financial instruments, both public and private. RECALLS nevertheless that grants within cohesion policy are an effective form of support for many types of projects and programmes on their own and in combination with financial instruments.

- (15) WELCOMES that, based on current estimates and plans, the overall use of financial instruments is expected to nearly double compared to the 2007-2013 programming period and INVITES Member States to continue exploring how to further enhance and widen the sustainable use of financial instruments, while taking into account different situations and contexts in the Member States and regions. TAKES NOTE of different implementation modalities, such as tailor made instruments, off-the-shelf instruments and SME Initiative.
- (16) CALLS on the Commission to provide guidance on the use of financial instruments and on the synergies between different instruments in a timely, coherent, consistent and clear manner and to explore all opportunities to provide more clarity, in no case going beyond the scope of the legal provisions agreed by the co-legislators by creating additional obligations.
- (17) HIGHLIGHTS that stable, consistent and clear rules throughout the whole implementation period are a pre-requisite to attract private investors.
- (18) INVITES the Commission to further explore possible synergies and complementarities between ESI Funds and the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) and provide guidance on combining the use of ESI Funds with EFSI to ensure smooth and efficient coordination between these instruments
- (19) RECOGNISES the importance of practical know-how and past experiences in successfully setting up and managing financial instruments. INVITES the Commission to continue analysing the implementation bottlenecks and to provide practical solutions in overcoming these bottlenecks, in particular for tailor made financial instruments.
- (20) WELCOMES the creation of the new "fi-compass" platform and INVITES the Commission to ensure that it is developed as a demand-driven advisory platform which delivers on practical issues related to the design and implementation of financial instruments in a timely manner.

**Administrative capacity and Simplification**

- (21) ACKNOWLEDGES that good governance and administrative capacity are among the main preconditions to achieve the objectives of Cohesion policy, that the primary responsibility in improving administrative capacity lies with the Member States and their regions, and that, at the same time, the Commission has an important supportive role to play. RECOGNISES the importance of addressing weaknesses in administrative capacity, including in the fields of public procurement and state aid.

- (22) CALLS on Member States to improve their administrative capacity in managing the ESI Funds while respecting the principle of proportionality and to foster the exchange of good practices within and between them. CALLS on the Commission to continue facilitating and fostering the exchange of good practices among Member States and to continue innovating in the way in which it can help Member States improving their administrative capacity in managing ESI Funds. WELCOMES the opportunities offered by the new TAIEX REGIO PEER 2 PEER exchange mechanism.
- (23) CALLS on the Commission to strengthen coordination within the Commission services and to reinforce its capacity to ensure timely, coordinated, clear and stable interpretation of rules and Commission decisions. Close cooperation between the Commission and Member States is crucial in order to ensure a common and consistent understanding of rules throughout the whole implementation period, in particular concerning specific arrangements agreed during recently finalized negotiations of programming documents
- (24) CALLS on the Commission and JASPERS to ensure sufficient capacity to support Member States in addressing horizontal issues and project preparation to ensure quality policy implementation.
- (25) INVITES the Commission to explore the possibilities for further simplification and proportionality, taking into account the findings in the Sixth Cohesion report on varying governance capacities. CONSIDERS that the Better regulation initiative should encompass Cohesion policy, including simplification.
- (26) WELCOMES the set-up by the Commission of the high level group monitoring simplification for beneficiaries. ASKS that the Council as of 2016 is informed regularly on the work of the group and that Member States are involved and ENCOURAGES relevant findings to be discussed with Member States and applied to the current programming period where it provides an immediate added value without undermining the stability of the general rules. RECALLS that achieving simplification of Cohesion policy is a shared objective and responsibility of the Commission, Member States, and other stakeholders. Respecting the principle of shared management of ESI Funds, all actors at EU and national level are invited to make use of the simplification measures provided for in the legal framework, to identify and remove processes and procedures which constitute excess administrative burden and cost, or can be simplified without undermining the overall assurance and effectiveness of the management and control system. RECOGNISES that auditors at EU and national level, including Court of Auditors, are well positioned to contribute to the simplification effort by detecting redundant processes and procedures and suggesting more effective solutions based on good practices.

- (27) INVITES the Commission and Member States to make efforts and where necessary allocate sufficient resources for preventive actions increasing legal certainty in order to minimise the risk of errors and avoid retroactivity, as well as to identify problems in the early stages of implementation via the designation procedure, system audits and early-warning mechanisms. CALLS on the Commission to provide timely guidance and coordinated methodological support to Member States, including national auditors, and to share recurrent and horizontal audit results with the audit community and programme authorities.
- (28) INVITES the Commission to report on the uptake of financial instruments and the contribution of ESI Funds to the implementation of the relevant country-specific recommendations, as well as on the contribution of ex ante conditionalities to creating a better investment environment and removing long-term bottlenecks for growth, and on the reduction in administrative burden. INVITES the Commission to include these findings in the report on the outcome of the negotiations concerning the Partnership Agreements and the programmes foreseen under article 16 of the Common provisions regulation<sup>1</sup>. INVITES Member States to provide information with respect to financial instruments funded by ESI Funds on performed ex-ante assessments and, if available, on signed funding agreements, in order to enable the Commission to produce this report.
- (29) RECOMMENDS that a regular debate in the General Affairs Council takes place among relevant ministers to discuss on the implementation and results of the ESI Funds, contributing in a meaningful and substantial way to ensure effective implementation and result orientation of cohesion policy."

## **ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS**

### **Capital requirements**

The Council decided not to object to the adoption by the Commission of regulations supplementing the regulation 575/2013 on capital requirements with regard to:

- regulatory technical standards for the disclosure of information in relation to the compliance of institutions with the countercyclical capital buffer requirement;
- regulatory technical standards for the transitional treatment of equity exposures under the Internal Ratings-Based approach.

The regulations are delegated acts pursuant to article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. They can now enter into force, unless the European Parliament objects.

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.

**JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS**

**EU-Mexico PNR Agreement**

The Council adopted a decision authorising the opening of negotiations for an agreement between the EU and Mexico for the transfer and use of Passenger Name Record (PNR) data to prevent and combat terrorism and other serious transnational crime.

**Charter of Fundamental Rights - Application in 2014**

The Council adopted the following conclusions on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in 2014 ([9319/15](#)):

**"I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The Council welcomes the 2014 Commission report on the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (further referred to as the Charter)<sup>1</sup> which identifies how the European Union and its Member States gave effect to the Charter in 2014.
2. The Council also welcomes the 2014 annual report of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (further referred to as the Agency),<sup>2</sup> highlighting fundamental rights challenges and achievements from the perspective of the Agency in 2014. The Council reiterates that the data collected by the Agency on specific thematic topics and its opinions given in accordance with its mandate remain an important tool for the EU institutions and its Member States in matters of implementation of EU law.

**II. RESPECTING AND PROMOTING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF THE CHARTER**

**a) Awareness of the Charter**

3. Marking that five years have passed since the Charter became legally binding, the Council notes its steady gain of legal importance as evidenced by increasing case law both at national and EU level. The Council highlights the relevance of the Charter, its rigorous application and implementation at EU and national level and underlines the continued need to regularly and systematically analyse the application of the Charter as the basic legal instrument for fundamental rights in the EU. The Council renews its commitment to annual debates following each Commission report on the application of the Charter.

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<sup>1</sup> 8707/15 + ADD 1

<sup>2</sup> 8988/15

4. The Council recognises that fundamental rights have to be considered constantly and comprehensively throughout decision-making and legislative procedures. The Council recalls that in 2014 it updated its guidelines<sup>1</sup> on methodological steps to be taken to check fundamental rights compatibility at the Council preparatory bodies, organised training activities to promote the use of these guidelines and emphasises that this will be accompanied by further training and awareness-raising activities in order to enhance the protection of fundamental rights at all levels of Council work. In this context the Council welcomes the recently adopted Better Regulation Guidelines,<sup>2</sup> Better Regulation for Better Results - An EU Agenda<sup>3</sup> and the proposal for an Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Regulation.<sup>4</sup>
  5. The Council underlines the essential role of the Agency in raising awareness of the Charter rights, its scope and about where to turn to concerning fundamental rights issues. Practical toolkits such as the Charterpedia application and the CLARITY project are to be welcomed and further developed.
  6. The Council recalls the international conference organised by the Latvian Presidency on 28-29 April 2015 in Riga on the role of the Charter in the legislative process of the EU and its application in the European Union's case law with a special focus on the impact of the Charter on the area of freedom, security and justice. In that context the Council notes that it is necessary to continue promoting training and best practice sharing with regard to the application of the Charter at national and EU level.
  7. The Council welcomes Commission plans to launch annual colloquiums on the state of play of fundamental rights in the Union, including the first edition of this initiative in October 2015 on tolerance and respect: preventing and combating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred.
  8. Having regards to the obligation to respect fundamental rights under the Charter the Council welcomes the Commission announcement to take steps to increase awareness of the Charter among the Member States when managing European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI funds).
- b) Security**
9. The Council notes the European Agenda on Security put forward by the Commission<sup>5</sup> and welcomes that the first of the five key principles is the need to ensure full compliance with fundamental rights.

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<sup>1</sup> 5377/15

<sup>2</sup> 9079/15 ADD 2

<sup>3</sup> 9079/15

<sup>4</sup> 9121/15

<sup>5</sup> See Commission Communication (2015) 185 final, The European Agenda on security, at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/documents/basic-documents/docs/eu\\_agenda\\_on\\_security\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/documents/basic-documents/docs/eu_agenda_on_security_en.pdf)

10. Security and respect for fundamental rights are consistent and complementary policy objectives. Taking into account growing threats from terrorism, serious and organized cross-border crime, including cybercrime, security plays an important role in ensuring that every individual can enjoy fundamental rights. Member States and the EU need to work together to ensure that all security measures comply with the principles of necessity, proportionality and legality, with appropriate safeguards to ensure accountability and judicial redress. Proportionate and legitimate responses also foster peaceful, inclusive and diverse societies and integrate respect for fundamental rights into planning and implementing counter-terrorism and other law enforcement actions from the outset.

**c) Racism and xenophobia**

11. The Council expresses concerns at the growing incidence of racist and xenophobic acts throughout the EU and deplores them.
12. The Council recalls that promoting inclusive tolerance, integration and shared values combined with raising awareness of fundamental rights of all, are important guarantees against the rise of racism and xenophobia in our diverse societies.
13. The Council invites Member States to fully implement the Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on **combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia** by means of criminal law.

**d) Asylum and migration**

14. The Council takes note of the European Agenda on Migration<sup>1</sup> and welcomes the emphasis on the importance of complying with fundamental rights in the EU asylum and migration policy at all stages, starting with the arrival of migrants and asylum seekers in the EU, through to migrant and refugee integration, and the return of those with no right to remain.
15. In that context, the Council invites the Member States to strictly enforce the immigration and asylum *acquis*, including the respect for the procedures and standards that allow Europe to ensure a humane and dignified treatment and a proportionate use of coercive measures, in line with fundamental rights and the principle of non-refoulement, and to reinforce the protection of the fundamental rights of asylum-seekers, paying particular attention to the needs of vulnerable groups, such as children. In this context appropriate cooperation measures for the benefit of Member States facing significant migratory pressure could improve the respect of the fundamental rights of migrants and asylum seekers.

**e) Digital single market**

16. The Council shares the concerns of the Commission about the effective protection of fundamental rights in the digital environment.
17. The protection of personal data, as guaranteed by Article 8 of the Charter is of key importance and should be enhanced with the adoption of the data protection reform package that is being negotiated.
18. The Council also notes with interest the adoption of the Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe by the Commission on 6 May 2015.<sup>2</sup>

**f) Consistency between internal and external policies**

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2015) 240 final, 8961/15.

<sup>2</sup> COM (2015) 192 final, 8672/15

19. The Council recalls its conclusions of 5 and 6 June 2014, in particular on the consistency between internal and external aspects of human rights' protection and promotion in the European Union and welcomes cooperation in particular through information exchange between FREMP and COHOM working parties of the Council.<sup>1</sup>

**g) Victims Directive**

20. The Council recalls that the deadline for transposition of the Victims Directive (2012/29/EU) is 15 November 2015 and encourages all Member States to have the legislative and policy measures in place to ensure the full implementation of that Directive.

**h) Rights of the Child**

21. The Council welcomes research projects on the subject of children's rights undertaken by the Agency<sup>2</sup> and recalls its conclusions of 4-5 December 2014 on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.<sup>3</sup> As follow-up to these conclusions, on 8 June 2015 the FREMP and COHOM working parties of the Council held a debate on child protection systems as follow-up to the 9th European Forum on the Rights of the Child which took place in Brussels on 3-4 June 2015.

**III. EU ACCESSION TO ECHR**

22. The Council agrees with the Commission that accession to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) remains of paramount importance and will strengthen fundamental values, improve the effectiveness of EU law and enhance the coherence of fundamental rights protection in Europe.
23. The Council reaffirms its strong commitment to the accession to the ECHR as required by the Treaties and invites the Commission as the EU negotiator to bring forward its analysis on the ways to address Opinion 2/13 of the Court of Justice of the European Union."

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent joint meeting took place on 8 June 2015 on integrated child protection systems and on combating racism and xenophobia.

<sup>2</sup> For example child-friendly justice:  
[http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2015-child-friendly-justice-professionals\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2015-child-friendly-justice-professionals_en.pdf)  
guardianship for child victims of trafficking  
<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/guardianship-children-deprived-parental-care-handbook-reinforce-guardianship>

<sup>3</sup> 17016/14

**EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA**

**Amendment to protocol 31 of the EEA agreement**

The Council adopted a decision on the position to be adopted, on behalf of the EU, in the EEA joint committee concerning an amendment to protocol 31 of the EEA agreement.

This amendment enables the continuation of the cooperation in actions concerning "Operation and development of the internal market, particularly in the fields of notification, certification and sectoral approximation" and "Implementation and development of the internal market" ([9413/15](#)).

**CUSTOMS UNION**

**Tariffs and quotas on certain products**

The Council adopted a regulation amending regulation 1388/2013 opening and providing for the management of autonomous tariff quotas of the EU for certain agricultural and industrial products ([9356/15](#)).

The regulation aims to ensure that adequate and uninterrupted supplies of products which are not produced in sufficient quantity in the EU can be imported at reduced or zero duty rates of the Common Customs Tariff duty for appropriate volumes, without disturbing the markets for such products.

The Council also adopted a regulation amending regulation 1387/2013 suspending the autonomous Common Customs Tariff duties on certain agricultural, fishery and industrial products ([9358/15](#)).

**TRANSPARENCY**

**Public access to documents**

On 23 June 2015, the Council approved:

- the reply to confirmatory application No 09/c/01/15 ([8981/15](#)).

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