



European Council

**Brussels, 16 December 2021
(OR. en)**

EUCO 22/21

**CO EUR 19
CONCL 6**

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: European Council meeting (16 December 2021)
– Conclusions

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

I. **COVID-19**

Vaccination

1. The European Council addressed the worsening epidemiological situation in the EU and the impact of the emergence of Omicron, a new variant of concern. It reiterates the vital importance of vaccination in the fight against the pandemic. Rolling out vaccination to all and deploying booster doses are crucial and urgent. In that context, overcoming vaccine hesitancy, including by addressing disinformation, remains key. In addition to vaccination, the implementation of the EU strategy on COVID-19 therapeutics, including joint procurement, should be taken forward.

Coordination

2. Continued coordinated efforts are needed to respond to developments based on the best available scientific evidence, whilst ensuring that any restrictions are based on objective criteria and do not undermine the functioning of the Single Market or disproportionately hamper free movement between Member States or travel into the EU. The European Council calls for the speedy adoption of the revised Council recommendation on safe free movement and of the revised Council recommendation on non-essential travel into the EU. The European Council stresses the importance of a coordinated approach on the validity of the EU Digital COVID vaccination certificate and takes note of the fact that the Commission will adopt a delegated act on this issue.

International cooperation

3. The European Council underlines that the pandemic will only be overcome through global cooperation based on trust and mutual assistance. In this context, it commends Botswana and South Africa for their vigilance and transparency in detecting, sequencing and reporting the most recent Omicron variant of concern so rapidly, and stresses the importance of scaling up global genomic sequencing capacity.

4. The EU is committed to playing its role in achieving global vaccination. The EU is the biggest donor and exporter in the world. We will continue to export and share vaccine doses and ancillary materials, and step up our support for the countries most in need, in particular in Africa, both by continuing to provide support to COVAX and on a bilateral basis, in cooperation with partners.
5. In order to address bottlenecks in vaccine sharing and administration, and to rapidly remove the obstacles hampering the global roll-out of vaccines, the European Council calls on the Commission to further enhance support to Member States and third countries, to further engage with manufacturers, and to strengthen coordination with the World Health Organization, COVAX and other partners. The European Council invites the Council to monitor closely the fulfilment of vaccine pledges in all transparency and will revert to the matter as appropriate.
6. The European Council welcomes the agreement reached by the World Health Assembly on 1 December 2021 to start a global process to draft and negotiate a convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, with a view to its adoption under Article 19, or under other provisions of the Constitution of the World Health Organization as may be deemed appropriate by the intergovernmental negotiating body.

II. CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND RESILIENCE

7. The European Council took stock of work to enhance our collective preparedness, response capability and resilience to future crises, which is a major cross-cutting political priority for the Union.

8. It welcomes the Council conclusions of 23 November 2021 and calls for:
 - strengthening the EU’s crisis response and preparedness in an all-hazards approach;
 - building and monitoring resilience and addressing areas where we are exposed.
9. The European Council invites the Council to take work forward and review progress regularly.

III. SECURITY AND DEFENCE

10. The EU is committed to the global rules-based international order, with the United Nations at its core, and to strengthening cooperation with partners throughout the world in order to address common threats and challenges together.
11. In the face of increased global instability, growing strategic competition and complex security threats, the EU will take more responsibility for its own security and in the field of defence, pursue a strategic course of action and increase its capacity to act autonomously. The EU will promote its interests and values, reinforce its resilience and preparedness to tackle security threats and challenges effectively, and continue to work towards global peace and security.
12. The European Council invites the Council to take forward work on an ambitious and actionable Strategic Compass, based on the first draft presented by the High Representative in November 2021, which sets out a common strategic vision over the next decade and makes best use of the entire EU toolbox, including civilian and military policies, tools and instruments. Within this framework, the European Council looks forward to the presentation of the technology roadmap requested in February 2021 and invites the Commission and the High Representative to make any further proposals necessary, including on space security, cyber and the fight against hybrid threats.

13. The EU is committed to cooperating closely with NATO, in full respect of the principles set out in the Treaties and those agreed by the European Council, including the principles of inclusiveness, reciprocity and decision-making autonomy of the EU. The transatlantic relationship and EU-NATO cooperation are key to our overall security. A stronger and more capable EU in the field of security and defence will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains, for those States that are members of it, the foundation of their collective defence. The European Council supports the strengthening of the EU-NATO strategic partnership and looks forward to the third joint declaration on EU-NATO cooperation. It should be prepared in an inclusive manner, address new threats and challenges and include, as areas for enhanced cooperation, resilience, cyber and hybrid threats, climate change and security, space, and emerging and disruptive technologies.
14. The European Council will revert to security and defence at its meeting in March 2022, when it will be invited to endorse the Strategic Compass.

IV. EXTERNAL ASPECTS OF MIGRATION

15. The European Council assessed the implementation of its conclusions of 24-25 June 2021 and of 21-22 October 2021. It recalls the importance of addressing all migratory routes, in a whole-of-route and comprehensive approach.
16. The European Council calls on the Commission and the High Representative, together with Member States, to ensure that the recent action plans for countries of origin and transit are made operational and implemented without further delay, in cooperation with partner countries. In this regard, it urges the Commission to make sure that adequate financing is clearly identified and mobilised without delay for migration-related actions on all routes, in line with the EU's increased ambition.

17. The European Council recognises the importance of a more unified EU returns policy and calls on the Commission and the High Representative, together with Member States, to swiftly take action to ensure effective returns from the EU to countries of origin by using as leverage all relevant EU policies, instruments and tools, including development, trade and visas, to ensure the full implementation of existing readmission agreements and arrangements, as well as to conclude new ones, and report to the Council.
18. The European Council reiterates its condemnation of attempts by third countries to instrumentalise migrants for political purposes. It underlines the need to develop tools to address the instrumentalisation of migration. It calls for swift work on the proposal on measures against transport operators that facilitate or engage in trafficking in persons or smuggling of migrants in relation to illegal entry into the territory of the European Union.
19. The European Council invites the Council and the Commission to consider ways to strengthen cooperation arrangements to support Member States facing specific challenges at the EU's external borders, including as regards border guards as well as aerial surveillance.
20. The European Council invites the Council, under the direction of its Presidency, to monitor closely the swift and effective implementation of the EU's external migration policy, and to give further impetus as necessary. The European Council will revert to the matter.

V. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Belarus

21. The European Council strongly condemns the instrumentalisation of migrants and refugees by the Belarusian regime and the humanitarian crisis it has created. The EU will continue to counter the hybrid attack launched by Belarus with a determined response, addressing all dimensions of the crisis in line with EU law and international obligations, including fundamental rights. The European Council underlines in particular the importance of:
- effectively protecting the EU’s external borders, including by strengthening the EU’s legal framework. In this respect it calls on the Council to examine the Commission proposal on provisional emergency measures;
 - combatting smuggling and trafficking;
 - promptly implementing restrictive measures, following the adoption of the fifth package of listings, and being prepared to adopt further measures as necessary;
 - ensuring unhindered access for international organisations in Belarus and stepping up humanitarian support;
 - supporting the return of migrants from Belarus.
22. The European Council reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and for an end to the repression of civil society and independent media. It reiterates the democratic right of the Belarusian people to elect their president through new, free and fair elections.

Ukraine

23. The European Council stresses the urgent need for Russia to de-escalate tensions caused by the military build-up along its border with Ukraine and aggressive rhetoric. The European Council reiterates its full support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Any further military aggression against Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe cost in response, including restrictive measures coordinated with partners.
24. The European Council encourages diplomatic efforts and supports the Normandy format in achieving the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

Southern Neighbourhood

25. The European Council reaffirms its determination to renew and reinforce the EU's partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood with a view to tackling common challenges and taking advantage of shared opportunities through strengthened cooperation. To that end, it invites the Council and the Commission to accelerate work on the new Agenda for the Mediterranean.

European Union - African Union Summit

26. The European Council discussed the preparations for the European Union - African Union Summit on 17-18 February 2022 and the possible themes and deliverables. It aims to establish an ambitious future-oriented Alliance with Africa which can build an area of prosperity and stability underpinned by a transformational investment package.

Ethiopia

27. The European Council continues to follow closely the situation in Ethiopia and fully supports the mediation efforts of African Union High Representative Obasanjo. The EU calls for an unconditional ceasefire and urges all parties to engage in an inclusive and transparent national dialogue. Ensuring the protection of civilians and providing unhindered humanitarian access remain key priorities.
-