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## Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC 21–22 January 2018, Sofia

### Background Information

#### Session 2 - The future of the European Union – Strength in Unity

At the Rome Summit on 1 March 2017 the Commission presented a **White paper**, setting out a broader vision for the future of the EU and the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The White Paper outlines the main demographic, economic and political challenges the EU will be facing in the future and presents five scenarios of the potential state of the Union in 2025: *Scenario 1: **Carrying On***; *Scenario 2: **Nothing but the Single Market***; *Scenario 3: **Those Who Want More, Do More***; *Scenario 4: **Doing Less, More Efficiently***; *Scenario 5: **Doing Much More Together***.

The White Paper aims to open an honest debate on how the Union should evolve in the years to come. To facilitate this process, the European Commission is hosting a series of 'Future of Europe Debates' across Europe's cities and regions. The aim of the established process is to allow a collective view on a course of action to be reached in time for the European Parliament elections in June 2019.

**The White Paper has been supplemented by five reflection papers on specific issues that are important for the future of the European Union with 27 Member States — the social dimension of Europe**, harnessing globalisation, the deepening of the economic and monetary union, the future of European defence and the future of EU finances.

In his annual speech on the State of the European Union 2017, the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker came out with a **“scenario six”** on the future of the EU. His speech stressed the **three founding principles of the EU – freedom, equality, and the rule of law** leading to “a more united, stronger and more democratic Union”.

According to Juncker’s speech, it is in the interest of the Union's security and the protection of the external borders that the Schengen Area needs to be opened to Bulgaria and Romania immediately. Amongst a number of ideas, Juncker underlined the need for a European Pillar of Social Rights; a European Minister of Economy and Finance; a Euro-accession Instrument; a European Defence Union; a Subsidiarity and



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Proportionality Task Force; presentation on guidance on dual quality of products which help national consumer authorities make better use of existing EU consumer law to identify and address unjustified differences. He also proposed using more qualified majority voting, merging the positions of the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council, and maintaining the enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans.

As it has been stated in the Rome Declaration, it is essential for Europe to **embrace technological change** in order to ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for our citizens. Additionally, while addressing the challenges of a rapidly changing world, Europe must offer its citizens both protection and new opportunities.

**The Tallinn Digital Summit, held on the 29 September 2017**, was a platform that launched high-level discussions on further plans for digital innovation with the aim of keeping Europe ahead of the technological curve while becoming a digital leader, globally, in the years to come. The summit discussions considered a longer timeframe (up to 2025) and focused on the essential topics of building a digital future for Europe: trust, security, e-government, industry, society and economy.

**On 20 October 2017, the European Council endorsed the Leaders' Agenda drafted by President Tusk.** The aim of this concrete work programme is to guide EU action over the next two years. The ambition of the Leaders' Agenda is to deal with the most contentious, politically sensitive issues including the Eurozone reform, migration crisis, internal security, trade, the future financing of the EU, the institutional issues related to the legal framework for the next European Parliament elections, the Digital Agenda legislative proposals. The new method aims at speeding up work and breaking deadlocks to key political dossiers in the Council of Ministers. The latter will be prepared with "decision notes" setting out in clear terms the political problems to be solved.

At the same time, President Tusk has supported the initiative of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of EU for a meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the EU Member States and the countries of the Western Balkans, which is to be held in Sofia on 17 May 2018. According to the timeline, the informal summit in Sofia will be preceded by the European Commission's Enlargement Strategy set in February 2018 and the progress reports in April 2018.



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On the **14 November 2017** the European Commission's President Jean-Claude Juncker has officially established the '**Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing Less More Efficiently"**'. The Task Force will report to the President by 15 July 2018, making recommendations on how to better apply the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, identifying policy areas where work could be re-delegated or definitely returned to Member States, as well as ways to better involve regional and local authorities in EU policy making and delivery. The work of the Task Force will contribute to the further evolution of the European Union in the context of the Commission's Roadmap for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union. The Task Force is expected to start work by the end of January 2018. It will be chaired by Frans Timmermans, the Commission's First Vice-President in charge of Better Regulation, Interinstitutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Task Force will be composed of nine additional members, with three members from national Parliaments, three from the European Parliament and three from the Committee of the Regions. During the COSAC plenary meeting held in Tallinn from 26 to 28 November 2017, the members of the national Parliaments had a lively debate on the matter at hand and ultimately decided for the national Parliaments in the Presidential Troika (Estonian *Riigikogu*, Bulgarian National Assembly and Austrian Parliament) to participate in the Task Force. COSAC also invited the Bulgarian Presidency to set up a working group under point 2.6 of the Rules of Procedure of COSAC in order to facilitate regular and comprehensive discussions related to the work of the Task Force. The working group will be officially launched during the COSAC Chairpersons meeting in Sofia, from 21 until 22 of January 2018.

**A European Pillar of Social Rights was proclaimed and signed by the Council of the EU, the European Parliament and the Commission during the Gothenburg Social Summit for fair jobs and growth on 17 November 2017.** The Social Pillar is intended to drive forward a social Europe for all European citizens. It aims to strengthen the social *acquis* and deliver more effective rights to citizens. It focuses on employment and social aspects and ensuring that the European social model is fit for the challenges of the 21st century. The objective of the Pillar is to contribute to social progress by supporting fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. It sets out 20 principles and rights, divided into three categories: equal opportunities and access to labour market; fair working conditions; social protection and inclusion.

Building on the vision set out in the Five Presidents' Report of June 2015 and the Reflection Papers on the Deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union and the Future of EU Finances from the spring of 2017, **on the 6 December 2017 the European Commission set out a Roadmap for deepening the Economic and**



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**Monetary Union**, including concrete steps to be taken over the next 18 months. The overall aim is to enhance the **unity, efficiency** and **democratic accountability** of Europe's Economic and Monetary Union by 2025. In addition to the Roadmap, the package includes four main initiatives: a proposal to establish a **European Monetary Fund (EMF)**, anchored within the EU's legal framework and built on the well-established structure of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM); **a proposal to integrate the substance of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance into the Union legal framework**, taking into account the appropriate flexibility built into the Stability and Growth Pact; **a Communication on new budgetary instruments for a stable euro area within the Union framework** setting out a vision of how certain budgetary functions essential for the euro area and the EU as a whole can be developed within the framework of the EU's public finances of today and tomorrow; a Communication indicating out the possible functions of a **European Minister of Economy and Finance** who could serve as Vice-President of the Commission and Chair of the Eurogroup, as is possible under the current EU Treaties.

**On 11 December 2017, the Council adopted a decision establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).** The Permanent Structured Cooperation in the area of security and defence policy was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. It foresees the possibility of a number of EU member states working more closely together in the area of security and defence. This permanent framework for defence cooperation will allow willing and able member states to develop together defence capabilities, invest in shared projects, and enhance the operational readiness and contribution of their armed forces. At the current moment, 25 member states are participating in PESCO.

**The last European Council on December 2017** called for the adoption of the **European Defence Fund and EU Defence Industrial Development Programme in 2018**, in view of financing the first capability projects in 2019 and a Council recommendation on a new instrument for **capacity building in support of security and development** after 2020.

**The European Council also debated on the external and internal dimensions of the EU migration policy.** The discussion's goal was to pave the way towards an agreement on **the reform of the asylum system**. It was focused on preventing mass arrivals at the external borders; tackling root causes of migration and resolving internal deadlocks that hamper policy development. The efforts should be also on the implementation of targeted measures to prevent illegal migration and trafficking of human beings.

**The last meeting of the European Council (Article 50) on 15 December 2017, in an EU-27 format,** reviewed the latest developments in the negotiations following the



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United Kingdom's notification of its intention to leave the EU. Leaders reassessed the state of progress in the Brexit negotiations and confirmed substantive progress had been achieved on citizens' rights, Ireland and the financial obligations. This will allow the negotiations to move to the second phase related to the transition and elaboration of the framework for the future relationship between Europe and the UK. The leaders have adopted guidelines regarding the second phase.