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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Council

Subject: Future of Europe - Presidency note
- Exchange of views

Delegations will find attached a Presidency note in view of the exchange of views on the Future of Europe at the General Affairs Council of 19 March 2024.

Presidency note

Future of Europe

I. *State of Play*

The issue of the **Future of Europe** has increasingly been discussed at EU level in recent months. Discussions particularly focused on the **EU's internal reform process, that should ensure that the Union retains and strengthens its capacity to act, while dealing with the triple challenges of 1. shortcomings in its current functioning, 2. the impact of a rapidly changing world and 3. the prospect of future enlargement.** The basic objective is to give all current and future EU citizens the sustained perspective that the Union furthers and protects their prosperity and security.

Under the Swedish and Spanish Presidencies, the General Affairs Council initiated discussions on the different aspects of the EU's absorption capacity, i.e., **EU policies, EU budget and the EU's governance.** Ministers considered that discussions should focus on the EU policies likely to be most affected, in particular by enlargement, while asking the question what Union we want in the future, in particular what do we want to do together. Concerning budgetary issues, the upcoming Commission's proposals for the MFF 2028-2034 were considered very important. As regards the EU's governance (the EU's capacity to act and Institutions), there was a general agreement that the reflections should start by exploring all the flexibilities and possibilities offered by the current Treaty framework. In this context, the announced Commission Communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews, as well as any further contributions from the Commission during the process, were considered a very important input to this work.

In the Granada Declaration of 6 October 2023, EU leaders stated that, looking ahead to the prospects of a further enlarged Union, both the EU and future Member States need to be ready. They considered that, **in parallel to the reform efforts by aspiring members, the EU needs to lay the necessary internal groundwork and reforms.** They also agreed that the EU needs to set its long-term ambitions and the ways of achieving them and address key questions related to the EU's priorities and policies as well as the EU's capacity to act.

Moreover, at the European Council of 14-15 December 2023, EU leaders recalled the Granada Declaration and the need for work on accession and on internal reforms to advance in parallel, and stated that, as the Union enlarges, successful European integration requires that Union policies be fit for the future and financed in a sustainable manner, based on the values on which the Union is founded, and that the EU institutions continue to function effectively. **The European Council also underlined that it will address internal reforms at its upcoming meetings with a view to adopting by Summer 2024 conclusions on a roadmap for future work.**

II. *Way ahead*

In support to and preparation for the work of the European Council, the Presidency intends to pursue the discussions in the General Affairs Council. While working on those matters, the Presidency highlights the importance for internal reforms in view of ensuring that the EU is ready for enlargement and to make the EU stronger, through unity and solidarity, pursuant to the principle of sincere cooperation, and in respect of the subsidiarity principle.

Against this background, at the General Affairs Council of 19 March, the Presidency intends to **invite the Ministers to share their views on the reforms and improvements of the EU's working methods**, that are necessary to ensure that the EU is ready for enlargement and to make the EU stronger. The discussion is meant to focus on **policies**, including communication thereof. We will revert to governance and budget, and also to the process of further work in the Council, at later General Affairs Council meetings. The Presidency is also interested to hear Ministers' views on how the General Affairs Council could contribute to the work of the European Council on the Roadmap for the Future of Europe.

Ahead of the adoption of the Roadmap by the European Council on 27-28 June, the Presidency will present a Presidency Report, reflecting the state of play at the level of the General Affairs Council.

III. *Questions for ministers*

- Which policies should be addressed as a matter of priority as part of the internal reform process in response to the three challenges to the EU's capacity to act, being 1. ongoing shortcomings in its internal functioning, 2. its position in a changing world and 3. enlargement? Do you see significant shifts in priorities?
- How can public support for EU reforms be ensured and maintained? How to build an engaging narrative?
- How could the General Affairs Council contribute to the work of the European Council on the Roadmap for the Future of Europe? Where should the focus of our contribution lie? On policies, budget, governance and/or the process for further work on reforms?

