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## Information and Notices

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## I

*(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)*

## RESOLUTIONS

## COUNCIL

**Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)**

(2021/C 66/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

## RECALLING

- the endorsement by the March 2002 Barcelona European Council of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme ('ET 2010'), the establishment of a new cycle through the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('Education and Training 2020' – 'ET 2020') and the assessment made through the 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') – which together established and gave continuity to a solid framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training, based on common objectives, aiming primarily at supporting the improvement of national education and training systems by developing complementary EU-level tools, mutual learning and the exchange of good practices using the open method of coordination,
- the political background to this issue as set out in Annex I,

## and ACKNOWLEDGING

- that in the Rome Declaration of March 2017, the EU leaders pledged to work towards a Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent,
- that the EU leaders jointly proclaimed at the 2017 Gothenburg Social Summit the European Pillar of Social Rights, establishing the right to quality and inclusive education and training and lifelong learning for all as its first principle, the right to timely and tailor-made assistance to improve employment or self-employment prospects, which includes training and re-qualification, as its fourth principle, as well as children's right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality, and the right of children from disadvantaged backgrounds to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities as its eleventh principle,
- that education has been singled out in the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017 as key to building inclusive and cohesive societies and to sustaining European competitiveness, putting education and training at the heart of the European political agenda for the first time,
- the progress achieved under the ET 2010 work programme and ET 2020 framework, especially in support of national reforms, recognizing that substantial challenges still remain if Europe is to achieve the ambitions set in the aforementioned proclamations,

- that the Commission, together with Member States, set in motion actions to achieve this vision for the future of education and training through the establishment of a European Education Area <sup>(1)</sup>, from 2018 onwards, to which the Council replied through the adoption of the Council conclusions of 22 May 2018 on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area and the Council Resolution of 8 November 2019 on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems,
- the work developed under the Bologna process, reinforced through the Rome Ministerial Communiqué of November 2020, as well as under the Copenhagen process, also recently strengthened by the Osnabrück Declaration of November 2020,
- that the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021 stresses the importance of ensuring equal opportunities and inclusive education, paying special attention to disadvantaged groups and investing in reskilling and upskilling,

EMPHASISES that:

- Education and training have a vital role to play when it comes to shaping the future of Europe, at a time when it is imperative that its society and economy become more cohesive, inclusive, digital, sustainable, green and resilient, and for citizens to find personal fulfilment and well-being, to be prepared to adapt and perform on a changing labour market and to engage in active and responsible citizenship.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has put unprecedented pressure on the education and training sector and triggered a widespread shift to distance and blended teaching and learning. This shift has brought different challenges and opportunities for education and training systems and communities, unveiling the impact of the digital divide and connectivity gaps within Member States, as well as inequalities among wealth groups and urban-rural settings, while also highlighting the potential of education and training to build resilience and foster sustainable and inclusive growth.
- The European Education Area will allow learners to pursue their studies in different stages of life and to look for employment across the EU, and Member States and stakeholders to cooperate, so that high quality, innovative and inclusive education and training, supporting economic growth and high quality employment opportunities, as well as personal, social and cultural development, become the reality in all Member States and regions across the EU.
- Furthermore, the European Education Area will be an area where learners and educational staff can easily cooperate and communicate across disciplines, cultures and borders, and where qualifications and learning outcomes from periods of learning abroad are automatically recognised. <sup>(2)</sup>

RECOGNISES that:

- The previous strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) helped to promote mutual learning in education and training through common strategic objectives, common reference tools and approaches, evidence and data from all relevant European agencies and international organisations and the exchange of good practices and peer learning between EU Member States and other stakeholders and supported the implementation of national reforms in education and training.
- An updated strategic framework of European cooperation in education and training – while fully respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the diversity of Member States' national educational systems, as well as building on the achievements of previous frameworks – will improve this cooperation in areas such as enhanced coordination, including at political level, greater synergies between different policies which contribute to social and economic growth and green and digital transitions, and strengthened communication and dissemination of outputs, within a more innovative and future-oriented perspective of support for education and training reforms.

<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2017) 673 final.

<sup>(2)</sup> In line with the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1).

- The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated that education and training systems must be sufficiently flexible and resistant to interruptions in their regular cycles, and proved that EU countries have the capacity to find solutions to continue the delivery of teaching and learning processes in different ways and contexts, and to ensure that all learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background or learning needs, continue to learn. The same applies for the framework of European cooperation, which should remain flexible enough to respond to both current and future challenges, including in the context of the European Education Area.

WELCOMES and TAKES GOOD NOTE of

the main elements of and, in particular, the vision set out in the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on “Achieving the European Education Area by 2025” of 30 September 2020 <sup>(3)</sup>, which outlines how European cooperation can further enrich the quality, inclusiveness and digital and green dimension of the EU education and training systems. This communication proposes a framework to enable cooperation with Member States and engagement with relevant stakeholders, including a reporting and analysis structure, with education target proposals to encourage and track reforms in education and training, in order to achieve the European Education Area by 2025.

and ALSO WELCOMES

- the main elements of the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on “European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience” of July 2020. <sup>(4)</sup>
- the main elements of the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on “Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 - Resetting education and training for the digital age” of September 2020. <sup>(5)</sup>

AGREES that:

1. Until 2030, the achievement and further development of the European Education Area will be the overarching political objective of the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, permeating all strategic priorities and priority areas, as set out in this Resolution, bearing in mind that the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training will be the main tool to support and implement the European Education Area, contributing to its successful achievement and ambitious further development <sup>(6)</sup>, through its initiatives and a common vision, in a spirit of co-creation.
2. While moving towards the achievement of the European Education Area by 2025, the main goal of European cooperation in education and training should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States which are aimed at ensuring:
  - a) the personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens, whilst promoting democratic values, equality, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue;
  - b) sustainable economic prosperity, the green and digital transitions, and employability.
3. European cooperation in education and training for the period up to 2030 should be established in the context of a strategic framework spanning education and training systems as a whole, in an inclusive, holistic and lifelong learning perspective. This should be underlined as the basic principle underpinning the entire framework, which intends to cover teaching, training and learning in all contexts and levels — whether formal, non-formal or informal — from

<sup>(3)</sup> COM(2020) 625 final.

<sup>(4)</sup> COM(2020) 274 final.

<sup>(5)</sup> COM(2020) 624 final.

<sup>(6)</sup> According to the Council Resolution of 8 November 2019 on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems (OJ C 389, 18.11.2019, p. 1).

early childhood education and care to adult learning, including vocational education and training (VET) and higher education, and also in digital environments. European cooperation in education and training should also contribute to the relevant priorities of the European Semester.

4. The work developed under this new framework should contribute towards the green and digital transitions, in accordance with the objectives established in the communication from the Commission on “The European Green Deal” of December 2019 <sup>(7)</sup>, as well as the main elements set out in the communication from the Commission on “Shaping Europe’s digital future” of February 2020. <sup>(8)</sup>
5. Such aims should also be viewed in a global perspective, considering that cooperation in education and training has gradually become an important instrument for the implementation of EU external policies, based on European values, trust and autonomy. This will help to make the EU an even more attractive destination and partner, both in the global race for talent as well as in promoting strategic partnerships with international partners to provide inclusive, quality education for all, in all contexts and levels of education. As such, cooperation is an essential dimension for the achievement of the Union’s geopolitical priorities, as well as the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, both globally and within EU Member States. Fostering greater coordination among the EU and Member States will strengthen Europe’s positioning as a key partner in education at global level and help cementing the links between the European Education Area and the rest of the world.
6. Effective and efficient investment in education and training is a prerequisite for enhancing quality and inclusiveness of the education and training systems and improving the education outcomes, as well as for driving sustainable growth, improving wellbeing and building a more inclusive society. While respecting the principle of subsidiarity, intensified work on investment has a potential to aid the recovery from the current crisis and contribute to the green and digital transitions of the education and training sector.
7. The periodic monitoring of progress towards the set objectives through systematic collection and analysis of internationally comparable data provides an essential contribution towards evidence-informed policy making. The strategic priorities outlined below should accordingly be accompanied during the period 2021-2030 by indicators and by EU-level targets, as set out in Annex II to this Resolution. Building on the results achieved during the last cycle of European cooperation in education and training, these will help to measure the overall progress made at European level, and to demonstrate what has been achieved, as well as foster and support education and training systems’ development and reforms.
8. Specifically, during the next decade, the strategic framework will address the following five strategic priorities:

– **Strategic priority 1: Improving quality, equity, inclusion and success for all in education and training**

To thrive in the world of today, and to cope with future transformations in society, the economy and the labour market, all individuals have to be equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes. Education and training is key for the personal, civic and professional development of European citizens.

At EU level, the vision for quality in education and training makes mastering key competences, including basic skills, fundamental bases for future success <sup>(9)</sup>, supported by highly qualified and motivated teachers and trainers, as well as other educational staff.

<sup>(7)</sup> COM(2019) 640 final.

<sup>(8)</sup> COM(2020) 67 final.

<sup>(9)</sup> As set out in the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1).

Early leaving from education and training, which exposes young people and adults to decreased socio-economic opportunities, although reduced in the last decade, remains a challenge, particularly when thinking of the expected consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts must continue to bring down the rate of early leaving from education and training and aiming for more young people to obtain an upper secondary education qualification.

National education and training systems have been able to improve their performance in these areas, but there is still a need to identify political measures which can boost educational success for all learners.

By ensuring quality and inclusive education and training for all, Member States can further reduce social, economic and cultural inequalities. However, across Europe, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, including from rural and remote areas, are overrepresented among underachievers and the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted even more starkly the importance of equity and inclusion in education and training.

To ensure a truly inclusive education and equal opportunities for all learners in all levels and types of education and training, academic attainment and achievement should be dissociated from social, economic and cultural status, or from other personal circumstances.

Quality early childhood education and care plays a particularly important role, and should be further reinforced as a basis for future educational success.

All other actions towards broader inclusion are to be encouraged, such as supporting access to inclusive quality education for persons with disabilities<sup>(10)</sup>, persons with specific learning needs, learners with migrant background and other vulnerable groups, supporting the re-entering in education in a lifelong learning perspective and providing opportunities to enter the labour market through different education and training pathways.

Inclusive education and training also entails developing gender sensitivity in the learning processes and in education and training institutions and challenging and dissolving gender stereotypes, especially those that constrain the choices of boys and girls for their field of study. Traditionally male- or female-dominated professions should be further promoted to persons of the under-represented sex. Further work is also needed towards a proper gender balance in leadership positions in education and training institutions.

Digital technologies play an important part in making learning environments, learning materials and teaching methods adaptable and suitable to diverse learners. They can promote genuine inclusion – provided that digital gap issues, both in terms of infrastructure and of digital skills, are addressed in parallel.

## – **Strategic priority 2: Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all**

Societal, technological, digital, environmental and economic challenges are increasingly affecting the way we live and work, including the distribution of jobs and the demand for skills and competences. The high number of career transitions the average European citizen is expected to go through, coupled with the increase of the retirement age, make lifelong learning and lifelong career guidance, including with outreach activities, essential for a just transition, as education and skills levels, including digital skills, continue to be a fundamental factor in the labour market.

Lifelong learning permeates the overall vision and objectives for education and training in the EU and encompasses all levels and types of education and training, as well as non-formal and informal learning, in a holistic way.

Further progress is still required in providing quality lifelong learning for all learners, including through ensuring permeability and flexibility between different learning pathways in various forms and levels of education and training, as well as validation of non-formal and informal learning.

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<sup>(10)</sup> In line with the UN Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities of 13 December 2006.

Education and training systems should become more flexible, resilient, future-proof and appealing, reaching out to a more diverse learner body and offering recognition and validation of prior learning, upskilling and reskilling training opportunities, including at higher qualification levels and throughout the working life <sup>(1)</sup>, supported by initiatives such as the European Universities and Centres of vocational excellence, which were launched through the Erasmus+ programme.

We are currently witnessing an increase in labour market needs for a different mix of skills and qualifications, as well as structural changes in the VET landscape. Both developments call for modernised, effective, inclusive and excellent VET that has an impact on meeting labour market and societal challenges. It is necessary to continue to further develop VET as an attractive and high-quality pathway for jobs and life.

Average participation of adults in learning in the EU remains low, which puts at risk a truly sustainable and fair economic growth in the Union. Innovations in learning pathways, new educational approaches, including individual approaches, and in learning environments in all education and training institutions, including higher education institutions, as well as in workplace and community settings, are a pre-condition to better accommodate the needs of a wider range of learners, as a growing number of adults will need reskilling and upskilling.

In addition, measures should be strengthened to enable and motivate adults to acquire basic skills, so that equal opportunities can be guaranteed and greater social participation could be ensured, thus enabling a holistic approach to adult learning.

As an essential element of lifelong learning and an important means of enhancing personal development, employability and adaptability, mobility for learners, teachers, teacher trainers and staff should continue to be expanded as a key element of EU cooperation and a tool to enhance quality and inclusion in education and training and promote multilingualism in the EU. It is important to strive for a balance in the mobility flows in order to stimulate optimal brain circulation and to monitor it, including through graduate tracking.

Further efforts must be made to remove existing obstacles and barriers to all types of learning and teaching mobility, including issues related to access, guidance, student services and recognition, and also in light of the impact of any current or future travel restrictions.

Moreover, to reinforce cooperation between education institutions and foster mobility, there is still work to be done in areas such as the automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad and quality assurance. Continued efforts are needed to make use of European initiatives to facilitate mobility, including those funded under Erasmus+.

### – **Strategic priority 3: Enhancing competences and motivation in the education profession**

Teachers, trainers, educational and pedagogical staff and education and training leaders, at all levels, are at the heart of education and training. To support innovation, inclusion, quality and achievement in education and training, educators must be highly competent and motivated, which requires a range of professional learning opportunities and support throughout their careers.

More than ever, attention needs to be paid to the well-being of teachers, trainers and educational staff in education and training systems, which is an important factor also for the quality of education and training, as it affects not only teacher satisfaction but also the quality of teaching.

There is also a need to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession and revalorise it, which becomes increasingly important as EU countries face shortages and the ageing of teachers. <sup>(12)</sup>

<sup>(11)</sup> In line with the objectives set out in the Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1) and in the Osnabrück Declaration of 30 November 2020.

<sup>(12)</sup> As stressed in the Council Conclusions of 9 June 2020 on European teachers and trainers for the future (OJ C 193, 9.6.2020, p. 11).

Furthermore, the pivotal role of education and training leadership should be taken into account when developing favourable environments and conditions for the development of competences and motivation of teachers, trainers and educational staff, thus ensuring that education and training institutions operate as learning organisations. Initiatives such as the European Teachers Academies, which will be launched through the Erasmus+ programme, will facilitate networking, knowledge sharing and mobility among institutions providing teachers and trainers with learning opportunities at all phases of teachers' and trainers' careers, sharing of best practices and innovative pedagogies, allowing for mutual learning at a European scale.

– **Strategic priority 4: Reinforcing European higher education**

The higher education sector and higher education institutions themselves have demonstrated their resilience and ability to cope with unforeseen changes, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis sharpened the challenges that remain, but also created opportunities for further development within the foreseen higher education transformation agenda.

Over the next decade, higher education institutions will be encouraged to find new forms of deeper cooperation, namely by creating transnational alliances, pooling their knowledge and resources and generating more opportunities for student and staff mobility and participation, as well as for boosting research and innovation, including through the full roll-out of the European Universities initiative.

Successful work has already been done towards creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), within the Bologna process. It will be important in future to continue working within the Bologna process, whilst creating further and stronger synergies with the European Research Area (ERA), avoiding parallel or double structures or instruments.

- **Strategic priority 5: Supporting the green and digital transitions in and through education and training**

The green and digital transitions are the core focus of the Union's agenda for the next decade. Both the transition to an environmentally sustainable, circular and climate-neutral economy as well as a more digital world, will have significant social, economic and employment impacts. Without ensuring that all citizens obtain the necessary knowledge, competences, skills and attitudes to cope with these changes, a socially just transformation of the EU will be impossible.

There is a need to enable a profound change in individuals' behaviour and skills, starting with the education and training systems and institutions as catalysts. Education and training institutions need to include the green and digital dimensions in their organisational development. This requires investments, namely into digital education ecosystems, not only to integrate a perspective of environmental sustainability and basic and advanced digital skills across all levels and types of education and training, but also to ensure that education and training infrastructures are accordingly prepared to deal with and educate for these changes. Reorienting education and training institutions to a whole-school approach and creating inclusive, healthy, sustainable educational settings are critical for achieving the needed changes for the green and digital transitions. In addition, businesses, national, regional and local authorities and relevant stakeholders need to develop strategies and shared ownership accordingly. In this context, it is important to modernise science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) fields of study.

FURTHER AGREES that:

1. In endeavouring to work within the strategic framework, on the basis of the strategic priorities described above and in order to achieve the European Education Area and support its further development, the following principles should be observed in the period up to 2030:
  - a) European cooperation in education and training should enable the EU and the wider education and training community to deliver on initiatives supporting mainly the achievement of the European Education Area by 2025, but also the Digital Education Action Plan, as well as the European Skills Agenda. Based on strengthened guidance from the Council and in line with the Open Method of Coordination, this requires boosting flexible cooperation methods and strengthening synergies with other initiatives in education and training.

- b) European cooperation in education and training should be implemented in an inclusive, holistic and lifelong learning perspective, sustaining and deepening the tried and tested mutual learning arrangements, tools, instruments and policy support available, namely those from ET 2020 and under the open method of coordination, and developing synergies between the education and training sector and other policy areas, where appropriate. While fully respecting Member States' competences in the area of education and training and the voluntary nature of European cooperation in education and training over the next decade, the strategic framework should draw on:
- i) the five strategic priorities for European cooperation outlined above;
  - ii) common reference tools and approaches;
  - iii) peer learning, peer counselling and the exchange of good practice, with particular focus on the dissemination and clear visibility of outcomes, as well as national impact;
  - iv) periodic monitoring and reporting, including through the EU-level targets, the annual Education and Training Monitor, in connection also with the European Semester, while using the expertise of the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks and avoiding additional administrative burdens on the Member States;
  - v) comparable evidence and data from all relevant European agencies, European networks, and international organisations, such as, for example, the OECD, UNESCO, and the IEA;
  - vi) the expertise of the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, which should be the first forum of discussion on the shared EU-level targets and indicators and future areas of focus, as well as the cooperation with other relevant sectors (employment, social and research sectors) to ensure appropriate and fit for purpose indicators;
  - vii) making full use of the opportunities available under EU programmes and funds and instruments, particularly in the field of education and training, including for lifelong learning.
- c) European cooperation in education and training should be pertinent, concrete and effective. Further efforts should be made to ensure that clear and visible outcomes are planned in advance and then presented, reviewed and disseminated on a regular basis and in a structured manner, through European and national fora, thereby establishing a basis for continuous evaluation and development.
- d) In order to support Member States' efforts to facilitate the foreseen transformation of higher education in Europe and to promote the cooperation of higher education institutions, close and structured synergies with the EHEA and Bologna process should be ensured, in particular with regard to quality assurance, recognition, mobility and transparency instruments, avoiding parallel or double structures and instruments already developed in the EHEA.
- e) The Copenhagen process is an important aspect of European cooperation under the open method of coordination in the field of VET, which will contribute to achieving the strategic priorities set out in this framework.
- f) Cross-sectoral cooperation should be enhanced between relevant EU initiatives in education and training and those in related policy areas and sectors — particularly employment, social policy, research, innovation, youth and culture. Particular attention should be paid to fostering a better dialogue between the Education Committee and the Employment Committee, ensuring a timely exchange of information <sup>(13)</sup>. As regards the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, in particular its first, fourth and eleventh principles, particular attention should be paid to its monitoring, carried out by the 'social scoreboard', which will track trends and progress across Member States and will feed into the European Semester.

<sup>(13)</sup> Following the adoption and in line with the Council Resolution of 27 February 2020 on education and training in the European Semester: ensuring informed debates on reforms and investments (OJ C 64, 27.2.2020, p. 1).



- g) With specific regard to the “knowledge square” (education, research, innovation and service to society), special attention should be paid to policy and funding synergies between education and training, research and innovation, namely in the context of the ERA and the European Education Area, while ensuring consistency with the EHEA. <sup>(14)</sup>
  - h) European cooperation, especially with a view to achieving the European Education Area, requires transparent and consistent dialogue and networking, in a co-creation perspective, not only between the Member States and the Commission, but also with all relevant stakeholders.
  - i) Policy dialogue with third countries and cooperation with international organisations, such as Council of Europe, OECD and UNESCO, should be reinforced, thereby providing evidence and data, but also inspiration and a source of fresh ideas and different working methods for comparison and improvement.
  - j) Financial resources from Erasmus+, the European Structural Funds, REACT-EU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and other Union funding programmes and mechanisms should be used to enhance education and training systems in accordance with the overall objective of achieving the European Education Area and Member States’ priorities, within the strategic priorities of the new framework.
  - k) The achievement of the European Education Area, given the fundamental role of education and training for recovery and building social and economic resilience, calls for an increased focus on investment in education. The Commission, together with Member States, will intensify work on investment, including fostering debate at appropriate high-level political fora, when relevant, such as joint exchanges between EU finance ministers and EU education ministers, as well as with other institutions, such as the European Investment Bank and the European Parliament. <sup>(15)</sup>
2. The successful use of the open method of coordination within the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training depends on the political commitment of Member States and on strengthened guidance from the Council and effective working methods at European level, that should be based on the following:
- a) Work cycles – The period up to 2030 will be divided up into two cycles, with the first cycle covering the 5 years from 2021 to 2025, following the timeline proposed by the Commission in its communication on the achievement of the European Education Area, and the second cycle until 2030. The first cycle should enable the achievement of the European Education Area by 2025.
  - b) Priority areas – For each cycle, a number of priority areas for European cooperation, based on the strategic priorities, will be agreed by the Council, taking into account the overall objective of achieving the European Education Area and its further development. The European priority areas should allow for all Member States to cooperate on broader issues, but will also allow for more specific and closer cooperation between interested Member States to tackle emergent challenges and specific policy needs. The priority areas for the first cycle under this new framework are set out in Annex III.
  - c) Mutual learning – European cooperation in the aforementioned priority areas should be carried out by such means as peer learning and peer counselling activities, conferences and seminars, workshops, high level fora or expert groups, panels, studies and analyses, web-based cooperation and, where appropriate, with the involvement of relevant stakeholders. All of these initiatives should be developed on the basis of clear mandates, time schedules and planned outputs, to be proposed by the Commission in cooperation with the Member States.
  - d) Common reference tools and approaches – Mutual learning can be inspired by or lead to the development of reference tools and approaches, that are built on joint analysis and support further policy development at different governance levels (EU, national, regional, local, sectoral etc.).
  - e) Governance mechanism – The strategic framework, during the first cycle, should maintain all the tried and tested mutual learning arrangements of the ET 2020, such as the working groups, Directors-General formations and peer learning instruments, and maintain the involvement of other relevant governance bodies. Member States and the Commission will adapt those arrangements to the new strategic priorities and will work together to set up

<sup>(14)</sup> This work could be supported at technical level.

<sup>(15)</sup> At technical level, an expert group on quality investment in education and training will support this process, helping to maintain focus on national and regional investment.

governance solutions to facilitate efficient communication of information from the technical to the political level, when necessary, and coordinate the work to be done under the strategic framework, without creating unnecessary structures or additional burdens for the Member States.

- f) Dissemination of results – To enhance visibility and impact at national and European level, the outcomes of cooperation will be widely disseminated among all relevant stakeholders and, where appropriate, discussed at the political level.
  - g) Monitoring of the process – To promote the delivery of results through the open method of coordination, as well as ownership of the process at both national and European level, the Member States and the Commission will work closely together to take stock of the work done at technical level, evaluating the process and its outcomes. Annual monitoring will also take place through the Commission's Education and Training Monitor, which tracks progress towards achieving all the agreed EU-level targets and indicators, including sub-indicators, in the field of education and training, and also contributes to the European Semester Process.
  - h) Progress reporting – At the end of the first cycle, by 2025, it will be necessary to revisit the set of priority areas in order to adjust them or set new ones for the following cycle, based on current challenges and to reflect on the progress made, including towards developing governance solutions that are proportionate to the political ambition of the European Education Area. In 2022 the Commission will publish a European Education Area Progress Report, taking stock and evaluating the achievements towards the European Education Area through the strategic cooperation framework and proposing next steps, as necessary, and in 2023, will also organise a mid-term review event. Both the progress report and the mid-term review will also be taken into account in the Council's agreement on possible new priority areas after 2025.
3. In 2025, the Commission will publish a full report on the European Education Area. On the basis of this evaluation, the Council shall review the strategic framework — including EU-level targets, governance structure, and working methods - and make any necessary adjustments for the second cycle, as appropriate, to adapt to the reality and needs of the European Education Area or any other major developments in the European Union.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES to:

1. Work together, with the support of the Commission and using the open method of coordination as outlined in this Resolution, to enhance European cooperation in education and training in the period up to 2030 on the basis of the five strategic priorities, the principles and working methods described above, and of the priority areas agreed for each cycle (those for the first cycle 2021-2025 being outlined in Annex III).
2. Consider, on the basis of national priorities and with due respect for national competences in the area of education and training, measures at national level aimed at achieving progress within the strategic priorities outlined in the strategic framework and contributing to the collective achievement of the European Education Area and of the EU-level targets identified in Annex II. Draw inspiration from mutual learning at European level, when devising national education and training policies.
3. Where appropriate, consider how and to what extent they can contribute to the collective achievement of the EU-level targets through national measures and actions, thus establishing national targets in accordance with the specificities of their education and training systems and taking into account national circumstances, including the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the economy and society, and within the education and training sector itself.
4. Support the governance structure presented above and the working methods chosen, taking ownership of the process.
5. Make effective use of EU policies and funding instruments to support the implementation of national measures and actions to achieve the progress along the strategic priorities and related targets at EU and national level, in particular in the context of recovery and green and digital transitions.

INVITES THE COMMISSION, IN LINE WITH THE TREATIES AND WITH FULL RESPECT FOR SUBSIDIARITY to:

1. Support and work with the Member States — during the period up to 2030 — in cooperating within this framework on the basis of the five strategic priorities, the principles and working methods described above, and the EU-level targets and agreed priority areas outlined respectively in Annexes II and III.
  2. Work with the Member States until the end of 2021, in order to agree on a suitable governance structure to coordinate the work and steer the development of the strategic framework, within the overarching objective of achieving and further developing the European Education Area, reflecting also on the issues that need to be taken further to higher political discussion, without creating additional burdens for the Member States, while ensuring their ownership of the process.
  3. Work with the Member States and provide specific support to local, regional and national authorities to facilitate mutual learning, analysis and sharing of good practices on investment in education infrastructure.
  4. Analyse, in particular through progress reporting, the degree to which the strategic priorities of this framework have been met as regards the achievement of the European Education Area, but also in the area of European cooperation in education and training at national level.
  5. Conduct work on proposals, based on and with the expert opinion of the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, for possible indicators or EU-level targets in the areas of inclusion and equity, of the teaching profession as well as of sustainability, including greening of education and training systems.
  6. Work with the Member States to analyse how to improve data collection and analysis for existing EU-level targets and indicators, with a view to fostering evidence-informed policy making, including with the expertise of the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, and report back to the Council on these discussions.
  7. Work with the Member States to examine, after 2025, the EU targets and indicators for which the set timelines do not coincide with the ten-year period encompassed by this framework, reporting back to the Council on possible new values for these targets and indicators.
  8. Present and regularly update a systematic overview and roadmap of ongoing and planned policies, cooperation tools, funding instruments, initiatives and targeted calls at Union level, which contribute to the achievement of the European Education Area and to the development of the European cooperation in education and training.
  9. Present the Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, and in particular its first, fourth and eleventh principles.
  10. Establish a European Education Area Platform as an interactive public gateway to support access for Member States and stakeholders to information, actions, services, instruments, results, as well to promote cooperation and exchanges.
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## ANNEX I

## POLITICAL BACKGROUND

1. Council conclusions on a strategic framework for European Cooperation in education and training (ET2020) (12 May 2009)
2. Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (20 December 2011)
3. Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (20 December 2012)
4. Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (Paris, 17 March 2015)
5. 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020) – New priorities for European cooperation in education and training (23 and 24 November 2015)
6. Council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school (23-24 November 2015)
7. Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on promoting socioeconomic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education: the contribution of education and training to the European Semester 2016 (24 February 2016)
8. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of Regions – A New Skills Agenda for Europe (10 June 2016)
9. Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (19 December 2016)
10. Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on inclusion in diversity to achieve a high quality education for all (17 February 2017)
11. Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (22 May 2017)
12. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture: The European Commission's Contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg (17 November 2017)
13. Council Recommendation on tracking graduates (20 November 2017)
14. Council Conclusions on school development and excellent teaching (20 November 2017)
15. Council conclusions on a renewed European Agenda for higher education (20 November 2017)
16. Conclusions of the European Council (14 December 2017)
17. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Digital Education Action Plan (17 January 2018)

18. Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (15 March 2018)
19. Decision (EU) 2018/646 of the European Parliament and of the Council on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) (18 April 2018)
20. Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (22 May 2018)
21. Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension in teaching (22 May 2018)
22. Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area (22 May 2018)
23. Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (26 November 2018)
24. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence (7 December 2018)
25. Council conclusions Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030 (9 April 2019)
26. Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages (22 May 2019)
27. Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care systems (22 May 2019)
28. Council conclusions on the future of a highly digitised Europe beyond 2020: 'Boosting digital and economic competitiveness across the Union and digital cohesion' (7 June 2019)
29. European Council: The New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 (20 June 2019)
30. Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems (8 November 2019)
31. Council conclusions on the key role of lifelong learning policies in empowering societies to address the technological and green transition in support of inclusive and sustainable growth (8 November 2019)
32. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - 'The European Green Deal' (11 December 2019)
33. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'A strong Social Europe for just Transition' (14 January 2020)
34. Council Resolution on education and training in the European Semester: ensuring informed debates on reforms and investments (20 February 2020)
35. Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future (25 May 2020)
36. Council conclusions on countering the COVID-19 crisis in education and training (16 June 2020)

37. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on "European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience" (1 July 2020)
  38. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "A new ERA for Research and Innovation (30 September 2020)
  39. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (30 September 2020)
  40. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 – Resetting education and training for the digital age (30 September 2020)
  41. Rome Ministerial Communiqué (19 November 2020)
  42. Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (24 November 2020)
  43. Council conclusions on digital education in Europe's knowledge societies (24 November 2020)
  44. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 (24 November 2020)
  45. Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies (30 November 2020)
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## ANNEX II

## EU-LEVEL TARGETS - Reference levels of European average performance in education and training

As a means of monitoring progress and identifying challenges, as well as contributing to evidence-informed policy-making through systematic collection and analysis of internationally comparable data, a series of reference levels of European average performance in education and training ('EU-level targets') should support the strategic priorities outlined in the Resolution for the period 2021-2030. They should be based solely on comparable and reliable data and take account of the differing situations in individual Member States. <sup>(1)</sup> They should not be considered as concrete targets for individual countries to reach by 2025 or 2030. As described in this Resolution, Member States are invited to consider the establishment of equivalent national targets.

On this basis, the Member States agree to the following seven EU-level targets to be reached:

**1. Low achieving 15-year-olds in basic skills <sup>(2)</sup>**

The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%, by 2030.

**2. Low achieving eight-graders in digital skills <sup>(3)</sup>**

The share of low-achieving eight-graders in computer and information literacy should be less than 15%, by 2030.

**3. Participation in early childhood education and care <sup>(4)</sup>**

At least 96% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education and care, by 2030.

**4. Early leavers from education and training <sup>(5)</sup>**

The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9%, by 2030.

**5. Tertiary level attainment <sup>(6)</sup>**

The share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45%, by 2030.

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<sup>(1)</sup> These targets should also take into account the different contexts of Member States and the fact that, according to international projections, there may be a change in the starting data for the years 2020 and 2021, due to the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on EU education and training systems.

<sup>(2)</sup> The data source is the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), as collected and administered by the OECD. The target measures the share of 15-year-olds who fail to reach level 2 on the PISA scale for reading, mathematics or science.

<sup>(3)</sup> The target is based on the Computer and Information Literacy (CIL) survey from the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) executed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The ICILS target population comprises students in their eighth year of schooling.

<sup>(4)</sup> The data source is Eurostat, online data code: [educ\_uoe\_enra21].

<sup>(5)</sup> Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey. Online data code: [edat\_lfse\_14] i.e. the share of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training. This EU-level target will be complemented by an accompanying indicator on upper secondary level attainment, measuring the share of people aged 20-24 with at least an upper secondary qualification through data made available by Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey. Online data code: [edat\_lfse\_03].

<sup>(6)</sup> Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey. Online data code: [edat\_lfse\_03].

**6. Exposure of VET graduates to work based learning <sup>(7)</sup>**

The share of recent graduates from VET benefiting from exposure to work-based learning during their vocational education and training should be at least 60%, by 2025.

**7. Participation of adults in learning <sup>(8)</sup>**

At least 47% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months, by 2025.

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<sup>(7)</sup> This will cover the age group 20-34, having left education and training 1-3 years ago. The indicator will be based on data that will be collected from 2021 onwards as part of the Eurostat European Union Labour Force Survey (EU LFS) as defined in the variable identifier 'HATWORK' in the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2240. This refers to work experiences at a workplace in a market or non-market unit (i.e. in a company, government institution or non-profit organisation) that were part of the curriculum of the formal programme that led to the highest level of education successfully completed. If a respondent had several work experiences, the cumulative duration of all work experiences should be considered. The work experiences should be expressed in full-time equivalents.

<sup>(8)</sup> Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey data collection from 2022 onwards. Given that the data source is planned to be changed in 2022 (from the Adult Education Survey to the EU Labour Force Survey), the target is subject to confirmation in 2023 on the basis of experience of the new data source. The Commission, in cooperation with SGIB, will evaluate the impact of these changes by comparing the results of AES and LFS in 2023 and consider possible changes to the LFS methodology, or to the level of the target. On the basis of this evaluation the Council will decide on a possible adaptation of the target level.



## ANNEX III

**PRIORITY AREAS FOR EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING DURING THE FIRST CYCLE: 2021-2025**

With a view to progressing along the five strategic priorities under the strategic framework for European cooperation, the identification of priority areas, concrete issues and actions <sup>(1)</sup> for a specific work cycle should improve the efficiency of European cooperation in education and training, as well as reflect the individual needs of Member States, including when facing new circumstances and challenges.

The priority areas, as referred to in this Resolution, together with the most relevant concrete issues and actions reflect the need to: (i) pursue cooperation in areas where key challenges remain and linked to more recent challenges; (ii) develop cooperation in areas regarded as particularly important during this work cycle.

If Member States deem necessary, the work on specific priority areas can continue in subsequent work cycles, with due regard to subsidiarity and national circumstances.

**Priority area 1 - Quality, equity, inclusion and success in education and training***Concrete issues and actions*

- i) Promoting the mastering of key competences <sup>(2)</sup>, including basic skills, which are a prerequisite to thrive in life, to find or create fulfilling jobs and to become engaged citizens.
- ii) Fostering and supporting language teaching and learning and multilingualism, enabling learners, teachers and trainers to benefit from a genuine European learning space, by further implementing the 2019 Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages, including in VET.
- iii) Bringing a European perspective in education and training, providing learners with an insight of what Europe at large, and the Union in particular, mean in their daily lives, including through widening and strengthening the Jean Monnet Actions.
- iv) Maintaining education and training institutions as safe environments, free of violence, bullying, harmful speech, disinformation and all forms of discrimination, including through further implementation of Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching.
- v) Stimulating a safe and supportive school environment as a necessary condition for concrete issues, such as tackling discrimination, racism, sexism, segregation, bullying (including cyber-bullying), violence and stereotypes, and for the individual well-being of all learners.
- vi) Helping all learners reach a baseline level of proficiency in basic skills, with a special focus on groups at risk of underachievement and early school leaving, including identifying effective policy reforms to support better achievement in basic skills, specifically concerning curriculum and/or assessment, as well as the capacity of institutions and staff to be innovative and develop their learning approaches and environments.
- vii) Promoting educational success strategies at national level in order to foster the successful conclusion of education and training pathways by all learners and to reduce early leaving from education and training and low-achievement, by supporting a whole-school approach with an overall inclusive learner-centred vision of education.

<sup>(1)</sup> Mentioning proposed future actions or initiatives in the following priority areas does not anticipate any future decisions, to be taken at the appropriate level.

<sup>(2)</sup> As set out in the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1).

- viii) Addressing the increasing diversity of learners and enhancing access to quality and inclusive education and training for all learners, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, such as learners with specific learning needs, minorities, people with a migrant background and Roma, and with fewer opportunities because of their geographical location and/or their social-economically disadvantaged situation.
- ix) Implementing the European quality framework for high quality early childhood education and care systems.
- x) Addressing the issue of gender gaps in education and training, and unequal opportunities for girls and boys, women and men, by promoting more gender-balanced educational choices, challenging and dissolving gender stereotypes in education and educational careers, especially in STEAM fields of study, addressing issues such as boys' underachievement, bullying and sexual harassment, and developing a better gender sensitivity in education and training processes and institutions.
- xi) Supporting data collection and innovation for inclusion and gender equality in education.
- xii) Promoting civic, intercultural, and social competences, mutual understanding and respect, and ownership of democratic values and fundamental rights at all levels and types of education and training. <sup>(3)</sup>
- xiii) Fostering, valuing and recognising non-formal learning including volunteering, and enhancing the inclusiveness, quality and recognition of cross-border solidarity activities.
- xiv) Developing ethical conduct and enhancing critical thinking, along with digital and media literacy.
- xv) Fostering sustainable investment in quality and inclusive education and training.

## **Priority area 2 - Lifelong learning and mobility**

### *Concrete issues and actions*

- i) Relaunching and continuing lifelong learning strategies and addressing the transition phases within education and training, while promoting, through high-quality career guidance, transitions to and between vocational education and training, higher education and adult learning, including non-formal and informal learning, and from education and training to work.
- ii) Making lifelong learning strategies more robust and inclusive in order to allow those who have left early to re-enter education in flexible forms through life, and those who need it to be able to access higher education and VET programmes to update or acquire skills (upskilling and reskilling) that the jobs of tomorrow require, at all stages of life.
- iii) Ensuring that education and training systems, including adult learning systems support all learners in accessing a changing labour market and in contributing to their personal development, become more agile, resilient, future-proof, attractive and tailored to the green and digital transitions, should provide upskilling and updating training opportunities throughout the working life, and should strengthen the cooperation with other stakeholders, such as companies or other workplaces.
- iv) Implementing the Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies.
- v) Strengthening the key role of higher education and VET systems in supporting lifelong learning and reaching out to a more diverse student body. Exploring the concept and use of micro-credentials can help widen learning opportunities and could strengthen the role of higher education and VET in lifelong learning by providing more flexible and modular learning opportunities, and offering more inclusive learning paths.

<sup>(3)</sup> As outlined in the "Declaration on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination through Education".

- vi) Updating of the renewed European agenda for adult learning.
- vii) Promoting the freedom for learners, teachers and trainers, and other education and training staff, to be mobile and for institutions to freely associate with one another in Europe and beyond, through learning mobility and cooperation across borders. Further efforts must be made to remove existing obstacles and barriers to all types of learning and teaching mobility, including issues related to access, guidance, student services and recognition.
- viii) Updating the learning mobility framework accompanying the strengthened Erasmus+ programme to enable mobility opportunities for a much wider variety of participants, foster green and digital mobility, including by blending online and physical exchanges, and to encourage balanced mobility.
- ix) Continue working towards the full implementation of the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (26 November 2018).

### **Priority area 3 - Teachers and Trainers**

#### *Concrete issues and actions*

- i) Strengthening the recruitment and selection of the best and most suitable candidates for the teaching and pedagogical profession at all levels and in all types of education and training.
- ii) Raising the attractiveness and the status of the teaching and pedagogical profession, by its revalorization in social and also in financial terms, including through the foreseen European Innovative Teaching Award.
- iii) Explore the possibility of developing a European guidance for the development of national career frameworks and lifelong guidance, thus supporting the career progression of school education professionals.
- iv) Explore the possibility of developing policy tools in a form of teacher competence frameworks to increase relevance of initial teacher education programmes as well as development of continuous professional development opportunities and to provide guidance for teachers in their career progression.
- v) Supporting initial education, induction and continuous professional development at all levels, especially to deal with the increased diversity of learners and their specific needs, to tackle early leaving from education and training to promote work-based learning, supporting the development of basic and advanced digital competences and innovative pedagogies, including ensuring that teacher education addresses teachers' competences to teach in digital environments.
- vi) Creating networks of teachers' education institutions, through the proposed Erasmus Teacher Academies, to foster communities of practice, provide learning opportunities to teachers, support innovation and inform national and European teacher education policies.
- vii) Supporting the promotion of excellence in teaching at all levels of education and training, through effective organisation of learning and structural incentives, by promoting appropriate support mechanisms, infrastructure and teaching materials and research-based teacher education, as well as exploring new ways to assess the quality of teacher training.
- viii) Supporting teachers and trainers in managing linguistic and cultural diversity in education and training institutions.
- ix) Explore the possibility of developing a policy framework for increasing the number and quality of learning mobility of teachers in Europe based on their actual mobility needs.

- x) Developing measures and establishing mechanisms to improve working conditions and to address occupational stress, in order to foster the well-being of teachers, trainers and pedagogical and education staff.
- xi) Striving to reduce gender imbalances at all levels and types of education and training related professions.
- xii) Ensuring that teacher and trainer education and training programmes also prepare teachers and trainers at all levels and types of education and training programmes for their key role in equipping learners with the competences to live, work, and act towards sustainable development and in enhancing well-being and mental health for all learners.

#### **Priority area 4 - Higher education**

##### *Concrete issues and actions*

- i) Encouraging closer and deeper cooperation between higher education institutions, namely by promoting and fostering seamless transnational cooperation, which will enable alliances of higher education institutions, such as those within the European Universities initiative, to leverage their strengths and jointly deliver transformative higher education.
- ii) Engage in the roll-out of the European Universities initiative under the Erasmus+ programme, in synergy with Horizon Europe and other funding instruments.
- iii) Establishing an agenda for higher education transformation, with a focus on inclusion, innovation, connectivity, digital and green readiness and international competitiveness, as well as fundamental academic values and high ethical principles, as well as employment and employability.
- iv) Encourage balanced mobility flows and optimal brain circulation.
- v) Fostering the role of higher education institutions as central actors of the “knowledge square” (education, research, innovation and service to society), enhancing synergies and facilitating further work between higher education and research.
- vi) Strengthening automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad for the purpose of mobility and further learning, while ensuring that quality assurance mechanisms provide a strong basis for public trust for further learning and safeguard the autonomy of higher education institutions. Automatic recognition of joint transnational activities and the recognition and portability of short courses, where appropriate, should be developed.
- vii) Encourage further use of the European Student Card initiative with the aim of benefitting all mobile students in Europe.
- viii) Fostering the relevance of higher education to the labour market and society, e.g. encouraging the development of curricula that encourages more work-based learning and enhanced cooperation between institutions and employers, fully respecting the holistic approach of higher education and the autonomy of higher education institutions and by exploring the possibility of establishing a European graduate tracking mechanism.

#### **Priority area 5 - Green and digital transitions**

##### *Concrete issues and actions*

- i) Boosting availability, access, and quality of digital equipment and infrastructure, connectivity, open and digital educational resources and pedagogies at all education and training levels to support education and training systems in adapting to the digital era.
- ii) Addressing the development of basic and advanced digital skills and competences at all levels and types of education and training (formal, non-formal and informal) and also traditional, blended and distance teaching and learning, in order to face and reply to the technological and digital transformation of economy and society.

- iii) Intensify the exchange of best practices and implementation of actions included in the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, exploring ways to foster a more integrated approach to the development of digital education policy through the possible set-up of a European Digital Education Hub.
  - iv) Mobilising expertise and resources for networking, and supporting creative approaches in green education, i.e. through the envisaged Education for Climate Coalition.
  - v) Promoting environmental sustainability perspectives across education and training curricula, at all levels of education and within an inter-disciplinary approach, and promoting educational concepts, such as Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education, in order to empower citizens to contribute to sustainable development.
  - vi) Fostering new sustainable education and training infrastructure and renovating existing buildings ('greening of education infrastructure').
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## II

*(Information)*INFORMATION FROM EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS, BODIES, OFFICES  
AND AGENCIES

## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

**Commission Notice on a guidance document on the implementation of the provisions for the  
conduct of audits under Article 6 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the  
Council**

(2021/C 66/02)

**Foreword**

Regulation (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council <sup>(1)</sup> provides in Article 6(1) that the competent authorities shall carry out internal audits or have audits carried out on themselves and shall take appropriate measures in the light of the results of those audits.

This guidance document is intended to assist national competent authorities in the application of the above-mentioned requirements. It has been elaborated by the Commission in co-operation with the Member States and is not legally binding <sup>(2)</sup>. Only the Court of Justice of the European Union is competent to authoritatively interpret Union law.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products, amending Regulations (EC) No 999/2001, (EC) No 396/2005, (EC) No 1069/2009, (EC) No 1107/2009, (EU) No 1151/2012, (EU) No 652/2014, (EU) 2016/429 and (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulations (EC) No 1/2005 and (EC) No 1099/2009 and Council Directives 98/58/EC, 1999/74/EC, 2007/43/EC, 2008/119/EC and 2008/120/EC, and repealing Regulations (EC) No 854/2004 and (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Directives 89/608/EEC, 89/662/EEC, 90/425/EEC, 91/496/EEC, 96/23/EC, 96/93/EC and 97/78/EC and Council Decision 92/438/EEC (Official Controls Regulation) (OJ L 95, 7.4.2017, p. 1).

<sup>(2)</sup> The term "should" in this guidance document means good practice, not a binding requirement.

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## 1. Purpose and scope

The guidance document provides guidance on the nature and the implementation of audit systems by competent authorities, as referred to in Article 3(3)(a) and (b) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. The purpose of audit systems is to verify whether official controls, and other official activities <sup>(3)</sup>, regulated by Regulation (EU) 2017/625 are effectively implemented and are suitable to achieve the objectives of the relevant legislation, including compliance with national control plans.

This guidance document seeks to describe the principles stemming from Regulation (EU) 2017/625 with regard to establishing national audit systems and carrying out internal audits, rather than stipulate detailed methods with a view to facilitating the application of the aforesaid principles across the diversity of Member State control and audit systems. The methods selected for applying those principles may vary depending on the size, nature, number and complexity of the competent authorities responsible for official controls throughout the Member States.

## 2. Legal background

This guidance document is intended to assist Member States in the implementation of the provisions for conducting the audits provided for in Article 6 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625, which reads as follows:

### Article 6

#### Audits of the competent authorities

1. To ensure their compliance with this Regulation, the competent authorities shall carry out internal audits or have audits carried out on themselves and shall take appropriate measures in the light of the results of those audits.
2. The audits referred to in paragraph 1 shall be subject to independent scrutiny and carried out in a transparent manner.

The delegated and implementing acts adopted under Regulation (EU) 2017/625, while not explicitly mentioned in Article 6, are also essential for ensuring compliance with Regulation (EU) 2017/625. Therefore, audits are to be carried out also to ensure compliance with these delegated and implementing acts.

## 3. Definitions

For the purposes of this guidance document, reference is made to the definitions laid down in Article 3 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625, Articles 2 and 3 of Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council <sup>(4)</sup>.

"Audit", as defined in Article 3(30) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625, means a systematic and independent examination to determine whether activities and the related results of such activities comply with planned arrangements and whether these arrangements are applied effectively and are suitable to achieve the objectives.

Other definitions that are relevant for the purposes of this guidance document:

"Audit body" means the body that carries out the audit process. This may be an internal or external entity.

"Audit universe" means an inventory of audit areas that is compiled and maintained by the audit body to identify areas for audit during the audit planning process.

"Audit system" means the combination of one or more audit bodies carrying out an audit process within or across competent authorities.

<sup>(3)</sup> According to Article 1(5) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625, Article 6 of the same regulation also applies to other official activities. For the purpose of this guidance document, when "official controls" are mentioned, "other official activities" are also included.

<sup>(4)</sup> Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food safety (OJ L 31, 1.2.2002, p. 1).



"Audit process" means the set of activities described in Section 5.1. (Systematic Approach) and Section 6. (Performing an Audit).

"Audit programme" means a set of one or more audits planned for a specific time frame and directed towards a specific purpose.

"Audit plan" means the description of the activities and arrangements for an audit.

"Audit approach" means the degree of emphasis to be placed during an audit on the activities being audited (e.g. auditing compliance directly, with an initial focus on outputs and outcomes, versus auditing the control systems, with an initial focus on systems and controls).

For specific audit terminology, it may be of assistance to refer to the current versions of international standards such as ISO 19011, ISO 9000 and The Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) <sup>(?)</sup>.

#### 4. Fundamental principles

The audit systems should cover all official controls and other official activities at all stages of the Union agri-food production chain, covered by Regulation (EU) 2017/625, including the activities of all competent authorities regardless of their way of organisation or administrative level, and all agencies or control bodies involved. In order to achieve this, audit(s) should, where necessary, extend beyond and across administrative boundaries. Where multiple audit systems exist in a Member State, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that, when combined, full coverage of all the above activities is achieved.

To build and maintain confidence in the integrity of the audit system, management and implementation of the audit process are to be transparent to all relevant stakeholders. In particular, there should be full transparency between the audit body and the auditee (see table in section 5.2 below). Ensuring the audit process is transparent in the eyes of other stakeholders is a way to promote confidence and assist in the dissemination of information, in particular the sharing of best practice within and between competent authorities.

Independence should be addressed at organisational, functional, audit process and auditor level. The audit body and audit team should be appointed by and report to top management of the competent authorities. A clear, documented mandate affording adequate power to conduct the audits should be provided. This mandate should include at least the purpose, responsibilities, authority and accountability of the audit body, and any other aspects, which are considered necessary to reach a satisfactory level of independence. The audit body and the audit team should not be involved in managing or supervising the control systems being audited.

Where control tasks are delegated, and the competent authority has chosen to audit rather than to inspect the delegated body, then the contractual obligations of that delegated body should include the acceptance of auditing requirements and the conditions thereof.

Independent scrutiny should be a regular and planned process, external to the audit body, to ensure that the audit system is capable of producing objective results and the competent authorities meet their obligations under Article 6(2) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

In addition to the specific guidance set out in this document, ISO 19011 may serve as a source for general guidance.

#### 5. Implementation of the audit process

##### 5.1. Systematic approach

The audit process should be managed in a systematic manner. To that end, the audit process should:

- Be the result of a transparent planning process identifying risk-based priorities in line with the competent authority's responsibilities under Regulation (EU) 2017/625.
- Include multi-annual strategic planning which is:
  - the basis for setting goals and priorities;

<sup>(?)</sup> <https://na.theiia.org/Pages/IIAHome.aspx> <https://na.theiia.org/Pages/IIAHome.aspx>

- a starting point for deciding which audit topics will be selected for audit; and
- a basis for detailed annual planning.
- Through strategic planning identify the audit universe: grouping it into auditable entities, identifying sources of information to inform the planning process and establishing selection criteria to be used for audit topic selection.
- Establish an audit programme that ensures adequate coverage of all relevant areas of activity and all relevant competent authorities regulated by Regulation (EU) 2017/625 at an appropriate risk-based frequency over a period not exceeding five years. The audit programme may include information on types of audits, resources, timetable, review frequency (e.g. once a year or more frequently).
- Be supported by documented procedures and records to ensure consistency and to demonstrate that a systematic approach is followed. Such procedures should cover:
  - Risk-based planning of the audit programme.
  - Generating audit findings, including the identification of evidence of compliance and non-compliance, as appropriate.
  - Preparing, approving and distributing audit reports.
  - Review of audit conclusions, in order to identify system-wide strengths and weaknesses in the control system, disseminate best practice and ensure the monitoring of corrective and preventive actions.
- Be monitored and reviewed to ensure the audit programme's objectives have been met and to identify opportunities for improvement.

Where more than one audit programme is envisaged within a Member State, steps should be taken to ensure that such programmes are effectively coordinated, so as to ensure a seamless audit process across the relevant competent authorities. The audit programme(s) should also cover all relevant levels of the competent authority's hierarchy.

## 5.2. Transparency

In order to demonstrate the audit process is transparent, documented procedures should support a clearly defined audit planning process, which includes the establishment of audit objectives, criteria, selection of the audit approach and audit report approval and distribution mechanisms.

The competent authorities should adopt the appropriate measures to ensure transparency, taking into account the relevant requirements of national and Union legislation and other conditions as appropriate. To that end, the competent authorities should consider encouraging practices that improve the transparency of the process. Some examples of such practices are listed in the Table below. When deciding on which measures to apply, the competent authorities should balance the need for transparency against the risk of undermining the audit system's ability to achieve its objectives. In order to optimise the benefits of transparency, it should be combined with balanced reporting, that is a proper mixture of verified compliance (positive findings) and areas for improvement (negative findings).

**Table - Examples of practices maintaining the transparency of an audit process**

	Auditee	Within competent authority	Across competent authorities (within Member States)	Public and other stakeholders
Access to documented audit body procedures	✓	✓	✓	
Consultation on planning of audit programme	✓	✓	✓	
Publication of audit programme	✓	✓	✓	✓
Submission of audit plan	✓	✓		

	Auditee	Within competent authority	Across competent authorities (within Member States)	Public and other stakeholders
Opportunity to comment on draft audit report	✓	✓		
Distribution of final audit report	✓	✓	✓	
Publication of auditee's comments on draft report	✓	✓	✓	✓
Publication of final audit report	✓	✓	✓	✓
Publication of summaries of final audit reports and of annual report	✓	✓	✓	✓
Publication of auditee's action plan	✓	✓	✓	✓
Publication of follow-up results	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: Competent authorities should select the practices (first column) and the extent to which they are applied (remaining columns) which are appropriate to their particular circumstances.

### 5.3. Independence

Audit bodies should be free from any commercial, financial, hierarchical, political or other pressures that might affect their judgment or the outcome of the audit process. The audit system, audit body and auditors should be independent of the activity being audited and free from bias and conflicts of interest.

Full independence is not achievable in many circumstances. What is required is a level of independence that a reasonable outside observer would consider as sufficient to ensure the audits are conducted in a fair, objective and impartial manner and that the audit body and its auditors are not subject to undue influence or have a conflict of interest that would prejudice either the audit process or individual audits.

The audit body should be provided with sufficient qualified and competent staff, funding, infrastructure, and other resources needed to execute the audit programme. The audit body should be granted access to continuous professional development and relevant technical expertise.

The audit body should be free of undue influence at all levels of the audit process. In particular, approval of the audit programme and reports should not be influenced or hindered by the auditee. The audit body should have the freedom to develop the audit scope and objectives and have access to all premises and information that is necessary to achieve audit objectives.

A check should be carried out to ensure no conflict of interest exists for the audit body, the audit team or any attached technical expert. Members of the audit team should behave objectively, impartially, independently, without bias, with fairness, intellectual honesty, integrity, and declare a conflict of interest when appropriate. To that end, the rotation of auditors and/or of audit teams may assist in achieving this.

Where technical expertise required for the audit is only available within the competent authority being audited, measures should be taken to ensure the audit team remains independent. Where control activities are organised on a regional basis, technical experts could be exchanged in order to ensure they are independent. Where technical experts have to be sourced outside of the audit body, measures should be taken to ensure they are independent and have no conflict of interest that would compromise the independence of the audit team.

#### 5.4. *Independent scrutiny*

The process of independent scrutiny should be carried out by a person(s) from outside both the audit body and the organisation subject to internal audits with sufficient level of independence and expertise to scrutinise the audit process. Where a body or a committee has been established with a view to independent scrutiny of the audit process, one or more independent persons should be members of such body or committee.

Independent scrutiny should cover the whole audit process, including programming, planning and executing audits, reporting (including approval of reports), corrective action and follow-up. It should also cover the different threats to independence and mechanisms to manage them. Independent scrutiny is not an audit, however, such scrutiny can also be performed using an audit approach. The scrutiny can vary in scope, level of detail and intensity and should provide:

- An objective evaluation of the effectiveness and independence of the audit process and audit body.
- Feed-back for continuous improvement.
- Confidence to the audit body, competent authorities' management and other stakeholders that the audit process is meeting the objectives of Article 6 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

Such scrutiny should be regular but the frequency may vary depending on the results of previous scrutiny and the internal controls applied by the audit body.

The competent authorities should ensure <sup>(6)</sup> that the process of independent scrutiny is documented, including: terms of reference, roles and responsibilities, confidentiality, code of ethics, rights and obligations, reporting and dissemination requirements.

The audit body should take action to remedy any shortcomings identified by the independent scrutiny.

#### 5.5. *Principal objectives*

The purpose of audit systems is to verify competent authorities' compliance with Regulation (EU) 2017/625, and as well the functioning of the official control systems. To this end, and to comply with the requirements of Article 6 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625, the audit system should cover the following three points set out in Article 3(30) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625:

- a) Verification that official controls are carried out in compliance with planned arrangements.

This is to provide assurances that competent authorities meet their general obligations <sup>(7)</sup> and that official controls are carried out as intended and that any instructions or guidelines given to staff carrying out such controls are followed.

Verification of this requirement may largely be addressed by document review, but should also include on-site verification. The audit team should have good generic audit knowledge and skills to address this audit objective.

- b) Verification that planned arrangements are applied effectively.

Effectiveness is the extent to which the official controls produce an (intended) effect / achieve an objective. An adequately functioning official control system is expected, through its planned arrangements to verify compliance with the relevant legal requirements and, when non-compliances are detected, to take actions to mitigate or eliminate these non-compliances within an appropriate time interval. Additionally it should exercise a level of control and enforcement that can act as a deterrent to non-compliance and manage risks to safe food.

Verification of this requirement should include an assessment of the quality, reliability and consistency of the controls and should involve on-site audit activities. The audit team should have the relevant technical expertise in order to address this audit objective.

<sup>(6)</sup> Some degree of flexibility is expected as responsibility for independent scrutiny varies within Member States.

<sup>(7)</sup> Under Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

- c) Verification that planned arrangements are suitable to achieve the objectives of official controls.

Suitability is about the "fitness for purpose" of the design and implementation of the control system to achieve the desired results, namely, the objectives of Regulation (EU) 2017/625, of the Member States' multi-annual national control plans (MANCPs) or national policy objectives. This aspect is particularly relevant when there are indications that controls, performed in accordance with planned arrangements, are not achieving their planned results or objectives.

Verification of this requirement should include assessing the official controls, for example their planning, their frequency / intensity and the methods applied, having regard to the structure and risk profile of the production chain(s) and to production practices and volume. It should also look at constraints that may have influenced the planning or implementation of arrangements <sup>(8)</sup>.

The audit team should have substantial knowledge and understanding of system auditing, together with relevant technical input to address this audit objective.

## 6. Performing an audit

### 6.1. Audit planning and preparation

The auditor (or audit team) should plan the audit in a manner which ensures that the audit is carried out in an efficient and effective way and in a timely manner.

The audit plan should provide an understanding, technical and legal, of the audit topic and the likely auditees, determine the audit objectives and scope, establish the audit criteria, identify key/risk areas, select the audit approach, and estimate resources and timing.

Audit criteria should include objectives stemming from the MANCPs, Regulations (EC) No 178/2002 and (EU) 2017/625, as well as specific requirements of relevant EU legislation and national legislation, if applicable.

Once the audit objectives, scope and audit criteria have been defined, the audit's approach, methodology and techniques should be determined. The purpose of setting out the audit approach is to ensure that the audit objectives are achieved and sufficient appropriate audit evidence is collected to draw valid, reliable audit conclusions. The auditor (or audit team) should develop such approach using professional judgement.

The audit team should, at the audit planning stage, consider what audit evidence should be required. Planning the evidence needed and how, when and where to collect it is an integral part of the audit planning process. The quality of the evidence collected has a direct and significant effect on the audit findings and conclusions.

### 6.2. Conducting the audit

Before commencing audit activity the audit team should ensure that the auditee is fully informed of the purpose, objectives and scope of the audit and of any requirements for contributions or assistance from the auditee, for example access to premises, documents or data either in advance of, or, during the audit.

Holding an opening meeting is a good opportunity to ensure that relevant information is communicated between the audit team and the key auditee staff. This meeting provides a forum to clarify audit objectives, ensure the audit plan is understood, establish working arrangements and address any outstanding issues.

When conducting an audit, the audit team should collect, verify and analyse/evaluate the audit evidence to ensure it is appropriate and sufficient to achieve the audit objectives, in particular on the compliance with the planned arrangements, the effectiveness of the implementation and the suitability of the planned arrangements to achieve the stated objectives. These activities should be recorded.

Audit evidence needs to be compared to the audit criteria and the audit objectives to allow the audit team produce audit findings and present persuasive audit conclusions. Only audit evidence that is appropriate and sufficient will effectively support audit findings, conclusions and recommendations (where applicable) which are capable of withstanding challenge and satisfy internal and external review.

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<sup>(8)</sup> Root cause analysis can be an important tool in assessing suitability.

In the closing meeting, the audit team presents the results of the audit and there should be an opportunity for:

- Discussion of preliminary findings and conclusions with the management of the auditee and obtaining management feedback on them.
- The auditee to correct misunderstandings and to discuss the preliminary findings and conclusions and to provide further information or clarification in support of their position.
- The auditee to provide their views on the conduct of the audit.

The audit team may review the preliminary findings and conclusions based on further analysis of the evidence collected or further evidence to be submitted.

Any relevant auditee feedback provided should be recorded and considered when reporting on the audit and in the conduct of future audits.

### 6.3. *Audit reporting*

The audit report is a very important part of the audit to:

- Provide relevant assurances about the functioning of the processes subject to audit.
- Identify and disseminate good practices.
- Identify areas of non-compliance or weakness and bring them to the attention of the auditee for corrective and, or, preventive action.
- Prepare a basis for follow-up of the action taken by the auditee in response to audit recommendations.
- Provide an opportunity to communicate with wider stakeholders, where applicable.

An audit report should be objective, persuasive and timely.

In order to be objective the audit team should, when reporting, present relevant evidence including any that may be opposed to or not supportive of its opinion or conclusion. Selective presentation of evidence should be avoided and opinions of the audit team not supported by sound evidence should not be reflected in the report. Reporting should be balanced and not focus exclusively on negative elements. The report should contain positive statements where the auditee's activities are found to be well organised and performed.

A persuasive audit establishes its credibility by presenting valid, evidence-based findings, logical conclusions and practical, realistic and relevant recommendations. The report should be logically structured leading the reader through the process from the purpose of the audit, the audit objectives and scope through findings and conclusions to recommendations. There should be clear coherence between evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions should address the compliance with the planned arrangements, the effectiveness of the implementation, and the suitability of the planned arrangements to achieve the stated objectives, as appropriate (see section 5.5). They should be based on objective evidence. In particular, where conclusions are drawn as to the planned arrangements' suitability to achieve the stated objectives, evidence may be obtained from the compilation and analysis of results from several audits. In this case conclusions should extend beyond the boundaries of individual establishments, units of authorities and authorities.

Recommendations should be directed at eliminating or correcting the reasons why the auditee failed to meet the audit criteria. Recommendations should not prescribe the action to be taken by the auditee but instead specify the result to be achieved by the auditees' intervention of corrective and/or preventive action.

Minimum content of the report should include:

- the identification of audit, dates, places, and the auditee
- the audit objectives, scope, methodology, and criteria
- the audit findings (and related evidence), conclusions and, where applicable, recommendations.

Depending on the policy of the audit body the audit team may, or may not, be identified in the report.

#### 6.4. Follow-up of audit output

Where appropriate, an action plan should be drawn up and delivered by the auditee. It should propose time-bound corrective and preventive actions <sup>(9)</sup> to address any recommendation resulting from the audit. The audit team <sup>(10)</sup> should assess the suitability of the action plan and may be involved in verifying its subsequent implementation:

- The action plan enables the audit team to assess whether the proposed corrective and preventive action is sufficient to address the recommendations of the audit report. Action plans should include risk-based prioritisation, responsibility for implementation and time frames for completion of corrective and preventive action. A variety of action plans could be considered satisfactory. It is for the auditee to choose from the various options available.
- Corrective and preventive action should not be confined to addressing specific technical requirements but should, where appropriate, include system-wide measures (for example communication, cooperation, coordination, reviewing and streamlining of control processes). A root cause analysis of any non-compliance should be conducted by the auditee in order to determine the most appropriate corrective and preventive action. Any differences of opinion between the auditee and audit team should be resolved.
- Close-out: Mechanisms should be established to ensure that action plans are appropriate and that corrective and preventive actions are effectively completed in a timely manner. Procedures for verifying the close out of the action plan should be agreed between the auditee and the audit team.

### 7. Review and dissemination of audit results

Audit results and, where applicable, feedback should be considered while planning future audit programmes and in the context of the review of the audit process.

The implications of audit findings or non-compliances for other sectors, regions or other competent authorities should be considered, particularly in Member States where controls are performed by several competent authorities or are decentralised.

Internal audits provide an independent evaluation of the effectiveness and suitability of the official controls to achieve objectives. Therefore, audit results should be made available to Member States' relevant competent authorities to assist them in developing and improving their control systems and reviewing their MANCPs.

Audit results may also identify examples of best practice, which should be disseminated. These examples may be used by the auditee in other areas or by other entities engaged in similar activities to improve their processes. For this purpose, reports should be made available to other sectors and regions within the Member State and to the Commission, when requested.

### 8. Other issues

#### 8.1. Resources

Member States should ensure that competent authorities have sufficient implementing powers (legal and administrative), and resources, with the appropriate competences, to establish, implement and maintain an effective audit system.

The human and related resources required to manage, monitor and review the audit process should be made available, bearing in mind that all competent authorities and their control activities within Regulation (EU) 2017/625 should be audited. In order to have the necessary expertise to fulfil the purpose and scope of the audit and audit programme(s), the audit team may include any combination of general and technical specialist auditors and technical experts.

General guidance on the resources required for auditing is provided in ISO 19011.

<sup>(9)</sup> In this context "corrective action" means action to eliminate the cause of a non-conformity and to prevent recurrence while "preventive action" means action to eliminate the cause of a potential non-conformity (to prevent occurrence of a non-conformity) or other potential undesirable situation.

<sup>(10)</sup> Some degree of flexibility is expected as responsibility for follow-up varies between Member States' competent authorities.

## 8.2. Auditor competence

Auditor competence and selection criteria should be defined under the following headings:

- Generic knowledge and skills,
- Audit principles, procedures and techniques; management/organisational skills,
- Specific technical knowledge and skills,
- Personal attributes <sup>(1)</sup>,
- Education,
- Work experience,
- Auditor training and experience.

It is essential to put a mechanism in place to ensure auditors are consistent and their competencies are maintained. Competencies required by audit teams may vary depending on the area they are auditing within the control or supervision systems. The auditors should have the required technical knowledge and skills and be familiar with the subject matters for the training of staff performing official controls and other official activities, set out in Chapter I of Annex II to Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Auditors should have an independent mind, be ethical, open-minded, diplomatic, observant, perceptive, versatile, tenacious, decisive, assertive, self-reliant and open to improvement.



**Non-opposition to a notified concentration**  
**(Case M.10116 — ION/NN/bpfBOUW/IRP JV)**

(Text with EEA relevance)

(2021/C 66/03)

On 17 February 2021, the Commission decided not to oppose the above notified concentration and to declare it compatible with the internal market. This decision is based on Article 6(1)(b) of Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 <sup>(1)</sup>. The full text of the decision is available only in English and will be made public after it is cleared of any business secrets it may contain. It will be available:

- in the merger section of the Competition website of the Commission (<http://ec.europa.eu/competition/mergers/cases/>). This website provides various facilities to help locate individual merger decisions, including company, case number, date and sectoral indexes,
- in electronic form on the EUR-Lex website (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html?locale=en>) under document number 32021M10116. EUR-Lex is the online access to European law.

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 24, 29.1.2004, p. 1.

**Non-opposition to a notified concentration****(Case M.10128 — Stirling Square Capital Partners/TA Associates/Glenigan)****(Text with EEA relevance)**

(2021/C 66/04)

On 19 February 2021, the Commission decided not to oppose the above notified concentration and to declare it compatible with the internal market. This decision is based on Article 6(1)(b) of Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 <sup>(1)</sup>. The full text of the decision is available only in English and will be made public after it is cleared of any business secrets it may contain. It will be available:

- in the merger section of the Competition website of the Commission (<http://ec.europa.eu/competition/mergers/cases/>). This website provides various facilities to help locate individual merger decisions, including company, case number, date and sectoral indexes,
- in electronic form on the EUR-Lex website (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html?locale=en>) under document number 32021M10128. EUR-Lex is the online access to European law.

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 24, 29.1.2004, p. 1.

**Non-opposition to a notified concentration**  
**(Case M.10064 — AnaCap/Carrefour/Market Pay)**

(Text with EEA relevance)

(2021/C 66/05)

On 19 February 2021, the Commission decided not to oppose the above notified concentration and to declare it compatible with the internal market. This decision is based on Article 6(1)(b) of Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 <sup>(1)</sup>. The full text of the decision is available only in English and will be made public after it is cleared of any business secrets it may contain. It will be available:

- in the merger section of the Competition website of the Commission (<http://ec.europa.eu/competition/mergers/cases/>). This website provides various facilities to help locate individual merger decisions, including company, case number, date and sectoral indexes,
- in electronic form on the EUR-Lex website (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html?locale=en>) under document number 32021M10064. EUR-Lex is the online access to European law.

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 24, 29.1.2004, p. 1.

**Non-opposition to a notified concentration**  
**(Case M.10072 — Sojitz/Eneos/Edenvale Solar Park)**

(Text with EEA relevance)

(2021/C 66/06)

On 15 February 2021, the Commission decided not to oppose the above notified concentration and to declare it compatible with the internal market. This decision is based on Article 6(1)(b) of Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 <sup>(1)</sup>. The full text of the decision is available only in English and will be made public after it is cleared of any business secrets it may contain. It will be available:

- in the merger section of the Competition website of the Commission (<http://ec.europa.eu/competition/mergers/cases/>). This website provides various facilities to help locate individual merger decisions, including company, case number, date and sectoral indexes,
- in electronic form on the EUR-Lex website (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html?locale=en>) under document number 32021M10072. EUR-Lex is the online access to European law.

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 24, 29.1.2004, p. 1.

**Non-opposition to a notified concentration**  
**(Case M.10004 — EQT/Zentricity/Cajelo/Recipharm)**

(Text with EEA relevance)

(2021/C 66/07)

On 10 February 2021, the Commission decided not to oppose the above notified concentration and to declare it compatible with the internal market. This decision is based on Article 6(1)(b) of Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 <sup>(1)</sup>. The full text of the decision is available only in English and will be made public after it is cleared of any business secrets it may contain. It will be available:

- in the merger section of the Competition website of the Commission (<http://ec.europa.eu/competition/mergers/cases/>). This website provides various facilities to help locate individual merger decisions, including company, case number, date and sectoral indexes,
- in electronic form on the EUR-Lex website (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html?locale=en>) under document number 32021M10004. EUR-Lex is the online access to European law.

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 24, 29.1.2004, p. 1.

**Non-opposition to a notified concentration****(Case M.10109 — Cinven/BCI/Compre)****(Text with EEA relevance)**

(2021/C 66/08)

On 17 February 2021, the Commission decided not to oppose the above notified concentration and to declare it compatible with the internal market. This decision is based on Article 6(1)(b) of Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 <sup>(1)</sup>. The full text of the decision is available only in English and will be made public after it is cleared of any business secrets it may contain. It will be available:

- in the merger section of the Competition website of the Commission (<http://ec.europa.eu/competition/mergers/cases/>). This website provides various facilities to help locate individual merger decisions, including company, case number, date and sectoral indexes,
- in electronic form on the EUR-Lex website (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html?locale=en>) under document number 32021M10109. EUR-Lex is the online access to European law.

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 24, 29.1.2004, p. 1.

**Non-opposition to a notified concentration****(Case M.10145 — American Industrial Partners/Personal Care Business of Domtar)****(Text with EEA relevance)**

(2021/C 66/09)

On 4 February 2021, the Commission decided not to oppose the above notified concentration and to declare it compatible with the internal market. This decision is based on Article 6(1)(b) of Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 <sup>(1)</sup>. The full text of the decision is available only in English and will be made public after it is cleared of any business secrets it may contain. It will be available:

- in the merger section of the Competition website of the Commission (<http://ec.europa.eu/competition/mergers/cases/>). This website provides various facilities to help locate individual merger decisions, including company, case number, date and sectoral indexes,
- in electronic form on the EUR-Lex website (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html?locale=en>) under document number 32021M10145. EUR-Lex is the online access to European law.

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 24, 29.1.2004, p. 1.

## IV

*(Notices)*NOTICES FROM EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS, BODIES, OFFICES AND  
AGENCIES

## COUNCIL

**Council conclusions****on the revised EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes**

(2021/C 66/10)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

1. APPRECIATES the continuous productive cooperation on tax matters between the EU Code of Conduct Group on Business Taxation ("Code of Conduct Group") and most jurisdictions around the world in order to promote globally the tax good governance principles;
2. WELCOMES the progress in the relevant jurisdictions through the active steps taken by the agreed deadlines towards resolving the deficiencies that the Code of Conduct Group had identified and UNDERLINES that such steps contribute to the strengthening of tax good governance mechanisms, fair taxation, global tax transparency and fight against tax fraud, evasion and avoidance, both at the EU level and globally;
3. ACKNOWLEDGES that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an impact on the ability of many jurisdictions to take on new commitments or deliver on their past commitments, as well as on the overall working methods of the Code of Conduct Group;
4. INVITES the Group to continue to make progress on all the outstanding issues that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with a view to completing them as quickly as possible, and to start the discussion on possible requests for commitments from jurisdictions when appropriate;
5. REGRETS that some jurisdictions have not taken sufficient steps to implement their commitments by the agreed deadline, or engaged in a meaningful dialogue that could lead to such commitments and INVITES these jurisdictions to engage with the Code of Conduct Group in order to resolve the remaining issues;
6. REGRETS in particular that Turkey has not made material progress in the effective implementation of the automatic exchange of information with all EU Member States, and has not therefore yet fulfilled all commitments it had taken to implement tax good governance principles as set out in the Report of the Code of Conduct group; TAKES NOTE that the exchange of information has been activated with 21 EU Member States and is scheduled to begin as of 2022 with 5 EU Member States; REGRETS that no evidence has been provided that effective exchange of data from Turkey took place to any of the Member States; STRESSES that no progress has been made with regard to the exchange of information with one Member State; REITERATES that the effective exchange of information with all Member States is a condition for Turkey to fulfil criterion 1.1 of the EU list in accordance with the Council conclusions of February 2020; CALLS on Turkey to fully commit on a high political level by 31 May 2021 to effectively activate its automatic information exchange relationship with the 6 remaining Member States by 30 June 2021; For all 27 Member States



the information for fiscal year 2019 has to be sent no later than by 1 September 2021 and the information for fiscal years 2020 and 2021 has to be sent according to the OECD calendar for automatic exchange of information and in any case no later than by, respectively, 30 September 2021 and 30 September 2022; STATES that failure to comply with any of the five above stated deadlines would fulfil the conditions for Turkey to be listed in Annex I under criterion 1.1; INVITES the Group to notify this request to Turkey, to continue monitoring the progress concerning the effective exchange of information with all Member States and inform the Council about developments in this regard, while maintaining its dialogue with Turkey on this matter and STATES that the Council will take the necessary decision on the listing in October 2021 based on the analysis of the Group on Turkey's compliance and will reexamine this decision after the remaining above mentioned deadline;

7. APPROVES the COCG Report set out in doc. 6223/21;
  8. APPROVES accordingly the revised EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes ('EU list') set out in Annex I;
  9. ENDORSES the state of play set out in Annex II with respect to commitments taken by cooperative jurisdictions to implement tax good governance principles;
  10. INVITES the EU institutions and Member States, as appropriate, to continue taking the revised EU list set out in Annex I into account in foreign policy, economic relations and development cooperation with the relevant third countries, without prejudice to the respective spheres of competence of the Member States and of the Union as resulting from the Treaties.
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## ANNEX I

**The EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes****1. American Samoa**

American Samoa does not apply any automatic exchange of financial information, has not signed and ratified, including through the jurisdiction they are dependent on, the OECD Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance as amended, did not commit to apply the BEPS minimum standards and did not commit to addressing these issues.

**2. Anguilla**

Anguilla does not have a rating of at least 'Largely Compliant' by the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes for Exchange of Information on Request and has not resolved this issue yet.

**3. Dominica**

Dominica does not have a rating of at least 'Largely Compliant' by the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes for Exchange of Information on Request and has not resolved this issue yet.

**4. Fiji**

Fiji is not a member of the Global Forum on transparency and exchange of information for tax purposes ('Global Forum'), has not signed and ratified the OECD Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance as amended, has harmful preferential tax regimes, has not become a member of the Inclusive Framework on BEPS or implemented OECD anti-BEPS minimum standard, and has not resolved these issues yet.

**5. Guam**

Guam does not apply any automatic exchange of financial information, has not signed and ratified, including through the jurisdiction they are dependent on, the OECD Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance as amended, did not commit to apply the BEPS minimum standards and did not commit to addressing these issues.

**6. Palau**

Palau does not apply any automatic exchange of financial information, has not signed and ratified the OECD Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance as amended, and has not resolved these issues yet.

**7. Panama**

Panama does not have a rating of at least 'Largely Compliant' by the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes for Exchange of Information on Request and has not resolved this issue yet.

**8. Samoa**

Samoa has a harmful preferential tax regime and has not resolved this issue yet.

**9. Seychelles**

Seychelles has harmful preferential tax regimes and has not resolved these issues yet.

Furthermore, Seychelles does not have a rating of at least 'Largely Compliant' by the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes for Exchange of Information on Request and has not resolved this issue yet.

**10. Trinidad and Tobago**

Trinidad and Tobago does not apply any automatic exchange of financial information, does not have a rating of at least 'Largely Compliant' by the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes for Exchange of Information on Request, has not signed and ratified the OECD Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance as amended, has harmful preferential tax regimes, and has not resolved these issues yet.

**11. US Virgin Islands**

US Virgin Islands does not apply any automatic exchange of financial information, has not signed and ratified, including through the jurisdiction they are dependent on, the OECD Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance as amended, has harmful preferential tax regimes, did not commit to apply the BEPS minimum standards and did not commit to addressing these issues.

**12. Vanuatu**

Vanuatu does not have a rating of at least 'Largely Compliant' by the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes for Exchange of Information on Request, facilitates offshore structures and arrangements aimed at attracting profits without real economic substance and has not resolved these issues yet.

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## ANNEX II

**State of play of the cooperation with the EU with respect to commitments taken by cooperative jurisdictions to implement tax good governance principles****1. Transparency****1.1. Commitment to implement the automatic exchange of information, either by signing the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement or through bilateral agreements**

The following jurisdiction is expected to commit at a high political level by 31 May 2021 and to effectively activate its automatic information exchange relationship with all 27 Member States by 30 June 2021 according to the timeline referred to in paragraph 6 of these Council conclusions.

**Turkey****1.2. Membership of the Global Forum on transparency and exchange of information for tax purposes ('Global Forum') and satisfactory rating in relation to exchange of information on request**

The following jurisdiction, which committed to have a sufficient rating by the end of 2018, is waiting for a supplementary review by the Global Forum:

**Turkey**

The following developing country without a financial centre, which committed to have a sufficient rating by the end of 2019, is waiting for a supplementary review by the Global Forum:

**Botswana**

The following jurisdiction is waiting for a supplementary review by the Global Forum:

**Barbados****1.3. Signatory and ratification of the OECD Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance (MAC) or network of agreements covering all EU Member States**

The following developing countries without a financial centre, which have made meaningful progress in the delivery of their commitments, were granted until 31 December 2020 to sign the MAC and until 31 December 2021 to ratify the MAC:

**Botswana, Eswatini, Jordan, Thailand**

The following developing country without a financial centre, which has made progress in the delivery of its commitment, was granted until 30 April 2021 to sign the MAC and until 31 December 2021 to ratify the MAC:

**Maldives****2. Fair Taxation****2.1. Existence of harmful tax regimes**

The following jurisdiction, which committed to amend or abolish its harmful tax regime by end 2019 but was prevented from doing so due to a delayed process in the OECD Forum on Harmful Tax Practices, was granted until the end of 2021 to adapt its legislation:

**Australia**

The following jurisdiction, which has made meaningful progress in the delivery of its commitment to amend or abolish its harmful tax regime, was granted until 31 December 2021 to do so:

**Jordan**

The following jurisdiction, which committed to amend or abolish its harmful tax regime, was granted until 31 December 2022 to adapt its legislation:

**Jamaica**  

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**Notice for the attention of persons and entities subject to the restrictive measures provided for in Council Decision 2012/642/CFSP and in Council Regulation (EC) No 765/2006 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Belarus**

(2021/C 66/11)

The following information is brought to the attention of the persons and entities designated in the Annex to Council Decision 2012/642/CFSP <sup>(1)</sup>, as amended by Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/353 <sup>(2)</sup>, and in Annex I to Council Regulation (EC) No 765/2006 <sup>(3)</sup>, as implemented by Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/339 <sup>(4)</sup>, concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Belarus.

The Council of the European Union, after having reviewed the list of persons and entities designated in the above-mentioned Annexes, has determined that the restrictive measures provided for in Decision 2012/642/CFSP and Regulation (EC) No 765/2006 should continue to apply to those persons and entities. The grounds for designations of those persons and entities appear in the relevant entries in those Annexes.

The attention of the persons and entities concerned is drawn to the possibility of making an application to the competent authorities of the relevant Member State(s) as indicated in the websites in Annex II to Regulation (EC) No 765/2006, in order to obtain an authorisation to use frozen funds for basic needs or specific payments (cf. Article 3 of the Regulation).

The persons and entities concerned may submit a request to the Council before 30 November 2021, together with supporting documentation that the decision to include them on the above-mentioned list should be reconsidered, to the following address:

Council of the European Union  
General Secretariat  
RELEX.1.C  
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 175  
1048 Bruxelles/Brussel  
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

Email: [sanctions@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:sanctions@consilium.europa.eu)

Any observations received will be taken into account for the purpose of the Council's periodic review, pursuant to Article 8(2) of Decision 2012/642/CFSP and Article 8a(4) of Regulation (EC) No 765/2006, of the list of designated persons and entities.

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 285, 17.10.2012, p. 1.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ L 68, 26.2.2021, p. 189

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ L 134, 20.5.2006, p. 1.

<sup>(4)</sup> OJ L 68, 26.2.2021, p. 29.

**Notice for the attention of the data subjects to whom the restrictive measures provided for in Council Decision 2012/642/CFSP and Council Regulation (EC) No 765/2006 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Belarus apply**

(2021/C 66/12)

The attention of data subjects is drawn to the following information in accordance with Article 16 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council <sup>(1)</sup>.

The legal basis for this processing operation are Council Decision 2012/642/CFSP <sup>(2)</sup>, as amended by Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/353 <sup>(3)</sup>, and Council Regulation (EC) No 765/2006 <sup>(4)</sup>, as implemented by Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/339 <sup>(5)</sup>.

The controller of this processing operation is the Department RELEX.1.C in the Directorate-General for External Relations - RELEX of the General Secretariat of the Council (GSC), that can be contacted at:

Council of the European Union  
General Secretariat  
RELEX.1.C  
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 175  
1048 Bruxelles/Brussel  
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

Email: [sanctions@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:sanctions@consilium.europa.eu)

The GSC's Data Protection Officer can be contacted at:

Data Protection Officer

[data.protection@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:data.protection@consilium.europa.eu)

The purpose of the processing operation is the establishment and updating of the list of persons subject to restrictive measures in accordance with Decision 2012/642/CFSP, as amended by Decision (CFSP) 2021/353, and Regulation (EC) No 765/2006, as implemented by Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/339.

The data subjects are the natural persons who fulfil the listing criteria as laid down in Decision 2012/642/CFSP and Regulation (EC) No 765/2006.

The personal data collected includes data necessary for the correct identification of the person concerned, the statement of reasons and any other data related thereto.

The personal data collected may be shared as necessary with the European External Action Service and the Commission.

Without prejudice to restrictions pursuant to Article 25 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1725, the exercise of the rights of the data subjects such as the right of access, as well as the rights to rectification or to object will be answered in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1725.

Personal data will be retained for 5 years from the moment the data subject has been removed from the list of persons subject to the restrictive measures or the validity of the measure has expired, or for the duration of court proceedings in the event they had been started.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 39.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ L 285, 17.10.2012, p. 1.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ L 68, 26.2.2021, p. 189

<sup>(4)</sup> OJ L 134, 20.5.2006, p. 1.

<sup>(5)</sup> OJ L 68, 26.2.2021, p. 29.

Without prejudice to any judicial, administrative or non-judicial remedy, data subjects may lodge a complaint with the European Data Protection Supervisor in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 ([edps@edps.europa.eu](mailto:edps@edps.europa.eu)).

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# EUROPEAN COMMISSION

## Euro exchange rates <sup>(1)</sup>

25 February 2021

(2021/C 66/13)

### 1 euro =

Currency	Exchange rate	Currency	Exchange rate		
USD	US dollar	1,2225	CAD	Canadian dollar	1,5257
JPY	Japanese yen	129,73	HKD	Hong Kong dollar	9,4793
DKK	Danish krone	7,4363	NZD	New Zealand dollar	1,6409
GBP	Pound sterling	0,86408	SGD	Singapore dollar	1,6120
SEK	Swedish krona	10,0668	KRW	South Korean won	1 359,14
CHF	Swiss franc	1,1076	ZAR	South African rand	18,1101
ISK	Iceland króna	153,30	CNY	Chinese yuan renminbi	7,8898
NOK	Norwegian krone	10,2275	HRK	Croatian kuna	7,5895
BGN	Bulgarian lev	1,9558	IDR	Indonesian rupiah	17 352,10
CZK	Czech koruna	26,110	MYR	Malaysian ringgit	4,9383
HUF	Hungarian forint	360,18	PHP	Philippine peso	59,492
PLN	Polish zloty	4,5122	RUB	Russian rouble	90,3519
RON	Romanian leu	4,8748	THB	Thai baht	36,858
TRY	Turkish lira	8,8344	BRL	Brazilian real	6,6663
AUD	Australian dollar	1,5317	MXN	Mexican peso	25,3424
			INR	Indian rupee	88,7940

<sup>(1)</sup> Source: reference exchange rate published by the ECB.

## V

*(Announcements)*PROCEDURES RELATING TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON  
COMMERCIAL POLICY

## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

**Notice of initiation concerning the possible extension of the safeguard measure applicable to imports  
of certain steel products**

(2021/C 66/14)

On 1 February 2019, the European Commission ('the Commission') imposed a definitive safeguard measure on certain steel products by Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/159<sup>(1)</sup>. The measure currently in force consists of a tariff-rate quota ('TRQ'), based on historical imports, which is applicable to imports into the Union of each of the 26 product categories comprising the product concerned. Where the relevant tariff-rate quota is exhausted, an additional duty of 25 % is levied on the net, free-at-Union-frontier price.

The safeguard measure was imposed for an initial period of three years, i.e. until 30 June 2021.

**1. Request for an extension of the measure**

The Commission received a substantiated request by 12 Member States on 15 January 2021 to examine pursuant to Article 19 of Regulation (EU) 2015/478 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>(2)</sup> and Article 16 of Regulation (EU) 2015/755 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>(3)</sup> whether the current safeguard measure should be extended in time.

The request contains evidence suggesting that the safeguard measure continues to be necessary to prevent or remedy serious injury and that Union producers are adjusting. In particular, the request contains information regarding negative performance of certain key injury indicators and the existence of continuous significant import pressure from third countries. The request further provides elements pointing to the fact that global overcapacity remains at a very high level, that a large number of trade restrictive measures and trade defence measures by third countries continue being adopted, and that there are no elements suggesting that the US will be removing the Section 232 measures on steel. Hence the request argues that the risk of trade diversion continues and that if the measure was lifted, the Union industry would face a flood of imports that would have a very negative impact on its economic performance. Moreover, the request includes examples pertaining to adjustments undertaken by the Union producers. The Commission considered that the information provided, including the sources and supporting evidence, constitutes sufficient basis to initiate an investigation.

<sup>(1)</sup> Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/159 of 31 January 2019 imposing definitive safeguard measures against imports of certain steel products (OJ L 31, 1.2.2019, p. 27).

<sup>(2)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2015/478 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2015 on common rules for imports (OJ L 83, 27.3.2015, p. 16).

<sup>(3)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2015/755 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2015 on common rules for imports from certain third countries (OJ L 123, 19.5.2015, p. 33).

## 2. Scope and objective of the investigation

In accordance with Article 19 of Regulation (EU) 2015/478 and Article 16 of Regulation (EU) 2015/755, the initial period of duration of a safeguard measure may be extended. In order to establish whether such an extension is warranted, the Commission should carry out an investigation pursuant to Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 2015/478 and Article 3 of Regulation (EU) 2015/755 respectively.

In the course of the investigation, the Commission will focus its assessment, notably, on whether the safeguard measure continues to be necessary to prevent or remedy serious injury, whether there is evidence that Union producers are adjusting, and whether a prolongation would be in the Union interest. The investigation will also determine the appropriate duration of the extension (if any).

## 3. Product under investigation

The product under investigation consists of certain steel products as listed in the Annex to this Notice.

## 4. Procedure

Having determined that there is sufficient evidence at its disposal, the Commission hereby initiates an investigation to determine whether to extend the duration of the current safeguard measure on certain steel products.

### 4.1. Questionnaire replies (Union producers only)

To carry out a proper assessment regarding the necessity to extend the duration of the current safeguard measure to prevent or remedy serious injury, the Commission deems it necessary to collect specific data from the Union industry. This data includes, inter alia, the performance of key economic and financial indicators for the period considered (2018-2020).

Union producers are thus requested to fill in and submit, through their respective Union associations, the questionnaires within 21 days from the publication of this Notice. A template of the relevant questionnaire is available at: [https://trade.ec.europa.eu/tdi/case\\_details.cfm?id=2519](https://trade.ec.europa.eu/tdi/case_details.cfm?id=2519)

### 4.2. Written submissions

In order to obtain all relevant information deemed necessary for the investigation, interested parties, i.e. parties that have an objective link between their activities and the product under investigation, are hereby invited to make their views known, submit information and provide supporting evidence to the Commission in writing within 15 days of the date of publication of this Notice in the *Official Journal of the European Union*. All written submissions are to be made via TRON.tdi (<https://tron.trade.ec.europa.eu/tron/TDI>). See Section 4.6 for further details.

Parties making a submission are requested to clearly state in their correspondence which of the below issue(s) is (are) concerned by their submission, and make their arguments under the following headings:

- (a) Whether the measure continues to be necessary, and why;
- (b) Union interest considerations;
- (c) Other.

For the sake of efficiency, and as it has done in previous review investigations, the Commission will automatically extend the status of interested party to all stakeholders that hold such status under the current safeguard measure. However, this provision will not apply to Powers of Attorney ('PoA').

For those companies, associations or third country governments that wish to participate in the proceeding triggered by the publication of this Notice through external legal representatives, presentation of a PoA specific to this proceeding is necessary.

Parties wishing to participate in the proceeding and which are currently not registered as interested parties to the case are invited to explain their interest and links with the case when making a submission via TRON.

#### 4.3. Possibility to comment on other parties' submissions

To guarantee the rights of defence, interested parties should have the possibility to comment on the information submitted by other interested parties. When doing so, interested parties may only address the issues raised in the other interested parties' submissions and may not raise new issues. In a rebuttal, interested parties should indicate specifically which party (-ies) comments they are rebutting, and follow the same abovementioned headings structure.

Such comments must reach the Commission within 10 days from the moment the submissions mentioned in Section 4.2 as well as questionnaire replies from Union producers are made available for inspection by interested parties in TRON. The Commission will duly inform interested parties, via TRON, when this second stage of the written proceeding is triggered.

Access to the file available for inspection for interested parties is made via Tron.tdi at the following address: <https://tron.trade.ec.europa.eu/tron/TDI> Please follow the instructions on that page to get access.

The outlined timeframe is without prejudice to the Commission's right to request additional information from interested parties in duly justified cases.

#### 4.4. Possibility to be heard by the Commission investigating services

All interested parties may request to be heard by the Commission investigation services. Any request to be heard must be made in writing within 15 days from the publication of this Notice in the Official Journal, and must specify the reasons for the request, as well as a summary of what the interested party wishes to discuss at the hearing.

Interested parties are informed, however, that given the need to complete the investigation and make a determination by 30 June 2021 at the latest (see Section 5 below), the likely high number of interested parties and the fact that these interested parties will be given the possibility to comment on other parties' submissions, which will ensure sufficient opportunities to defend and make their views known, the Commission intends to carry out the investigation in written form, without organising oral hearings unless interested parties can show that there is a special need to be heard in oral form.

#### 4.5. Submission of information and extension to time limits specified in this Notice

As a rule, interested parties may only submit information within the timeframes specified in this Notice. Any extension to the time limits provided for in this Notice can only be requested in exceptional circumstances and will only be granted if duly justified. Duly justified exceptional extensions to the deadline to make submission will normally be limited to 3 additional days as a maximum.

#### 4.6. Instructions for making written submissions and sending completed questionnaires and correspondence

Information submitted to the Commission for the purpose of trade defence proceeding shall be free from copyrights. Interested parties, before submitting to the Commission information and/or data which is subject to third party copyrights, must request specific permission to the copyright holder explicitly allowing the Commission (a) to use the information and data for the purpose of this trade defence proceeding; and (b) to provide the information and/or data to interested parties to this investigation in a form that allows them to exercise their rights of defence.

All written submissions provided by interested parties for which confidential treatment is requested shall be labelled 'Limited' <sup>(4)</sup>. Parties submitting information in the course of this investigation are invited to reason their request for confidential treatment.

Parties providing 'Limited' information are required to furnish non-confidential summaries of it pursuant to Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2015/478 <sup>(5)</sup> and Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 2015/755 <sup>(6)</sup>, which will be labelled 'For inspection by interested parties'. Those summaries should be sufficiently detailed to permit a reasonable understanding of the substance of the information submitted in confidence and must reach the Commission at the same time with the 'Limited' version.

<sup>(4)</sup> A 'Limited' document is a document which is considered confidential pursuant to Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2015/478, Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 2015/755 and Article 3.2 of the WTO Agreement on Safeguards. It is also a document protected pursuant to Article 4 of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 145, 31.5.2001, p. 43).

<sup>(5)</sup> OJ L83, 27.03.2015, p. 16.

<sup>(6)</sup> OJ L123, 19.5.2015, p. 33.

If a party providing confidential information fails to show good cause for a confidential treatment request or does not furnish a non-confidential summary of it in the requested format and quality, the Commission may disregard such information unless it can be satisfactorily demonstrated from appropriate sources that the information is correct.

Interested parties are invited to make all submissions and requests via TRON.tdi (<https://tron.trade.ec.europa.eu/tron/TDI>) including scanned powers of attorney. By using TRON.tdi or e-mail, interested parties express their agreement with the rules applicable to electronic submissions contained in the document 'CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN TRADE DEFENCE CASES' published on the website of the Directorate-General for Trade: [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2011/june/tradoc\\_148003.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2011/june/tradoc_148003.pdf). The interested parties must indicate their name, address, telephone and a valid e-mail address and they should ensure that the provided e-mail address is a functioning official business email which is checked on a daily basis. Once contact details are provided, the Commission will communicate with interested parties by TRON.tdi or email only, unless they explicitly request to receive all documents from the Commission by another means of communication or unless the nature of the document to be sent requires the use of a registered mail. For further rules and information concerning correspondence with the Commission including principles that apply to submissions via TRON.tdi, interested parties should consult the communication instructions with interested parties referred to above.

Commission address for correspondence:

European Commission  
Directorate-General for Trade  
Directorate G, unit G5  
Office: CHAR 03/66  
1049 Bruxelles/Brussel  
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

TRON.tdi: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/tron/tdi>

Email address: [TRADE-SAFE009-REVIEW@ec.europa.eu](mailto:TRADE-SAFE009-REVIEW@ec.europa.eu)

## 5. Schedule of the investigation

The measure in place will lapse on 30 June 2021, unless there is a decision to extend them. Therefore, any decision resulting from this proceeding should take place before that date.

## 6. Non-cooperation

In cases where any interested party does not provide the necessary information within the time limits, or significantly impedes the investigation, findings may be made on the basis of facts available, in accordance with Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 2015/478 and Article 3 of Regulation (EU) 2015/755. Where it is found that any interested party has supplied false or misleading information, the information may be disregarded and use may be made of facts available.

## 7. Hearing Officer

The Hearing Officer acts as an interface between the interested parties and the Commission investigation services. The Hearing Officer reviews requests for access to the file, disputes regarding the confidentiality of documents, requests for extension of time limits and any other request concerning the rights of defence of interested parties and third parties as may arise during the proceeding.

Interested parties may request an intervention of the Hearing Officer. In principle, these interventions shall be limited to the issues that have arisen during the current review proceeding.

A request for an intervention of the Hearing Officer should be made in writing and should specify the reasons for the request. Interested parties are invited to follow the timeframes set out in Section 4.1 to Section 4.3 of this Notice for submissions to the Commission when requesting the intervention to the Hearing Officer. Where such requests are submitted outside the relevant timeframes, the Hearing Officer may also examine the reasons for such late requests, having due regard to the interests of good administration and the timely completion of the investigation.

For further information and contact details interested parties may consult the Hearing Officer's web pages on DG Trade's website: <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/trade-policy-and-you/contacts/hearing-officer/>

## 8. Processing of personal data

Any personal data collected in this investigation will be treated in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council <sup>(7)</sup>.

A data protection notice that informs all individuals of the processing of personal data in the framework of Commission's trade defence activities is available on DG Trade's website: <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/html/157639.htm>

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<sup>(7)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC (OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 39).

## ANNEX

Product category Number	Product category
1	Non Alloy and Other Alloy Hot Rolled Sheets and Strips
2	Non Alloy and Other Alloy Cold Rolled Sheets
3.A	Electrical Sheets (other than GOES)
3.B	
4.A	Metallic Coated Sheets
4.B	
5	Organic Coated Sheets
6	Tin Mill products
7	Non Alloy and Other Alloy Quarto Plates
8	Stainless Hot Rolled Sheets and Strips
9	Stainless Cold Rolled Sheets and Strips
10	Stainless Hot Rolled Quarto Plates
12	Non Alloy and Other Alloy Merchant Bars and Light Sections
13	Rebars
14	Stainless Bars and Light Sections
15	Stainless Wire Rod
16	Non Alloy and Other Alloy Wire Rod
17	Angles, Shapes and Sections of Iron or Non Alloy Steel
18	Sheet Piling
19	Railway Material
20	Gas pipes
21	Hollow sections
22	Seamless Stainless Tubes and Pipes
24	Other Seamless Tubes
25A	Large welded tubes
25B	
26	Other welded pipes
27	Non-alloy and other alloy cold finished bars
28	Non Alloy Wire

## PROCEDURES RELATING TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPETITION POLICY

### EUROPEAN COMMISSION

#### **Prior notification of a concentration**

**(Case M.10148 — FCA/EEPS/JV)**

#### **Candidate case for simplified procedure**

**(Text with EEA relevance)**

(2021/C 66/15)

1. On 18 February 2021, the Commission received notification of a proposed concentration pursuant to Article 4 of Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 <sup>(1)</sup>.

This notification concerns the following undertakings:

- FCA Italy S.p.A. ('FCA', Italy), a subsidiary of the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles N.V. Group ('FCA NV', The Netherlands), which will incorporate Peugeot S.A. and be renamed as Stellantis N.V. (The Netherlands),
- EPS E-mobility S.r.l. ('EPS E-mobility'), currently owned by ENGIE EPS Italia S.r.l. ('EEPS', Italy), a subsidiary of the ENGIE Group (France).

FCA and EEPS acquire within the meaning of Article 3(1)(b) and 3(4) of the Merger Regulation joint control of EPS E-mobility.

The concentration is accomplished by way of purchase of shares.

2. The business activities of the undertakings concerned are:

- for FCA NV: a global automotive group whose activities envisage the design, manufacture and sale of passenger cars and light commercial vehicles (under the Abarth, Alfa Romeo, Chrysler, Dodge, Fiat, Fiat Professional, Jeep, Lancia, Maserati and Ram brands) as well as of components and production systems worldwide,
- for EEPS: is the industrial player of the ENGIE group active in the provision of microgrid solutions, energy storage systems for renewable power producers and e-mobility services,
- for EPS E-mobility: develops innovative solutions and technologies for electric and hybrid vehicles providing innovative charging solutions.

3. On preliminary examination, the Commission finds that the notified transaction could fall within the scope of the Merger Regulation. However, the final decision on this point is reserved.

Pursuant to the Commission Notice on a simplified procedure for treatment of certain concentrations under the Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 <sup>(2)</sup> it should be noted that this case is a candidate for treatment under the procedure set out in the Notice.

4. The Commission invites interested third parties to submit their possible observations on the proposed operation to the Commission.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 24, 29.1.2004, p. 1 (the 'Merger Regulation').

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 366, 14.12.2013, p. 5.



Observations must reach the Commission not later than 10 days following the date of this publication. The following reference should always be specified:

M.10148 — FCA/EEPS/JV

Observations can be sent to the Commission by email, by fax, or by post. Please use the contact details below:

Email: COMP-MERGER-REGISTRY@ec.europa.eu

Fax +32 22964301

Postal address:

European Commission  
Directorate-General for Competition  
Merger Registry  
1049 Bruxelles/Brussel  
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

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## OTHER ACTS

## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

**Publication of a communication of approval of a standard amendment to a product specification for a name in the wine sector referred to in Article 17(2) and (3) of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/33**

(2021/C 66/16)

This communication is published in accordance with Article 17(5) of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/33 <sup>(1)</sup>.

COMMUNICATION OF A STANDARD AMENDMENT MODIFYING THE SINGLE DOCUMENT

**‘LA JARABA’**

**PDO-ES-01895-AM01**

**Date of communication: 16.11.2020**

**DESCRIPTION OF AND REASONS FOR THE APPROVED AMENDMENT**

Title

ADDITION OF WHITE WINE

— Section 2.1 ‘Parameters to be considered, analytical limits and tolerances’ of the product specification; the amendment also concerns the section ‘Description of the wines’ in the Single Document.

Description and reasons

— The addition of the monovarietal white wine made from Sauvignon Blanc grapes means that the analytical parameters of the white wines must be defined.

NEW WORDING

2.1.2. White wine

Parameter	Limit	Tolerance limit
Minimum actual alcoholic strength (in % volume)	≥11,5	±0,2
Minimum total alcoholic strength (in % volume)	≥12,5	±0,2
Reducing sugars (g/l expressed as glucose)	≤4	±0,5
Total acidity (g/l expressed as tartaric acid)	4<AT<7	±0,3
Volatile acidity (meq/l)	≤16,7	±3
Total sulphur dioxide (mg/l)	≤130	±15
Strontium content (mg/l)	≥2,2	±0,2

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 9, 11.1.2019, p. 2.

## REASON

- Given that the demarcated area for La Jaraba PDO includes a parcel of Sauvignon Blanc grapes that produce wines which also contain high levels of strontium, we request an amendment to the product specification in order to include the white grape variety Sauvignon Blanc and the white wines produced from it.

## Title

## ADDITION OF WHITE WINE

- Section 2.2 'Characteristics to be determined through organoleptic analyses' of the product specification; the amendment also concerns the section 'Description of the wines' in the Single Document.

## Description and reasons

- The addition of the monovarietal white wine made from Sauvignon Blanc grapes means that the organoleptic characteristics of the white wine produced must be defined.

## NEW WORDING

## 2.2.4. - White monovarietal Sauvignon Blanc

- Appearance: clean, bright and clear with a straw yellow colour.
- Aroma: intense and full with notes that are typical of the variety, notably white stone fruit, and floral notes.
- Taste: fresh, silky and balanced.

## REASON

- Given that the demarcated area for La Jaraba PDO includes a parcel of Sauvignon Blanc grapes that produce wines which also contain high levels of strontium, we request an amendment to the product specification in order to include the white grape variety Sauvignon Blanc and the white wines produced from it.

## Title

## WINE-MAKING AND PRODUCTION METHODS FOR WHITE WINE

- Section 3 'Specific oenological practices' in the product specification; the amendment also concerns the section 'Specific oenological practices' in the Single Document.

## Description and reasons

- The oenological practices specific to the production of white wine are added in line with the addition of the Sauvignon Blanc variety to the product specification.

## NEW WORDING

The must obtained from the white grapes by crushing and pressing the destemmed harvest is settled at a temperature between 15 and 20 °C for a period not less than 12 hours. Alcoholic fermentation of the must at a temperature between 10 and 21 °C in stainless steel tanks. Under normal conditions, alcoholic fermentation is triggered by the grapes' own microbial flora. After this, clarification takes place and just before bottling the wine is filtered using a filter with a large pore diameter so that the product remains as unadulterated as possible.

## REASON

- Since white wine has been added to the product specification, the wine-making and production methods need to distinguish between the production of red and white wine.

## Title

## AMENDMENT TO THE AGEING PERIODS

Section 3 'Specific oenological practices' of the product specification; the amendment also concerns the section 'Specific oenological practices' in the Single Document.

## Description and reasons

The amendment concerns the wording of the wine-making and production methods as the wine spends less time in the barrel and in the bottle.

## NEW WORDING

- 3.1 - Blend of red wines with differing proportions of the Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Graciano varieties.

Ageing in oak barrels with a capacity of 225 litres for at least three months. Ageing in bottles for at least one month.

- 3.2 - Blend of red wines with differing proportions of the Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot varieties.

Ageing in oak barrels with a capacity of 225 litres for at least three months. Ageing in bottles for at least one month.

## REASON

- Increasing market demand for wines with shorter ageing periods.

## Title

## ADDITION OF MAXIMUM YIELD

- Section 5 'Maximum yields' of the product specification; the amendment also concerns the section 'Maximum yields' in the Single Document.

- Description of the reasons

- Addition of the maximum yields for the Sauvignon Blanc variety.

## NEW WORDING

## 5. Maximum yields

Tempranillo: 10 500 kg/ha, equivalent to 73,5 hl/ha.

Cabernet Sauvignon: 11 000 kg/ha, equivalent to 77 hl/ha.

Merlot: 10 000 kg/ha, equivalent to 70 hl/ha.

Graciano: 10 000 kg/ha, equivalent to 70 hl/ha.

Sauvignon Blanc: 11 000 kg/ha, equivalent to 77 hl/ha.

## REASON

- Since the Sauvignon Blanc variety has been added to the product specification, the maximum yield has been established for this variety.

## Title

## ADDITION OF WINE GRAPE VARIETY USED

- Section 6 'Wine-making varieties' of the product specification; the amendment does not concern the Single Document.

## Description of the reasons

- Addition of the Sauvignon Blanc variety.

## NEW WORDING

## 6. Wine-making varieties

Red: Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Graciano.

White: Sauvignon Blanc

## REASON

- Since the Sauvignon Blanc variety has been added to the product specification, the variety has been included in this section.

## SINGLE DOCUMENT

1. **Name of the product**

La Jaraba

2. **Geographical indication type**

PDO - Protected Designation of Origin

3. **Categories of grapevine product**

1. Wine

4. **Description of the wine(s)***Red wine*

The wine is a deep cherry-red colour and of medium to strong intensity, with notes of red and black fruit delivering a generous and meaty feel in the mouth. It contains higher concentrations of strontium than other wines as a result of the high levels of this element in the soil, which help produce intense, aromatic, full-bodied wines with strong mineral and balsamic notes.

- \* The maximum total alcoholic strength shall be within the legal limits in accordance with the relevant EU legislation.

## General analytical characteristics

Maximum total alcoholic strength (in % volume):	
Minimum actual alcoholic strength (in % volume):	11
Minimum total acidity:	4 in grams per litre expressed as tartaric acid
Maximum volatile acidity (in milliequivalents per litre):	15
Maximum total sulphur dioxide content (in milligrams per litre):	130

*White wine*

Clean, bright and clear with a straw yellow colour. Intense, full aroma with notes that are typical of the variety, notably white stone fruit and floral notes. The taste is fresh, silky and balanced.

- \* The maximum total alcoholic strength shall be within the legal limits in accordance with the relevant EU legislation.

General analytical characteristics	
Maximum total alcoholic strength (in % volume):	
Minimum actual alcoholic strength (in % volume):	11,5
Minimum total acidity:	4 in grams per litre expressed as tartaric acid
Maximum volatile acidity (in milliequivalents per litre):	10
Maximum total sulphur dioxide content (in milligrams per litre):	130

## 5. Wine-making practices

### a. *Specific oenological practices*

#### Specific oenological practice

Alcoholic fermentation of the red grapes at a temperature between 15 and 30 °C in stainless steel tanks or French oak vats. Tanking and maceration for a minimum of 10 days.

The must obtained from the white grapes by crushing and pressing the destemmed harvest is settled at a temperature between 15 and 20 °C for a period not less than 12 hours. Alcoholic fermentation of the must at a temperature between 10 and 21 °C in stainless steel tanks.

The maximum yield from the pressing of the grapes is 70 litres for 100 kg of grapes.

The wine is aged first in oak barrels with a capacity of 225 litres and then in the bottle for the following periods of time:

- Blend of red wines with differing proportions of the Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Graciano varieties: ageing in oak barrels with a capacity of 225 litres for at least three months and ageing in bottles for at least one month.
- Blend of red wines with differing proportions of the Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot varieties: ageing in oak barrels with a capacity of 225 litres for at least three months and ageing in bottles for at least one month.
- Monovarietal Merlot red wine: ageing in oak barrels with a capacity of 225 litres for at least 6 months and ageing in bottles for at least 6 months.

#### Cultivation practices

The grapes are harvested once they have achieved phenolic ripeness; the bunches with the best structure and the highest concentration of phenolic compounds are selected. The only organic material used in the vineyards is sheep manure from the estate's own livestock farm.

### b. *Maximum yields*

Tempranillo

73,5 hectolitres per hectare

Tempranillo

10 500 kilograms of grapes per hectare

Cabernet Sauvignon

77 hectolitres per hectare

Cabernet Sauvignon

11 000 kilograms of grapes per hectare

Merlot and Graciano

70 hectolitres per hectare

Merlot and Graciano

10 000 kilograms of grapes per hectare

#### 6. **Demarcated geographical area**

The demarcated area lies within the municipality of El Provencio (Cuenca). The parcel layout is as follows, according to the Vineyard Register: Zone 9, parcels 14b, 14d, 14f, 14h, 26d, 26e, 26h, 26i, 26j, 26k, 26m, 26n, 26v.

The grapes harvested in the demarcated vineyards are made into wine and the wines are bottled at the winery located in the production area.

#### 7. **Main wine grapes**

MERLOT

TEMPRANILLO - CENCIBEL

#### 8. **Description of the link(s)**

ENVIRONMENT (NATURAL AND HUMAN FACTORS)

La Jaraba is the geographical name used to denote the place in which the demarcated area is located, as can be seen in a map of Spain's current rural cadastre. It is situated in a sediment-filled valley. The former watercourse known as the Cañada de Valdelobos, now intermittent, crosses the site to join the River Záncara, which forms the boundary between the provinces of Cuenca and Albacete. La Jaraba has almost no hills and can be considered completely flat. Its elevation is 700 m above sea-level.

The location of the vineyards, largely protected by 92 ha of holm oak and pine forest, provides a micro-climate that is especially favourable for the development of the vines. This largely spares them from the water stress that might be expected from the warm and dry east wind, allowing a longer ripening process for the grapes. Consequently, the fruit is richer in colouring agents, good quality tannin and aromas than the grapes produced on vines located outside the demarcated area.

The land belongs to the Quaternary period, forming a morpho-stratigraphic unit of the Guadiana river system. Its composition is varied, including quartzites, quartz, and Mesozoic and Miocene limestone. This composition enables the land to retain moisture for longer and differentiates it from the surrounding areas, which have a much higher limestone content.

The soils belong to the order of Alfisols, with red Mediterranean soils on limestone. They have a developed profile, pH between 7 and 8,5, poor exchange capacity, good internal drainage, good penetrability as far as the horizontal limestone layers, situated at around 60 to 90 centimetres, and textures ranging from loose textured sand to clay. Alluvial elements are plentiful, making the soils rich in nutrients. In addition, the morphology of the fertile soil, rich in coarse alluvial sediment, together with the practice of applying manure every year, results in a light, fresh profile. Such soil is highly suitable for vine-growing and, consequently, a factor in the high quality of the fruit.

The climate can be described as temperate Mediterranean with continental features. In terms of figures for the climate, the most significant annual average values are: between 14 and 16 °C in temperature, and 450 mm of rainfall.

An above-average level of strontium has been identified in the soil: over 100 mg/kg in separate parcels. Specifically the amounts are between 111,67 and 158,41 mg/kg. These amounts are far in excess of those in the soils surrounding the particular area, including the site known as 'Los Canforrales' where the figure is 76,59 mg/kg, and the 'Manteleros' site where it is 20,19 mg/kg. In the latter case, the figure is almost eight times lower than in La Jaraba.

This has direct consequences for the wines which have been found to have strontium levels of over 2,2 mg/l, with as much as 3,3 mg/g in some wines. These figures are notably higher than in the wines from neighbouring areas, which have been shown to have levels of between 0,95 and 1,6 mg/l. Therefore, the strontium level in the wines can be considered a reliable indicator with regard to the wine production of La Jaraba.

As far as the production methods are concerned, the only organic material used is sheep manure from the estate's own livestock farm.

As regards the processing methods, alcoholic fermentation is triggered by the grapes' own microbial flora and no more than 70 litres of wine is obtained from each 100 kg of grapes at the pressing stage.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE WINE

The wines of La Jaraba are conditioned by the local soil and climate. These give the phenolic content intensity, stability and elegance. The wines display an impressive structure, mineral content and body. The fact that all of these wines are aged in casks and bottles affects the organoleptic characteristics, producing wines of deep cherry-red colour and of medium to strong intensity, with notes of red and black fruit delivering a generous and meaty feel in the mouth. They contain higher concentrations of strontium than other wines produced outside the demarcated area as a result of the high levels of this element in the soils of La Jaraba, which helps produce these full-bodied wines with strong mineral and balsamic notes.

#### LINK

The estate is situated in a sediment-filled river valley with varying amounts of quartzite, quartz and limestone and an above-average level of strontium in the soil, all of which helps produce intense, aromatic and full-bodied wines with strong mineral notes and balsamic flavours. The level of strontium lends these wines their distinctive qualities.

Although the area is located within the La Mancha PDO, the following factors differentiate it from La Mancha.

#### NATURAL FACTORS

The demarcation of the area is based on a strontium level of the soil that is significantly higher than soils in the surrounding vicinity. This gives the wines produced in the area a more mineral character.

In a survey of the environment provided by the applicant, it can be seen that outside of the area, strontium levels are between 20 and 80 mg/kg, while inside the demarcated area, they attain levels between 110 and 160 mg/kg. This results in wines from the area having a strontium content of between 2,5 and 3,3 mg/l, whereas wines from surrounding vineyards only attain a strontium content of around 1 mg/l.

In addition to the strontium content as a factor determining the uniqueness of the area is the fact that surrounding the area there is a large expanse of holm oaks and pine trees, which protects it from the warm and dry eastern winds. This means it is more humid than in neighbouring areas, thus extending the ripening process for the grapes. As a result, this brings more colour, tannins and aromas to the fruit and therefore to the wine.

#### HUMAN FACTORS

The most obvious differences between the production methods of 'La Jaraba' wines and those in the neighbouring La Mancha PDO (for this, we will consider the La Mancha aged red wines, because this is the only type produced by 'La Jaraba') are as follows:

LA MANCHA PDO	LA JARABA	DIFFERENCES
>11,5% vol.	>12,5% vol.	Higher alcohol content
<10 meq/l	<16,7 meq/l	Higher volatile acidity
<13 000 kg/Ha	<11 000 kg/Ha	Lower production per hectare
≤ 1,6 mg/l	≥ 2,2 mg/l	Higher strontium content

Having demarcated the area on the basis of the strontium content in the soil, it turns out that at present there is only one winery producing wine in the area and it belongs to the applicant.

It should be stressed that they are the owner of an area that is larger than that included in the demarcated area. Thus, the demarcation was not made on the basis of their ownership, but on the basis of the environmental conditions outlined above.



Moreover, other producers may use the registered name if they set up in the demarcated geographical area in the future, provided that they meet the conditions set out in the specification. In fact, this area occupies about 75 hectares so it is perfectly possible for more wineries to be set up there.

9. **Essential further conditions (packaging, labelling, other requirements)**

Legal framework:

In national legislation

Type of further condition:

Packaging in the demarcated geographical area

Description of the condition:

The grapes harvested in the demarcated vineyards are made into wine and the wines are bottled at the winery located in the production area. This is because production of the red wines involves a second stage of ageing in bottles for at least one month, whereby a reduction process takes place. This enhances the quality of the wines, rounding out their flavour. They are ready for consumption when they attain the organoleptic characteristics set out in the product specification for each type of wine. The aim is to ensure quality and provide a guarantee as to origin and control in order to attain the characteristics set out in the product specification for the La Jaraba PDO red and white wines.

**Link to the product specification**

[http://pagina.jccm.es/agricul/paginas/comercial-industrial/consejos\\_new/pliegos/MOD\\_PLIEGO\\_LA-JARABA\\_20200529-II.pdf](http://pagina.jccm.es/agricul/paginas/comercial-industrial/consejos_new/pliegos/MOD_PLIEGO_LA-JARABA_20200529-II.pdf)

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**Publication of the amended single document following the approval of a minor amendment pursuant to the second subparagraph of Article 53(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012**

(2021/C 66/17)

The European Commission has approved this minor amendment in accordance with the third subparagraph of Article 6(2) of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 664/2014 <sup>(1)</sup>.

The application for approval of this minor amendment can be consulted in the Commission's eAmbrosia database.

SINGLE DOCUMENT

**'SALCHICHÓN DE VIC'/'LLONGANISSA DE VIC'**

**EU No: PGI-ES-0119-AM02 – 9.9.2020**

**PDO ( ) PGI (X)**

**1. Name(s)**

'Salchichón de Vic'/'Llonganissa de Vic'

**2. Member State or third country**

Spain

**3. Description of the agricultural product or foodstuff**

**3.1. Type of product**

Class 1.2. Meat products (cooked, salted, smoked, etc.)

**3.2. Description of the product to which the name in 1 applies**

'Salchichón de Vic'/'Llonganissa de Vic' PGI is a traditional cured sausage from Catalonia, made from lean pork and pork fat and with sugar, salt and pepper as the only seasonings. The meat is minced, left to infuse with the seasoning, stuffed into casings and then cured.

Stuffed into natural casings, it is characterised by a wrinkled external appearance, with the casing adhering tightly to the sausage mixture. It is cylindrical in shape (more or less regular) and whitish on the outside due to the fungal flora, which takes on purplish-brown tones over time. Diced pork fat and peppercorns are visible on the inside.

It has a characteristic, pleasant aroma and flavour, which it gets from the spices and the curing process.

The casing used determines the diameter and size of 'Salchichón de Vic'/'Llonganissa de Vic' PGI. The dimensions at the time of dispatch and curing times are as follows:

Weight (g)	Cured sausage diameter (dry) (mm)		Minimum curing time (in days)
200-300	≥ 35	≤ 75	30 days
≥ 300	> 40	≤ 90	45 days

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 179, 19.6.2014, p. 17.

Physical and chemical parameters:

- Maximum fat: 48 % (\*)
- Minimum protein: 38 % (\*)
- Maximum collagen/protein ratio x 100: 12
- Total soluble sugars expressed as maximum glucose: 3 % (\*)
- Added protein: none
- Water activity at 20 °C:  $a_w < 0,92$
- $5,3 \leq \text{pH} \leq 6,2$

(\*) value expressed on a dry matter basis

3.3. *Feed (for products of animal origin only) and raw materials (for processed products only)*

The product is made using selected lean cuts of pork (ham, shoulder ham and other top-quality lean meat), pork fat, salt, pepper and natural casings (hog bung, middles, sewn casings or dried tubed casings).

The only other ingredients that may be used are sugars (mono- and disaccharides), the producer's own matured sausage mix, potassium nitrite, sodium nitrite, potassium nitrate, sodium nitrate, ascorbic acid and sodium ascorbate.

3.4. *Specific steps in production that must take place in the identified geographical area*

Production (preparing the fresh meat, trimming and mincing, mixing, kneading, infusing with seasoning, stuffing in casing, and curing or maturing) must take place in the geographical area defined in point 4.

3.5. *Specific rules concerning slicing, grating, packaging, etc. of the product the registered name refers to*

'Salchichón de Vic' may be sold as packaged slices. It can be sliced and packaged for sale both within and outside of the geographical area described in point 4.

3.6. *Specific rules concerning labelling of the product the registered name refers to*

Packaging must clearly display the protected name – 'Salchichón de Vic' in Spanish or 'Llonganissa de Vic' in Catalan – as well as the PGI's own logo, the EU PGI symbol, an official numbered label issued by the Regulatory Board and all other information generally required under current legislation.

The PGI logo is as follows:



4. **Concise definition of the geographical area**

The defined area for this PGI comprises the municipalities of the Plain of Vic, which is located in Osona district in the province of Barcelona. These municipalities are:

Aiguafreda, Sant Martí de Centelles, El Brull, Seva, Tona, Muntanyola, Malla, Taradell, Sant Julià de Vilatorrada, Santa Eugènia de Berga, Calldetenes, Folgueroles, Vic, Santa Eulàlia de Riuprimer, Gurb, Tavèrnoles, Roda de Ter, Manlleu, Santa Cecília de Voltregà, Sant Hipòlit de Voltregà, Les Masies de Voltregà, Orís, Torelló, Centelles, Balenyà, Les Masies de Roda, San Vicenç de Torelló and Sant Pere de Torelló.

## 5. Link with the geographical area

The uniqueness of 'Salchichón de Vic' is based on the fame and reputation that this product has acquired both in Catalonia and in the rest of Spain over the centuries, especially from the 19th century onwards. It is also due to the environmental and climate conditions in the geographical area that enable its production.

The geographical area for the PGI, the Plain of Vic, is a plain with outstanding agricultural conditions and a large number of farms and small rural towns. The area is located at an altitude of between 400 and 600 metres and is surrounded by the Guillerics, Montseny, Collsacabra and Lluçanés mountain systems, which give it a certain degree of isolation. While it has what is known as a 'continental' Mediterranean climate, its location means that the air often stagnates during high pressure conditions, which leads to thermal inversion, bringing lower temperatures – sometimes as much as 20 °C lower – in the plain than in the surrounding areas. Moreover, mists hover persistently over the area (225 days of mist per year on average). For all of these reasons, the Plain of Vic has very specific environmental conditions that are difficult to replicate. This promotes the development of typical microbial flora, which is responsible for the fermentation and enzymatic processes that give 'Salchichón de Vic' its characteristic aroma and flavour.

While the earliest written references to 'Salchichón de Vic' date back to 1456, its origins might even be traced back to the 4th century. This product was historically made in rural households as a way of preserving prime cuts of meat. There are many written references to the quality and good reputation of 'Salchichón de Vic' dating from the mid-19th century onwards. One example is a reference to 'the now-famous *salchichones de Vic*' published in the *El Porvenir* newspaper on 29 May 1867. It is even known that King Alfonso XIII himself was a fan of the product. Thus, the place-name Vic and the term *salchichón* have for years gone together like a first name and a great family surname, and over time the sausage has become regarded as a small treasure.

Although the term traditionally used is *salchichón*, meaning a thick cured sausage, the original, native name of this product is *lloganissa*, the Catalan term, which became *salchichón* in Spanish. This is why the names 'Salchichón de Vic' and 'Lloganissa de Vic' are used interchangeably.

In summary, 'Salchichón de Vic' is a product with an excellent reputation, reflecting experience passed down from generation to generation of producers and the specific environmental conditions of the geographical area in which it is made.

## Reference to publication of the product specification

(the second subparagraph of Article 6(1) of this Regulation)

The updated product specification can be found at [http://agricultura.gencat.cat/web/.content/al\\_alimentacio/al02\\_qualitat\\_alimentaria/normativa-dop-igp/plecs-tramit/pliego-condiciones-igp-lloganissa-vic-cambio-logo.pdf](http://agricultura.gencat.cat/web/.content/al_alimentacio/al02_qualitat_alimentaria/normativa-dop-igp/plecs-tramit/pliego-condiciones-igp-lloganissa-vic-cambio-logo.pdf) while the amendment process is underway and will be published on <http://agricultura.gencat.cat/ca/ambits/alimentacio/segells-qualitat-diferenciada/distintius-origen/dop-igp/normativa-dop-igp/plecs-condicions/> once it has been approved.

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**EN**