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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Delegations
Subject: Presidency conclusions on Enlargement

The Presidency notes that its proposed text for draft Council conclusions received the support of 26 delegations in the course of the Council deliberations on this item.

However, as one delegation did not support the text, the Presidency, in the absence of consensus, decides to issue the text, attached, as Presidency conclusions.

PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS ON ENLARGEMENT

1. The Council reconfirms the geostrategic importance of enlargement as a major contribution to European peace, security, stability and prosperity in the twenty-first century. An efficient, merit-based and credible enlargement process must be sustained, based on the Copenhagen criteria, established principles, and methodology.
2. The Council urges all partners to seize the opportunity, use the current momentum and take all necessary steps to accelerate their progress on the EU path. In an increasingly volatile geopolitical context, with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine being fought on our continent, the European Union remains an anchor of peace, prosperity and security. Respect of international law, peaceful resolution of conflicts, reconciliation and regional cooperation are principles of the highest importance to which the Union is committed.
3. The Council reiterates that the progress of all partners who aspire to join will continue to be assessed on the basis of fair and rigorous conditionality and their own merits: a cornerstone of the accession negotiations, with rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights at its core. They must respect and promote the values of the European Union as set out in the Treaties. EU membership presupposes the ability to fully take on all the obligations of membership. Progress on the fundamentals remains the key benchmark for progress towards EU membership. Special attention should be given to address any shortcomings reported by the Commission.

4. The Union's capacity to absorb new members, while maintaining its ability to function effectively and develop, is an important consideration in the general interest of both the Union and the candidate countries. Looking ahead to the prospect of a further enlarged Union, both the EU and future Member States need to be ready. In parallel to aspiring members stepping up their reform efforts, the EU needs to lay the necessary internal groundwork and reforms, as set out in the Granada Declaration and the European Council conclusions of June 2024. This will make the EU stronger and will enhance European sovereignty. The Council will remain seized of this matter and take work forward in accordance with agreed procedures.
5. Full alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) remains a key aspect of the EU integration process, and a strong expression of a partner's strategic choice. The Council expects all partners to fully align with the EU CFSP, including on restrictive measures. The Council welcomes partners' continuous contributions to the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations.
6. In the Western Balkans, good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation remain essential elements of the enlargement process, as well as of the Stabilisation and Association Process. The Council strongly encourages partners to solve their bilateral disputes and issues rooted in the legacy of the past, in line with international law and established principles, including the Agreement on Succession Issues.
7. Bringing partners closer to the EU already before accession remains a priority. The Council calls on candidate countries to make the most of existing opportunities and invites the Commission to make further proposals on gradual integration.
8. Effective strategic communication on enlargement and its benefits by all partners and the EU remains crucial.

9. The Council takes good note of the Commission's Communication and reports of 4 November 2025, and welcomes in particular:

- the significant breakthroughs and progress achieved by several candidates in 2025 despite significant challenges caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and continued hybrid activities. Commending the progress, the Council looks forward to taking further steps to advance the respective accession processes as soon as the criteria have been met and conditions permit.
- that Montenegro has advanced further in its accession negotiations and that 12 negotiating chapters now have been provisionally closed. The Council looks forward to the provisional closing of further chapters as soon as possible, when the conditions are met. On the basis of the overall progress achieved by Montenegro, the Council decides that the Ad hoc Working Party on Drafting the Accession Treaty with Montenegro will be established. In this regard and as a matter of priority, the Council looks forward to the necessary preparatory work to ensure the effective operation of the Ad hoc Working Party upon its establishment, including on clarifying the key principles of future accession treaties.
- that Albania has now opened all 6 negotiating clusters and is advancing in its accession negotiations.
- the successful and timely completion of the screening process by Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter: Moldova) and takes good note of the Commission's assessment that all six clusters are ready to be opened. The Council looks forward to the opening of clusters with both candidates, starting with the fundamentals cluster without delay and followed by the other clusters, in accordance with the methodology and the negotiating frameworks. The Council is carrying out work with a view to preparing the next steps.

- the partners' EU-related reforms which have enabled unprecedented additional financial support now being disbursed through the Ukraine Facility and the Growth Plans for the Western Balkans and for Moldova.

10. The Council welcomes the new concrete benefits brought by gradual integration, while fully preserving the integrity of the EU internal market and a level playing field. It looks forward to, in particular:

- Ukraine and Moldova joining the 'Roam like at home area' from 1 January 2026, allowing their citizens to make calls to, from and within the European Union and the European Economic Area and use mobile data without additional charges.
- The Western Balkans partners achieving the same goal in 2026. The Council invites the Commission to accelerate work towards this end.
- The significantly lower costs of bank transactions in Euro for both citizens and businesses, as a result of Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia and Moldova joining the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA), with other partners expected to join soon.

11. The Council remains committed to providing candidates a clear and predictable path to EU membership, including through streamlining within the framework of the established methodology. It stresses in this respect the value of organising political intergovernmental conferences.

ANNEX

The Council takes good note of the Communication from the Commission of 4 November 2025 on the EU Enlargement Policy including the reports on Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter: Moldova), Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Türkiye and Georgia.

MONTE NEGRO

1. The Council welcomes Montenegro's significant progress on its EU reform path and commends the government for its resolve to implement the reforms. It notes the overall progress made in the accession negotiations so far, with all 33 screened chapters opened and 12 chapters provisionally closed. The Council encourages the government to follow its ambitious plan to bring the accession negotiations to a successful closing. The Council encourages all political forces to maintain their broad political consensus and step up their efforts and work together to ensure further progress. The Council reaffirms its support for Montenegro's continued progress on its EU path and looks forward to provisionally closing further chapters when conditions are met.
2. The Council encourages Montenegro to further advance its implementation of the **closing benchmarks**, notably for the rule of law chapters 23 and 24.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

3. Montenegro must continue to advance on its reform path, particularly with respect to the judiciary, freedom of expression, media freedom, the fight against corruption and organised crime, and public administration. The EU expects Montenegro to generally augment its administrative capacity. The Council notes that the number of final convictions in high-level corruption cases remains low and stresses the need for Montenegro to improve its track record with respect to investigations and prosecutions in high-level corruption and organised crime cases, ensuring final convictions, dissuasive penalties, asset seizures and confiscations. The Council calls on Montenegro to further align its electoral legislation with the EU *acquis* and European standards, namely on the financing of political entities and electoral campaigns.
4. The Council also encourages Montenegro to ensure the continued functioning of the main judicial bodies and to accelerate and deepen the implementation of key **judicial reforms**, to ensure further strengthening of independence, professionalism and accountability of the judiciary. Montenegro needs to swiftly conclude pending appointments to vacant positions through transparent and inclusive consultation process, as well as merit-based procedures.
5. The Council recognises the good progress made on asylum and **migration** management, while reaffirming the need for swift and full alignment with the EU's visa policy.
6. On the **economic criteria**, the Council welcomes the steady growth of the economy, the stability of the banking and financial sectors and the improvement in the labour market. The Council underlines the importance of protecting the independence of the Central Bank and transparent, impartial appointments of board members and welcomes the recent appointment of vice-governors. The Council encourages Montenegro to further implement the necessary structural reforms, reduce public debt and continue its efforts to strengthen fiscal governance and transparency.

7. The Council remains committed to further progress of Montenegro's gradual integration in the EU internal market, on the basis, *inter alia*, of enhanced implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The Council welcomes the ongoing implementation of the **Growth Plan** for the Western Balkans in Montenegro, which is on track to deliver concrete benefits to the citizens. It takes positive note of the first two partial payments under the Reform and Growth Facility and encourages Montenegro to continue the implementation of its Reform Agenda.
8. The Council notes that **good neighbourly relations** and regional cooperation remain essential elements of the enlargement process, as well as of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
9. The Council strongly commends Montenegro for its consistent cooperation on foreign policy issues, and its steadfast and long-standing full alignment with the **EU CFSP**, including on EU restrictive measures – a strong signal of Montenegro's strategic commitment to its EU path. It also welcomes Montenegro's continued active participation in EU missions and operations under the CSDP and its interest to strengthen such cooperation. The high-level EU-Montenegro Security and Defence Dialogue offers a flexible platform for deeper, practical cooperation.

ALBANIA

10. The Council welcomes the significant progress achieved by Albania, which has led to the opening of all negotiating clusters. The Council welcomes the government's ambitious plan for the successful closing of the accession negotiations and encourages all political forces and stakeholders to step up their efforts and work together to ensure further progress.
11. The Council recalls the essential role of Albania's **parliament** in debating and adopting EU-related reforms and ensuring they are based on an inclusive, constructive and transparent process.

12. The Council underscores that the progress on the **fundamentals** cluster will determine the overall pace of negotiations. The Council encourages Albania to intensify reform on the fundamentals, in particular to complete the fulfilment of the **interim benchmarks** on the rule of law chapters 23 and 24, which would allow Albania to start provisionally closing the negotiating chapters. Albania should also step up work on meeting the **closing benchmarks** in all negotiating chapters.
13. In the area of the **fundamentals**, including the **rule of law**, the Council positively notes Albania's continued implementation of the justice reform and underlines the need to maintain the integrity and accountability of the judiciary by applying the high standards established by the vetting. The Council underlines the importance of the independence of the judiciary, including the Specialised Structure for Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK), and of further strengthening the resilience of the justice system against internal or external interference. The Council also recalls the importance that Albania ensures effective judicial protection and consistent implementation of court judgments. The Council welcomes the progress Albania has made in the fight against corruption and organised crime, and invites it to further build a solid track record and strengthen its capacities in addressing those matters. The Council welcomes the good results already achieved by SPAK and its courts, including in high level corruption cases. The Council also welcomes the good cooperation with EU and Member States' law enforcement agencies, which should continue, including cooperation on financial investigations. The Council reaffirms that strengthened controls and consolidated capacities to protect EU financial interests are important.

14. The Council welcomes the progress made, including with the adoption of legislation on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in the areas of self-identification and the use of minority languages, on personal data protection and on gender equality. It recalls the importance of Albania continuing to strengthen the protection of **fundamental rights**. Media freedom and freedom of expression need to be strengthened. Albania needs to further step up its efforts to strengthen media pluralism and independence, including by ensuring full decriminalisation of defamation, increasing the transparency of media ownership and financing and ensuring a safe and secure environment for journalists. The Council underlines the importance of the promotion of the rights of the child, as well as the effective implementation of the secondary legislation on minorities, the implementation of a comprehensive land-sector reform and the consolidation of property rights in a transparent and credible manner in line with the EU Common Position on Cluster 1. The role of civil society also needs to be further strengthened and meaningful consultations reinforced.
15. The Council notes that the parliamentary elections of 11 May 2025 were competitive, despite identified shortcomings, which need to be addressed. With this in mind, the Council calls for a comprehensive **electoral reform** in an inclusive and timely manner, in line with OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations.
16. The Council recognises the progress made on **migration** and border management, while underscoring the importance of further progress on improving asylum reception systems and procedures as well as swift and full alignment with the EU's visa policy.
17. On the **economic criteria**, the Council welcomes Albania's good level of preparation in developing a functioning market economy. It encourages Albania to intensify efforts to advance in its capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU and to implement necessary structural reforms in a sustainable manner.

18. The Council remains committed to further progress of Albania's gradual integration in the EU internal market, on the basis, *inter alia*, of enhanced implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The Council welcomes the ongoing implementation of the **Growth Plan** for the Western Balkans in Albania which is on track to deliver concrete benefits to the citizens. It takes positive note of the first two partial payments under the Reform and Growth Facility and encourages Albania to continue the implementation of its Reform Agenda.
19. The Council welcomes Albania's continued constructive engagement in **multilateral** and **regional cooperation**. The Council notes that **good neighbourly relations** and regional cooperation remain essential elements of the enlargement process, as well as of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
20. The Council strongly commends Albania for its consistent cooperation on foreign policy issues, and its steadfast and long-standing full alignment with the **EU CFSP**, including on EU restrictive measures - a strong signal of Albania's strategic commitment to its EU path. The Council also welcomes Albania's continued active participation in EU missions and operations under the CSDP and readiness to enhance cooperation in the framework of the Security and Defence Partnership with the EU.

UKRAINE

21. The Council reiterates its resolute condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter, and recalls the European Union's unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and its inherent right of self-defence against the Russian aggression. The EU will continue to provide comprehensive, political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes.

22. The Council notes that all military support as well as security guarantees for Ukraine will be provided in full respect of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and taking into account the security and defence interests of all Member States.
23. The Council commends Ukraine for its strong commitment and steadfast work on accession-related reforms under the most challenging circumstances. The Council welcomes the successful and swift completion of the screening process and takes good note of the Commission's assessment that all 6 clusters are ready to be opened. The Council takes good note of the adoption by Ukraine of the roadmaps on the rule of law, on public administration and on democratic institutions, as well as an action plan on national minorities, all positively assessed by the Commission. The Council looks forward to the opening of clusters, starting with the fundamentals cluster without delay and followed by the other clusters, in accordance with the enlargement methodology and the negotiating framework. The Council is carrying out work with a view to preparing the next steps.
24. The EU continues to **support** Ukraine's humanitarian needs, as well as repair, recovery and reconstruction.
25. The Council notes Ukraine's continued efforts in strengthening the **rule of law**, and on moving forward on **judicial and public administration reforms** which remain essential for advancing on the EU path. The independence, impartiality and integrity of the judiciary remain key. The Council further underlines the need for Ukraine to continue to fill the vacancies in the Constitutional Court through a transparent and merit-based selection process without further delays and ensure the Court's functionality and administrative capacity.
26. The Council stresses the continued importance of transparent and merit-based selection and vetting processes across the judiciary, including the improvement of the selection procedure and integrity checks for the Supreme Court. In this context, the Council underlines the importance of meaningful temporary involvement of independent experts nominated by international partners.

27. On **anti-corruption**, the Council stresses the importance of independent and effective anti-corruption institutions and welcomes the legislative rectification in July 2025 that reinstated the procedural autonomy and independence of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), while recalling that some provisions still need to be addressed. The Council will remain vigilant on this matter and stresses the need to ensure that, in the future, no legal or political interference should impact the work of these institutions. The Council positively notes the results delivered by NABU and SAPO in 2025, including a significant number of investigations, notably in high-level corruption cases. It strongly encourages Ukraine to pursue efforts to further improve its track-record and capacities in this domain. In this context it also welcomes Ukraine's recent adoption of the law on the reform of the Asset Recovery and Management Agency (ARMA) and it looks forward to its swift implementation. The Council underlines the importance of timely completion of the selection and appointment of additional judges for the High Anti-Corruption Court, following a credible procedure.

28. The Council welcomes Ukraine's continued commitment to promote and protect **fundamental rights** and notes the further strengthening of the legislative and institutional framework in this area. Incidents of alleged political pressure on anti-corruption activists, human rights defenders and civil society organisations need to be monitored and addressed. The Council takes good note of the further amendments adopted to strengthen the legislative framework on the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. The implementation of this legislation as well as the commitment undertaken by Ukraine should continue, in line with the Negotiating Framework. The Council encourages Ukraine to reinforce, among others, a transparent, pluralistic and independent media landscape, civil society organisations protection, and the enforcement of the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

29. Efforts on **countering foreign information manipulation** and interference need to be reinforced.

30. On the **economic criteria**, the Council commends Ukraine on its sustained macroeconomic stability and its progress on fiscal and public administration reforms, which need to be brought forward, and invites Ukraine to further implement the OECD principles on corporate governance. Welcoming the good progress made towards establishing a functioning market economy, the Council encourages Ukraine to intensify its efforts to advance its capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU. The Council welcomes the ongoing implementation of the Ukraine Plan as part of the **Ukraine Facility**, takes positive note of its decisive contribution to the reforms implemented so far, including those necessary for Ukraine's accession to the EU, and the disbursement of corresponding funds, and recalls the need for continued reform efforts in this regard.
31. Recalling its continued support, the Council commends Ukraine's efforts to enhance its **energy** security, resilience and independence of supply in the most challenging of circumstances, faced with Russia's intensified attacks against Ukraine's energy and civilian infrastructure. It notes the importance of developing energy connectivity for enhancing the resilience of Ukraine's energy sector and for the integration in the EU energy market. Urgent joint efforts are now needed to help address immediate needs and to strengthen Ukraine's energy system following the attacks.
32. The Council remains committed to further progress Ukraine's **gradual integration** in the EU internal market, on the basis of enhanced implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area.
33. The Council strongly commends Ukraine for its consistent cooperation on foreign and security policy issues, and its continued efforts towards full alignment with the **EU CFSP**, including on restrictive measures, in line with the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states. Ukraine's very high level of alignment constitutes a strong signal of Ukraine's strategic commitment to its EU path. The Council welcomes Ukraine's cooperation in preventing the circumvention of sanctions against Russia and Belarus and its active participation in EU missions and operations under the CSDP.

MOLDOVA

34. The Council commends Moldova for its strong commitment and steadfast work on accession-related reforms despite the challenging circumstances caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and hybrid attacks especially targeting Moldova as well as the recent energy crisis.
35. The Council welcomes the successful and swift completion of the screening process and takes good note of the Commission's assessment that all 6 clusters are ready to be opened. The Council takes good note of the adoption by Moldova of the roadmaps on the rule of law, on public administration and on democratic institutions, all positively assessed by the Commission. The Council looks forward to the opening of clusters, starting with the fundamentals cluster without delay and followed by the other clusters, in accordance with the enlargement methodology and the negotiating framework. The Council is carrying out work with a view to preparing the next steps.
36. The Council welcomes the renewed and reinforced political mandate obtained by Moldova's authorities following the referendum on EU membership held on 20 October 2024 and the recent parliamentary elections which reaffirm the European aspirations of the people of Moldova as well as Moldova's commitment to its EU path and to continued EU-related reforms. The Council commends the resilience demonstrated by Moldova's democratic institutions in organising well-managed elections in a challenging context, including intensified foreign interference, disinformation and cyber-attacks, particularly from Russia. The Council takes note of the lessons learned from these attacks, which remain a threat to democratic confidence and media pluralism and will continue its support for Moldova in this domain.

37. On the **fundamentals**, the Council underlines the importance of maintaining the pace of reforms, notably in the areas of the rule of law, justice, security, and fundamental rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. It welcomes Moldova's inclusive approach to reform implementation, involving civil society, the private sector, and representatives of the diaspora. The Council also welcomes Moldova's request to join the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), reflecting its commitment to further align with EU standards on the protection and promotion of fundamental rights.
38. Building on the significant progress already achieved, Moldova should continue advancing its comprehensive **justice reform**, including finalising the vetting and appointment of judges and prosecutors, and strengthening the independence and integrity of the judiciary, leading to a positive track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments at all levels. The Council encourages Moldova to improve the functioning of the National Integrity Authority (NIA) to effectively verify the assets and personal interests of high-level public officials.
39. The Council encourages Moldova to continue fighting **corruption**, increasing prosecution capacity and improving judicial independence. The Council welcomes Moldova's fight against illicit financing, as well as its focus on creating a solid track record of investigations, prosecutions and convictions, including in high-level cases. It commends Moldova's systemic approach to de-oligarchisation and encourages continued implementation of the related actions. The Council also notes the authorities' commitment to tackling money laundering, including through enhanced cooperation with the EU's Financial Action Task Force and the use of new technological tools including during election periods. The Council welcomes Moldova's efforts to strengthen public administration and finance management, including local government reform. It encourages continued improvement in administrative capacity in key institutions.

40. The Council commends Moldova's resilience in the face of Russia's unprecedented **hybrid** attacks, and reconfirms the EU's continued support, including through the EU Partnership Mission in Moldova. It welcomes Moldova's proactive efforts to counter disinformation, including the development of a national communication strategy and innovative, community-based approaches to engage local actors such as farmers, youth organisations, and faith leaders. The Council encourages continued engagement in Gagauzia, and recalls the importance of countering disinformation and promoting inclusive and objective communication on EU integration at the local level. The Council encourages Moldova to continue these inclusive efforts to strengthen societal resilience, foster voter participation, and safeguard freedom of expression, including by aligning the strategic investment law to European standards.
41. The Council welcomes Moldova's steady progress in enhancing its **energy** security and independence of supply. The Council also notes positively Moldova's commitment to accelerating **infrastructure interconnections** to reduce vulnerabilities and to strengthen regional resilience. The EU stands ready to continue supporting this process.
42. On the **economic criteria**, the Council welcomes the good progress made towards establishing a functioning market economy and encourages Moldova to intensify its efforts to advance its capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU. The Council underscores the importance of continuing transformative economic reforms and deepening sectoral cooperation with the EU. The Council recommends pursuing a fiscal policy that ensures debt sustainability. This includes increasing public investments to drive economic growth, notably through the **Growth Plan** for Moldova. The Council welcomes the setting up of the EUR 1.9 billion Reform and Growth Facility, part of this Growth Plan, and takes positive note of the reforms implemented so far and the disbursement of corresponding funds, and recalls the need for continued reform efforts in this regard.

43. The Council remains committed to further progress Moldova's **gradual integration** in the EU internal market, on the basis of enhanced implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. It encourages increasing the capacity of the Agency for Interventions and Payments in Agriculture, and supports further reform coordination with EU assistance.
44. The EU reaffirms its strong and unwavering support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova within its internationally recognised borders and remains fully committed to supporting a comprehensive, peaceful, and sustainable settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. It calls on Russia to withdraw its military forces illegally stationed on the territory of Moldova.
45. The Council strongly commends Moldova for its consistent cooperation on foreign and security policy issues, and its continued efforts towards full alignment with the **EU CFSP**, including on restrictive measures, in line with the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states. Moldova's very high level of alignment constitutes a strong signal of Moldova's strategic commitment to its EU path. The Council welcomes Moldova's cooperation in preventing the circumvention of sanctions against Russia and Belarus and its active participation in EU missions and operations under the CSDP. The Council welcomes Moldova's readiness to enhance cooperation in the framework of the Security and Defence Partnership with the EU.

SERBIA

46. The Council welcomes that EU integration remains Serbia's strategic goal and expects Serbia to reflect this more clearly in both actions and words. This includes demonstrating strong political will and consistency in implementing EU-related reforms, and communicating objectively and unambiguously on the EU. While the reforms significantly slowed down during the past year, the Council takes note of certain recent positive developments and encourages Serbia to continue this trend.

47. The Council notes the overall progress achieved in the accession negotiations so far, with 22 out of 35 negotiating chapters opened and two chapters provisionally closed. Acknowledging the Commission's assessment that Serbia maintains its level of preparedness on the opening benchmarks in cluster 3 (Competitiveness and inclusive growth), the Council will revert to the issue of the opening of cluster 3 in line with the negotiating framework, recalling in particular the need for substantial further progress by Serbia on the rule of law and the normalisation of relations with Kosovo, which will continue to determine the overall pace of accession negotiations.
48. The Council takes note of the domestic **mass protests** triggered by the collapse of a train station canopy in Novi Sad, claiming 16 lives. While freedom of assembly was generally ensured, the Council recalls the need to strengthen it, and to ensure the safety of journalists. Reports of violence and excessive use of force during some of those protests require impartial and thorough investigations. The Council calls on Serbia to de-escalate tensions and overcome deep polarisation in the society by establishing the conditions for an inclusive dialogue involving all stakeholders, including civil society.
49. The Council reiterates the general importance of protecting all **fundamental rights**, including media freedom, freedom of expression, protection of the most vulnerable groups, as well as the non-discriminatory treatment of persons belonging to minorities throughout Serbia. The Council notes with regret the backsliding in freedom of expression, while welcoming the adoption of amendments to media legislation, the implementation of which in letter and spirit is of key importance. While welcoming the steps taken so far, the Council calls on Serbia to swiftly finalise the appointment of the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) in an inclusive and transparent way and to ensure its ability to operate effectively. The Council also calls on Serbia to actively engage in preventing and tackling all forms of disinformation and foreign information manipulation, including countering anti-EU narratives in media and public communication. Serbia needs to ensure a truly enabling environment for civil society, media, and academic freedom and strengthen the protection and safety of journalists.

50. Serbia should accelerate reforms and deliver concrete and tangible results on the **fundamentals**, in particular by focusing on fulfilling the interim benchmarks of the rule of law chapters 23 and 24. The Council notes that no progress has been made on the judiciary and limited progress in the fight against corruption and organised crime.
51. The Council welcomes the adoption of the amendments to the law on the unified voter register and stresses the importance of its proper implementation, in particular by finalising the audit of the voter register. The Council strongly encourages Serbia to address the remaining recommendations made by OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe bodies, including those pertaining to key aspects of the **electoral process**.
52. The Council welcomes the continued progress made on border management and calls upon Serbia to align swiftly with the EU's visa policy. The Council notes with concern the acquisition of visa-free travel rights to the EU for nationals of Russia by granting them Serbian citizenship per fast-track procedure, which poses a potential security risk for the EU.
53. On the **economic criteria**, the Council welcomes Serbia's good level of preparation in developing a functioning market economy and encourages Serbia to intensify efforts to advance in its capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU and to implement the necessary structural reforms. The Council welcomes Serbia's steps to diversify its energy sources and routes.
54. The Council remains committed to further progress of Serbia's gradual integration in the EU internal market, on the basis, *inter alia*, of enhanced implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The Council welcomes the ongoing implementation of the **Growth Plan** for the Western Balkans in Serbia, which is on track to deliver concrete benefits to the citizens. It takes positive note of the disbursement of prefinancing and encourages Serbia to continue the implementation of its Reform Agenda in view of next payments.

55. The Council encourages Serbia to strengthen **good neighbourly relations** and contribute to stability and reconciliation with all partners in the region. While welcoming that Serbia has maintained its commitment in a number of regional cooperation initiatives, decisive efforts are still required to solve issues rooted in the legacy of the past, in line with international law and established principles.
56. The Council continues to underscore the importance of meaningful regional cooperation in the **domestic handling of war crimes**, resolving the remaining cases of missing persons and fully cooperating with the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals. There should be no support for convicted war criminals or for the glorification or denial of their crimes.
57. The Council welcomes Serbia's recent incremental increase in alignment with the EU CFSP but reiterates its strong expectation of Serbia to step up its efforts towards full **alignment**, notably by aligning with EU restrictive measures against Russia and Belarus taken in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, as a matter of the utmost priority. The Council also calls on the Serbian authorities to refrain from actions and statements that run counter to EU positions on foreign policy and other strategic matters. The Council welcomes Serbia's assistance to Ukraine and encourages Serbia to continue its cooperation with the EU on preventing the circumvention of EU restrictive measures. The Council welcomes Serbia's continued active participation in and important contribution to EU missions and operations under the EU CSDP.
58. The Council reaffirms its full support to the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue on normalisation of relations, led by High Representative and supported by the EU Special Representative.

59. Progress on their respective European paths depends on efforts made to fully implement all their commitments from the 2023 Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Implementation Annex and all past agreements without further delays or preconditions. Both parties risk losing important opportunities in absence of progress on the normalisation of their relations. The Council acknowledges that the domestic political contexts in both Serbia and Kosovo have posed challenges to progress and regrets that implementation of several Dialogue agreements remains incomplete by both sides.
60. Serbia is expected to fully implement all agreements reached in the Dialogue and to start delivering on its commitments from the 2023 Agreement by initiating the recognition of documents and symbols in line with Article 1 and refrain from objecting to Kosovo's membership in any international organisation in line with Article 4.
61. The Council reiterates that the status of Serbia-supported structures and services, in particular healthcare and education, is foreseen to be resolved in a coordinated, transparent and inclusive manner in line with Dialogue agreements and Kosovo law.
62. The Council reiterates its expectations for the reintegration of Kosovo Serbs, starting with inclusive participation in Kosovo institutions on all levels, followed by the unconditional reintegration of eligible judiciary and police personnel, in accordance with Dialogue agreements and in full respect for Kosovo's legal framework.
63. Serbia and Kosovo are expected to refrain from provocative actions, avoid divisive rhetoric and find sustainable and coordinated solutions that guarantee safety, security and participatory democracy for all citizens. The Council takes note of the de-escalation steps taken by both sides in 2025.

64. The Council reiterates its strong condemnation of the violent acts committed by Kosovo Serb protesters against citizens, KFOR troops, law enforcement, and media in the north of Kosovo in May 2023 and the violent attack against Kosovo Police in September 2023. There is no justification for violence. The Council notes with deep concern that Serbia has not yet met expectations for full accountability and deeply regrets Serbia's insufficient actions in this regard, including violations of Dialogue procedures on mutual legal assistance.

65. The Council takes note of the High Representative's readiness to convene a high-level meeting of the Dialogue once conditions are conducive and expects both parties to seize the opportunity to achieve concrete results towards a comprehensive legally binding agreement on normalisation of relations in accordance with international law and EU *acquis*.

NORTH MACEDONIA

66. The Council welcomes that North Macedonia has maintained EU integration as its strategic goal and calls upon it to intensify efforts in advancing the EU-related reforms. Recalling its conclusions of July 2022, the Council notes that North Macedonia has not yet completed **the constitutional changes**, to which it has committed itself. The Council reaffirms its readiness to convene another intergovernmental conference, without further delays nor additional political decision, as soon as North Macedonia has implemented this commitment, in line with its internal procedures. Thereafter, the Council stands ready to open the first negotiating cluster as soon as possible, in line with the Negotiating Framework.

67. The Council underlines that swift and decisive actions are needed in order for North Macedonia to meet the opening benchmarks for cluster 1 on the **fundamentals**. The Council calls upon North Macedonia to intensify efforts and deliver on reforms, notably in the area of the rule of law, where no progress was made during the last year. North Macedonia needs to safeguard the judicial independence and integrity, including through strengthening the Judicial Council in line with the 2023 peer review mission recommendation and opinion of the Venice Commission. The fight against corruption and organised crime needs to be reinforced. North Macedonia needs to improve its track record with effective investigations, prosecutions, final convictions and confiscation of criminal assets in high-level corruption cases. The Council calls on North Macedonia to adopt a new Criminal Code in line with the EU *acquis* and international standards. The Council notes that some progress was made in the area of public administration reform and encourages North Macedonia to intensify its efforts regarding the modernisation of its public administration and ensuring the required administrative capacity is in place.
68. The Council takes note of the information provided by the Commission on some recent progress made, and encourages North Macedonia's authorities to prepare and finalise in an inclusive manner the work on all **three roadmaps** for the functioning of democratic institutions, public administration reform and the rule of law chapters, as well as on the **action plan** dedicated to the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities or communities.
69. The Council reiterates its call on North Macedonia to further strengthen **fundamental rights**, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities or communities, media freedom and freedom of expression.

70. The Council welcomes that recent local elections held in October and November 2025 were generally competitive, although with some procedural shortcomings. Comprehensive **electoral reform** is still needed, which includes addressing outstanding recommendations from OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission.
71. The Council welcomes the cooperation on border management between North Macedonia and Frontex. The Council calls upon North Macedonia to step up efforts to improve asylum reception systems and procedures.
72. On the **economic criteria**, the Council notes the good level of preparation and limited progress made by North Macedonia in developing a functioning market economy. It positively notes that North Macedonia has made some progress and encourages the candidate to intensify its efforts to advance in its capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU and to implement necessary structural reforms. The Council welcomes the recent progress in relation to the rail connection along transport Corridor VIII, which is of strategic importance, and expects effective implementation of commitments made.
73. The Council remains committed to further progress of North Macedonia's gradual integration in the EU internal market, on the basis, *inter alia*, of enhanced implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The Council welcomes the ongoing implementation of the **Growth Plan** for the Western Balkans in North Macedonia, which is on track to deliver concrete benefits to the citizens. It takes positive note of the first two partial payments under the Reform and Growth Facility and encourages North Macedonia to continue the implementation of its Reform Agenda.

74. The Council notes that **good neighbourly relations** and regional cooperation remain essential elements of the enlargement process, as well as of the Stabilisation and Association Process. The Council recalls the importance of achieving tangible results and implementing in good faith bilateral agreements, including the Prespa agreement with Greece and the Treaty on Friendship, Good-neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria in line with the Negotiating Framework.

75. The Council strongly commends North Macedonia for its consistent cooperation on foreign policy issues, and its steadfast and long-standing full alignment with the **EU CFSP**, including on EU restrictive measures – a strong signal of North Macedonia’s strategic commitment to its EU path. The Council also welcomes North Macedonia’s continued active participation in EU missions and operations under the CSDP and readiness to enhance cooperation in the framework of the Security and Defence Partnership with the EU.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

76. Following the decision of the European Council of March 2024 to **open accession negotiations** with Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Council looks forward to Bosnia and Herzegovina taking all relevant steps set out in the Commission’s recommendation of 12 October 2022 with a view to the adoption of the negotiating framework by the Council the moment these conditions are met. Further efforts are needed in fulfilling the 14 key priorities set out in the Commission Opinion on its EU membership application as endorsed by the Council in 2019.

77. The Council notes that the **reform dynamic** continues to be stalled and urges all political actors to renew the country's focus on progressing on the EU path and deliver on the necessary reforms. As a matter of priority, Bosnia and Herzegovina should adopt the new Law on the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council and the Law on Courts in line with European standards as well as appoint a chief negotiator. Bosnia and Herzegovina also needs to develop a national plan for the adoption of the *acquis* and urgently appoint a national IPA coordinator.
78. The Council notes that no progress has been made on the **judiciary and the fight against corruption**, and underlines that the decisions of the Constitutional Court must be fully respected, implemented and enforced. The Council also notes that some progress has been made in the **fight against organised crime**, and welcomes the ratification of the Eurojust cooperation agreement and the adoption of the Law on personal data protection. Establishing a track record of investigations and convictions and continued strengthening of the country's institutional, planning and coordination capacities in the fight against corruption and organised crime is still needed.
79. The Council welcomes the adoption of the Law on border control and the operational deployment of Frontex staff following the signature and provisional application of the Frontex Status Agreement, and calls on Bosnia and Herzegovina to swiftly align in full with the EU **visa policy**.
80. The Council notes limited efforts in the area of **fundamental rights** and calls on Bosnia and Herzegovina to fully respect the freedom of assembly, association and expression, and refrain from any actions that adversely impact their exercise. Electoral integrity needs to be improved ahead of the 2026 general elections, in line with recommendations of international bodies.

81. With reference to the **institutional mechanisms** which were set by the Dayton Peace Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to undertake further constitutional and electoral reforms to ensure equality and non-discrimination of all citizens, notably by implementing the *Seđić-Finci* and related case law of the European Court of Human Rights. The Council reiterates its call for an inclusive process of limited constitutional and electoral reforms, through genuine dialogue and in line with European standards to eliminate all forms of inequality and discrimination in the electoral process, in particular in light of the 2026 elections. The Council also recalls that a number of Constitutional Court decisions have yet to be fully enforced. No steps should be taken which would make the implementation of these rulings more challenging or further deepen divisions.
82. The Council reiterates its **unequivocal commitment** to Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU perspective as a single, united and sovereign country. The Council urges all political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina to refrain from and renounce provocative divisive rhetoric and actions, including questioning the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country, to respect the principles of equality and non-discrimination of all citizens belonging to all constituent peoples and others, and to end the glorification of convicted war criminals as well as to actively promote trust and reconciliation.
83. The Council takes note of the recent developments in the National Assembly of Republika Srpska that contribute to the de-escalation of the political situation. The Council underlines the key importance of the authorities in the Republika Srpska entity to demonstrate a clear political will to move away from the remaining initiatives and legislation that run counter to the constitutional order and EU path of the country, and which continue to be a source of concern.

84. On the **economic criteria**, the Council encourages Bosnia and Herzegovina to intensify its efforts to advance the establishment of a functioning market economy, its capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU and to implement the necessary structural reforms.
85. The Council remains committed to further progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina's gradual integration in the EU internal market, on the basis, *inter alia*, of enhanced implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The Council welcomes the ongoing implementation of the **Growth Plan** for the Western Balkans in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is on track to deliver concrete benefits to the citizens. The Council welcomes the recent adoption of the **Reform Agenda** required for disbursements from the Reform and Growth Facility and calls on Bosnia and Herzegovina to ratify the Loan and Facility Agreements, appoint the Reform and Growth Facility Coordinator and start implementing the reforms without further delay.
86. The Council welcomes the renewal of the mandate of **EUFOR Althea**, which continues to play a key role in supporting the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in maintaining a safe and secure environment for all citizens.
87. The Council reiterates the importance of continued cooperation among international actors and expresses its support to the mission of the **High Representative** and his Office towards fulfilling the 5+2 Agenda.
88. The Council encourages Bosnia and Herzegovina to further actively engage in regional cooperation and **good neighbourly relations**, and reiterates its call on Bosnia and Herzegovina to swiftly ratify all regional **mobility agreements** under the Berlin Process.

89. The Council commends Bosnia and Herzegovina's full alignment with **EU CFSP** signalling its clear commitment to the EU path and encourages it to maintain it and to fully implement restrictive measures, including on Russia and Belarus.

KOSOVO

90. The Council welcomes Kosovo's continued **commitment** to its European path and related reforms, for which the EU will continue to provide support.

91. The Council notes the overall **limited progress** on reforms in the reporting period and calls on Kosovo to forge cross-party cooperation and accelerate the pace of reforms. Efforts are needed in particular to strengthen public administration reform and the rule of law, including the consolidation of the judicial system, the fight against corruption, and the protection of fundamental rights, in particular the freedom of expression, where no progress was made. The Council **notes that some progress** has been made in the fight against organised crime.

92. The Council welcomes that the February 2025 **parliamentary elections** were competitive and held under a new legal framework but also notes the significant challenges and encourages Kosovo to continue consolidating its electoral framework in line with the recommendations of 2025 EU Election Observation Mission.

93. The Council notes with concern the protracted political stalemate after the parliamentary elections and stresses the importance of a well administered and inclusive electoral process in view of the early general elections on 28 December 2025, regretting the attempts to politicise the work of the Central Electoral Commission.

94. The Council welcomes that 2025 **local elections** were held in a transparent and professional manner with the participation of all communities.

95. The Council recognises the progress made on migration management and calls upon Kosovo to align swiftly with the EU's visa policy.

96. On the **economic criteria**, the Council welcomes some progress achieved by Kosovo in developing a functioning market economy and in terms of its capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces in the EU and encourages Kosovo to implement necessary structural reforms.
97. The Council remains committed to further progress of Kosovo's gradual integration in the EU internal market, on the basis, *inter alia*, of enhanced implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The Council welcomes the ongoing implementation of the **Growth Plan** for the Western Balkans in Kosovo, which is on track to deliver concrete benefits to the citizens. As a precondition to start receiving disbursements from the Reform and Growth Facility, Kosovo needs to ratify the Loan and Facility Agreements without further delay.
98. The Council encourages Kosovo to continue to cooperate with **EULEX** and other relevant international actors and to unconditionally support the work of the **Kosovo Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office**.
99. A constructive approach towards **regional cooperation**, notably in CEFTA, remains essential.
100. The Council strongly commends Kosovo's condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, its continued voluntary alignment with the **EU CFSP**, and its implementation of the EU restrictive measures, which is a strong expression of Kosovo's strategic choice and its place in a community of values.
101. Taking positive note of the orderly transfer of local governance in the four northern municipalities, the Council reiterates its conclusions from last year and looks forward to lifting the remaining measures.
102. The Council reaffirms its full support to the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue on normalisation of relations, led by High Representative and supported by the EU Special Representative.

103. Progress on their respective European paths depends on efforts made to fully implement all their commitments from the 2023 Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and all past agreements without further delays or preconditions. Both parties risk losing important opportunities in absence of progress on the normalisation of their relations. The Council acknowledges that the domestic political contexts in both Kosovo and Serbia have posed challenges to progress and regrets that implementation of several Dialogue agreements remains incomplete by both sides.
104. Kosovo is expected to fully implement all agreements reached in the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue, which includes the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb Majority Municipalities, and start delivering on its commitments from the 2023 Agreement by starting the process leading to specific arrangements and guarantees "for an appropriate level of self-management for the Serbian community in Kosovo" in line with Article 7.
105. The Council reiterates that the status of Serbia-supported structures and services in Kosovo, in particular healthcare and education, is expected to be resolved in a coordinated, transparent and inclusive manner in line with Dialogue agreements and Kosovo law. The Council notes with concern several uncoordinated actions by Kosovo including those directed against Serbia-supported structures and services operating in Kosovo that negatively impacted Kosovo Serbs and other communities and their access to basic public and social services.
106. The Council reiterates its expectations for the reintegration of Kosovo Serbs, starting with their inclusive participation in Kosovo institutions on all levels, followed by the unconditional reintegration of eligible judiciary and police personnel, in accordance with Dialogue agreements and in full respect for Kosovo's legal framework.
107. Kosovo and Serbia are expected to refrain from provocative actions, avoid divisive rhetoric and find sustainable and coordinated solutions that guarantee safety, security and participatory democracy for all citizens. The Council takes note of the de-escalation steps taken by both sides in 2025.

108. The Council reiterates its strong condemnation of the violent acts committed by Kosovo Serb protesters against citizens, KFOR troops, law enforcement, and media in the north of Kosovo in May 2023 and the violent attack against Kosovo Police in September 2023 and stands in solidarity with the affected people. There is no justification for violence. It underlines the need for full accountability.
109. The Council takes note of the High Representative's readiness to convene a high-level meeting of the Dialogue once conditions are conducive and expects both parties to seize the opportunity to achieve concrete results towards a comprehensive legally binding agreement on normalisation of relations in accordance with international law and EU *acquis*.
110. The Council recalls the need to amend the agenda of Kosovo's Special Group on Normalisation to reflect Kosovo's obligations referred to in the 2023 Agreement.

TÜRKİYE

111. Türkiye remains a candidate country and a key partner in many areas of joint interest. The Council reaffirms its previous conclusions noting that Türkiye's accession negotiations have effectively come to a standstill and that no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing. In line with previous Council and European Council conclusions on relations with Türkiye, the Council reiterates the EU's strategic interest in a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean, and in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Türkiye.
112. The EU recalls its **readiness to continue engaging with Türkiye** in areas of common interest in a phased, proportionate and reversible manner, in line with the European Council conclusions of April 2024, and subject to established conditionalities.

113. The Council takes good note of the **concrete steps that have been taken in that context**, notably the holding of new or previously suspended High-Level Dialogues and work by the European Investment Bank towards resuming operations, with a focus on the private sector. The Council also takes good note of the continuation of the dialogues on foreign policy and regional issues, and of the sectoral High-Level Dialogues between the EU and Türkiye, set out in previous European Council conclusions. Türkiye's own constructive engagement will be instrumental in advancing the various areas of cooperation. In this regard, the Council attaches particular importance to the resumption of and progress in the Cyprus settlement talks in further strengthening EU-Türkiye cooperation.

114. The Council is deeply concerned by the worrying backsliding and continued **deterioration in the areas of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights**. The systemic lack of independence and undue pressure on the judiciary, as well as the restrictions on free and safe expression, and the arrests of and prosecution of democratically elected officials and opposition figures, including the mayor of Istanbul, as well as political activists, civil society and business representatives, journalists, and others, give rise to increasing questions regarding Türkiye's commitment to democratic values, and deepened concerns about the independence of its judiciary. The growing pressure facing civil society organisations, especially those dealing with women, LGBTI persons, environmental protection and human rights is also a matter of serious concern. The Council calls on Türkiye to urgently reverse the negative trends and credibly address these and all other serious shortcomings identified in the Commission's report.

115. The Council is also deeply concerned by Türkiye's continued lack of progress on implementation of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) and of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. The Council reiterates its calls on the authorities to step up cooperation with the Council of Europe, address key recommendations of its bodies, fully implement the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) and other international human rights instruments to which Türkiye is a party, as well as execute all judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in line with Article 46 of the ECHR.

116. The Council reiterates the importance of continued and sustained improvements in the **relations between Türkiye and Greece**. The Council recalls that the de-escalation in the Eastern Mediterranean needs to be sustained.
117. The Council continues to expect Türkiye to unequivocally commit to **good neighbourly relations** and the peaceful settlement of disputes, having recourse, if necessary, to the International Court of Justice. The Council, as stated in all relevant Council conclusions, as well as in the Declaration of 21 September 2005, reiterates that Türkiye needs to fulfil its obligations under the Negotiating Framework, including the full, non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement towards all Member States. Recognition of all Member States is essential. Türkiye must normalise its relations with the Republic of Cyprus and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all EU Member States, as well as all their sovereign rights, in accordance with EU and international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
118. The Council reiterates the EU's full commitment to a comprehensive **settlement of the Cyprus problem**, within the UN agreed framework, in accordance with all relevant UNSC resolutions and in line with the principles on which the Union is founded and the *acquis*. It remains crucial that Türkiye commits and actively contributes to such a peaceful settlement, including its external aspects. The Council welcomes the steps taken by the United Nations Secretary-General towards a resumption of comprehensive settlement talks, including his appointment of a Personal Envoy on Cyprus. The EU remains ready to play an active role in supporting all stages of the UN-led process, with all appropriate means at its disposal. In this context, the Council looks forward to close cooperation with the Commission's Special Envoy for Cyprus. The Council recalls the importance of the status of Varosha, condemns all Türkiye's unilateral actions that run contrary to UN Security Council Resolutions, and reiterates its call for their immediate reversal. The Council calls on Türkiye to respect all the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, in particular Resolutions 541, 550, 789 and 1251.

119. On the **economic criteria**, the Council notes that some progress was made and encourages Türkiye to continue implementing stability-oriented macroeconomic policies and to continue addressing concerns about the proper functioning of Türkiye's market economy and institutional and regulatory environment.
120. The Council commends Türkiye for its continued efforts in hosting one of the world's largest refugee populations. The **EU-Turkey Statement** remains the key framework for the cooperation on migration and continues to deliver results. Türkiye and the EU continued to cooperate in supporting refugees and host communities in Türkiye. The Council reiterates the importance of the full and non-discriminatory implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, including vis-à-vis the Republic of Cyprus, to resume returns and prevent irregular arrivals without further delay. In this context, the Council also stresses the need for Türkiye to fully and effectively implement the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement and to cooperate in the area of justice and home affairs with all EU Member States, as well as to align with the EU visa policy.
121. The Council recalls the need for Türkiye to fulfil its obligations as regards the implementation of the **EU-Turkey Customs Union**, ensuring its effective application to all Member States and fully realigning its customs policy with the EU's Common Customs tariff, Generalised Scheme of Preferences and dual-use export control regime as well as with EU legislation on Foreign Direct Investments. While acknowledging the progress achieved towards resolving a number of trade barriers and removing certain restrictions, the Council expects Türkiye to continue and step up work to remove remaining trade irritants.
122. The Council acknowledges the specific measures taken by Türkiye to stop the circumvention of **EU sanctions against Russia** through its territory, which need to be implemented and complemented by further efforts where appropriate, in particular on advanced technology items used for military purposes by Russia and with regard to Russia's 'Shadow Fleet'. Active and stronger cooperation with the EU in preventing and detecting the circumvention of EU sanctions remains paramount.

123. The Council deeply regrets Türkiye's continued very low alignment rate with the **EU CFSP** and its non-alignment with **EU restrictive measures** adopted in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and reiterates its strong call on Türkiye to step up its alignment with EU CFSP positions and restrictive measures as a matter of utmost priority. This needs to be addressed by the Turkish authorities, including in the framework of the dialogues between EU and Türkiye on foreign policy and regional issues. The Council notes that Türkiye has demonstrated a constructive approach on a number of regional and geopolitical issues. The Council acknowledges Türkiye's important role in the continued facilitation of talks between Ukraine and Russia in Istanbul, and Türkiye's overall support for, and contributions to Ukraine, which need to be maintained and expanded.

GEORGIA

124. The Council reaffirms the Union's support to the aspirations of the vast majority of Georgian people for a European future.

125. The actions taken by the Georgian authorities fall short of the EU's expectations of a candidate country. The Council notes the serious general backsliding in democracy, human rights and rule of law, including the adoption of repressive legislation undermining fundamental rights and freedoms, the political instrumentalisation of the judiciary, the persecution of opposition leaders, arbitrary arrests of protesters and journalists and a shrinking civic space.

126. The Council condemns and calls for an end to disinformation and anti-EU narratives spread by the Georgian authorities.

127. The Council notes with regret Georgia's backsliding across the nine steps on which the candidate status was granted. Therefore, Georgia's EU accession process has effectively come to a standstill until the authorities demonstrate resolute commitment to reverse course and return to the EU accession path.

128. The Council calls on the Georgian authorities to free all arbitrarily detained politicians, journalists and activists, to repeal repressive legislation, adopt democratic, comprehensive and sustainable reforms, in line with the core principles of European integration, and cease its aggressive narrative against the EU, the EU Ambassadors and Head of Delegation as first steps towards re-engagement on the EU path.

129. The Council reaffirms the EU's support to Georgia's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and underlines that the EU remains firmly committed to peaceful conflict resolution and its policy of non-recognition and engagement, including through the presence of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia.

130. The Council regrets Georgia's continued non-compliance with the seventh visa suspension mechanism report recommendations and calls on the Georgian authorities to fulfil them and meet the visa liberalisation benchmarks without delay.

131. The Council reiterates its strong expectation of Georgia to step up its efforts towards full CFSP alignment, notably by aligning with EU restrictive measures against Russia and Belarus taken in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, as a matter of the utmost priority. The Council also calls on the Georgian authorities to refrain from actions and statements that run counter to EU positions on foreign policy. The Council encourages Georgia to continue its cooperation on preventing the circumvention of EU restrictive measures.