Arrangement with Iceland on the modalities of its participation in the European Asylum Support Office

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PURPOSE: to conclude the Arrangement with Iceland on the modalities of its participation in the European Asylum Support Office.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: Council may adopt the act only if Parliament has given its consent to the act.

BACKGROUND: Regulation (EU) No 439/2010 established the European Asylum Support Office to strengthen practical cooperation between Member States on asylum, enhance the implementation of the Common European Asylum System and support Member States whose asylum and reception systems are under particular pressure.

Accordingly, Article 49 (1) of the Regulation stipulates that the Support Office shall be open to the participation of **Iceland**, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland as observers.

Arrangements shall be made, specifying in particular the nature, extent and manner in which those countries are to participate in the Support Office's work.

The participation of associate countries in the Support Office's work is not only a logical step, having regard to their association to the Dublin system, but also has a clear added value to the Support Office's support offer such as:

- the exchange of best practices and expertise,
- the Support Office's permanent and emergency support,
- the Support Office's information gathering and analysis,
- the Support Office's early warning and preparedness system.

On that basis the Commission presented on 1 July 2011, a recommendation to the Council in order to authorise the Commission to open negotiations with Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein on international agreements establishing such arrangements.

The Commission received the Council authorisation to open negotiations with Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein on arrangements on the modalities of these countries' participation in EASO on 27 January 2012.

The negotiations were held jointly with all associate countries. Four rounds of negotiations took place.

The final text of the draft Arrangement with Iceland was initialled on 28 June 2013.

It is now necessary to approve the Arrangement on behalf of the European Union.

CONTENT: with this proposed Decision, the Council is called upon to approve, on behalf of the Union, the Arrangement with Iceland on the modalities of its participation in the European Asylum Support Office.

Main provisions of the Arrangement: the draft Arrangement foresees:

- the full participation of Iceland in the activities of the Support Office,
- representation in the Support Office's Management Board as an observer and without voting rights,
- annual financial contributions of Iceland, to the budget of the Support Office by an annual sum calculated in accordance with its GDP as a percentage of GDP of all States participating in the Support Office's work. Iceland accepted provisions concerning a possible increased contribution if the Union contribution is increased.

Institutional provisions: the draft Arrangement foresees the establishment of a committee composed of representatives of the Commission and of the associate countries. For reasons of efficiency, this committee shall meet jointly with the corresponding Committees set up with other associated countries participating on the basis of Article 49 (1) of the Regulation. The committee was not mentioned in the negotiating directives and has been requested by the associate countries in order to allow for an exchange of information and monitor the proper implementation of the Arrangement.

Financial contribution: Iceland shall contribute to the revenue of the Support Office an annual sum calculated in accordance with its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a percentage of the GDP of all participating States in accordance with the formula described in Annex I of the draft Arrangement.

Staff of the Support Office: the Staff Regulations of the European Union should apply to nationals of Iceland recruited as staff members by the Support Office. Iceland shall apply to the Support Office and to its staff the Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the European Union as well as any rules adopted pursuant to this Protocol relating to staff matters of the Support Office.