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On 19 December 2018, TEPSA, its Finnish member the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) and the civil society organisation Eurooppalainen Suomi jointly organised a debriefing on the December European Council meeting.

In the December meeting, the big questions were about migration, the EU's future funding and the development of the internal market. The seminar was held in the premises of the National Museum of Finland and was co-funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the EU. The event attracted 98 participants, and special attention was paid to the openness of the event for the citizens.

Programme Director Dr Juha Jokela from the Finnish Institute of International Affairs acted as chair. Mr. Jouni Ovaska, Chair of the Board of Eurooppalainen Suomi, opened the seminar. He described the issues covered in the December meeting of the European Council – budget, migration, Brexit, the Eurozone and its future, for example. State Secretary of the EU affairs, Mr Kare Halonen, from the Prime Minister's Office gave an introductory address, in which he presented the results of the European Council meeting and discussed those from the point of view of the Finnish EU Presidency. Concerning the migration issues, he pointed out that no results were achieved at the meeting. There are many differences in the views among the member states. Finland has to deal with this issue when it assumes the Presidency of the Council of the EU. A more positive thing is that the European Council will adopt a new five-year strategic agenda. Finland has an interest in having issues concerning the EU internal market and trade policy issues included in the agenda. Mr Halonen also mentioned that climate policy issues will be defined during Finland's Presidency. Due to e.g. the question of Ukraine, we have to be prepared for possible surprises in the EU's external relations.

In the next presentation, Special EU Correspondent Susanna Turunen from the Finnish Broadcasting Company commented on Brexit issues covered in the meeting. She remarked that it is difficult to understand British politics at the moment. It is also difficult to see what more the EU could do after all it has already done. In her opinion the EU is doing everything to support a smooth Brexit. Ms Turunen pointed out that the EU's position towards Brexit has been significant in the way that the EU has been able to be consistent in this issue. She also mentioned that the European Union election may cause challenges. For example, populism and support of extremism have increased significantly. Also, the formation of governments has become a difficult and long process in many countries. Forming the new European Commission might also be a difficult process.

Ms Janica Yli-Karjula, Chief Policy Advisor in the Confederation of Finnish Industries pointed out in her presentation that from the point of view of businesses, the greatest concern is that the EU is more polarised than before. There is a great concern that the current distrust among the member states will deepen. The most important issue and the greatest advantage for businesses is the EU's internal market, and the concern at the moment is that its development has slowed down. In the meeting of the European Council it was agreed that it is important to remove the existing trade barriers and to make sure that new ones will not be formed. The enforcement of regulations has to be transparent and the Commission has to have sufficient resources to monitor the enforcement. The EU's internal market is an instrument with which the EU's global influence can be strengthened. But a lot of work has to be done for the internal market. Regarding Brexit, Ms Yli-Karjula pointed out that the way that relations between the EU and Britain will be organised in the future is very important for companies. At the moment, uncertainty has increased concerning how the EU and Britain are going to trade in the future and what the operational environment will be.