



Council of the
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NOTE

From: Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 1)
To: Council

Subject: **Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council**
meeting on 8 December 2016
European Semester: Annual Growth Survey 2017 - Public Health-related
part
- *Exchange of views*
(Public debate in accordance with Article 8(2) of the Council's Rules of
Procedure [proposed by the Presidency])

Delegations will find attached a background note prepared by the Presidency that is intended as a basis for the exchange of views on the subject referred to above scheduled for the session of the Council (EPSCO) on 8 December 2016.

In order to structure the debate, the Presidency has included a set of questions at the end of this note. The background note and questions were examined by the Permanent Representatives Committee at its meeting on 30 November 2016.

European semester: Annual Growth Survey 2017 - Public Health-related part
Reinforcing the Health Perspective in the Annual Growth Survey

The European Semester is a tool of economic and fiscal policy coordination in the European Union. The Annual Growth Survey (AGS) provides an overview of the EU priorities for the following year. While in most Member States, the European Semester has attracted a great deal of media interest, it unfortunately seems that the opportunity that it offers to reflect on how to increase the cost-effectiveness and overall quality of health care is heavily underutilised.

Taking into consideration the ageing population, increasing demands on healthcare systems, caused inter-alia by the increasing complexity of diseases that are today diagnosed and treated, and furthermore the fact that healthcare services sometimes replace social services, it is clear that action is needed to ensure the sustainability of the healthcare sector. This is highlighted in the Annual Growth Survey for 2017, which inter alia states:

"Driven by population ageing and technological developments, public expenditure on health care and long-term care is expected to increase significantly in the coming decades. To safeguard sustainable health systems and support their positive contribution to population health and economic prosperity, further policy action will be needed enabling the individual to stay healthy for longer, while making health systems more effective, accessible and resilient."

and

"Health policies should support and reinforce social safety nets and active inclusion strategies, through preventive, but also curative and rehabilitation policies. Member States therefore need to continue to reform their health systems, thus ensuring universal access to cost effective public health and healthcare services. Protecting the population from falling into poverty or social exclusion due to ill-health and related expenditure is essential, both from a social and economic view-point."

The 2017 AGS further underlines that in order to slow down the decline in the workforce, healthcare systems need to exert more resources to ensure that citizens are able to stay healthy and work up to a higher age. It adds that necessary changes are not possible unless Member States undertake a variety of reforms.

One measure to ensure sustainability of the healthcare sector is an increased direct healthcare contribution of individual citizens in order not to overstrain limited public resources. It, however, significantly increases the risk of individuals falling into poverty or social exclusion due to ill-health and related expenditure. At the same time there are already Member States that have undertaken a variety of other in depth reforms of their healthcare sector, ensuring universal access to healthcare and control of costs, while ensuring a cost-effective system.

As the European Semester offers an opportunity for Member States to learn from each other, inter alia through the exchange of best practices, it could be used as a tool to achieve the goal of providing universal access to cost effective care thus improving the sustainability of healthcare systems. It is also noted that the Working Party on Public Health at Senior Level has started a reflection process on the sustainability of healthcare systems.

Against this background, the Presidency believes that it is high time to involve Health Ministers in the preparation of the European Semester since it is the best way of ensuring that health policies are accurately reflected therein and coordinated with other policies.

Therefore, the Council is invited to consider the following questions:

1. **Do you agree that the European Semester and the Annual Growth Survey should be the subject of debate in the Health part of future meetings of the Council (EPSCO) in order for it to be better involved in the European Semester process?**
2. **Do you agree that the Working Party on Public Health at Senior Level be instructed to review in what way an increased involvement of the Council (EPSCO) could contribute to improve the European Semester process?**
3. **How could the Annual Growth Survey best be used to ensure that health systems are fit for the future?**