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**NOTE**

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From: Presidency  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee  
Subject: Work Programme of the High Level Working Group on Competitiveness and Growth

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1. On 31 October 2014, the Permanent Representatives Committee approved the establishment of a High Level Working Group on Competitiveness and Growth (COMPCRO HLG) with the mandate to *"monitor the state of Single Market integration and discuss the policy priorities set out in the relevant documents, including within the European Semester"* and *"support the Council in its reinforced role of monitoring and mainstreaming competitiveness, in particular industrial competitiveness"*<sup>1</sup>.

The Committee agreed on arrangements concerning the membership of the COMPCRO HLG, the appointment of its chair and its work programme. In particular relating to the work programme, the Committee agreed that *"in order to align the COMPCRO HLG's agenda with the Trio Presidency Programme of the Council, the High Level Working Group will have a work programme, with a duration corresponding to the 18-month Trio Programme, taking into account the Commission's work programme, and which will be submitted for consideration and approval to the COREPER"*.

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<sup>1</sup> Doc 15006/14

2. On 28 January 2015, the Presidency informed the Committee on the state of play of several implementing steps, in particular relating to the membership and the appointment of the chair of the group.
  3. At the meeting of the COMPCRO HLG on 11 February 2015, Member States expressed broad support for the draft work programme for 2015 proposed by the Chair, exchanged views, made suggestions and endorsed a revised version for submission to COREPER for consideration and approval.
  4. The Permanent Representatives Committee is invited to consider the draft work programme of the COMPCRO HLG for 2015, as set out in the Annex together with an explanatory note, and approve it.
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## **Explanatory note to the Work Programme of the High-Level Working Group on Competitiveness and Growth for 2015 Brussels, 11 February 2015**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

COREPER on 31 October 2014 approved the establishment of a High Level Working Group on Competitiveness and Growth (HLG) and reiterated the call from the Council Conclusions of 25 September 2014 that *Member States should put forward proposals for a revised multiannual work programme for the HLG that would enable the Group to support the Competitiveness Council more consistently in its reinforced role of monitoring and mainstreaming industrial competitiveness across all relevant EU policy initiatives.*

COREPER agreed that the HLG's agenda should be aligned with the Trio Presidency Programme with a work programme having a duration corresponding to the 18-month Trio Programme, taking into account the Commission's work programme (CWP).

The proposed work programme would cover the remainder of the current Presidency Trio (Italy-Latvia-Luxembourg) and hence the HLG's activities in 2015.

### **MAIN PRINCIPLES OF THE PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME**

The proposed elements for a HLG work programme aim at focussing the activities of the HLG on its core role, namely to provide concrete and timely input to the Council (via COREPER) and to the Commission as well as to enable an exchange of views and information amongst delegations and with external stakeholders or experts on important issues.

At the meeting on 6 November 2014, the HLG held a broad exchange of views on its future work programme, during which the Member States were invited to present their priorities and suggestions. In the meantime, the Commission also published its Investment Plan for Europe<sup>2</sup> and its 2015 Work Programme<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [COM\(2014\) 903 final](#)

<sup>3</sup> [COM\(2014\) 910 final](#)

On the basis of these elements and of the Trio programme, there is a need to select a limited number of top priority issues, among the wide range of subjects that are of relevance for EU competitiveness, for consideration of HLG during 2015. In this regard it is important to note that the limited amount of time available makes such a choice unavoidable. At the same time, it is crucial to avoid duplication of work with other working parties or instances.

In order to encourage active participation and interaction at HLG meetings, HLG members should furthermore have the possibility to propose and to present items for discussion (either as individual Member States or as a group of delegations), that could then be added to the agenda of HLG meetings (and prepared by the interested Member States themselves).

Additionally, the HLG should be able to react to new developments and to take up urgent matters, where necessary, therefore there is a need for keeping a certain degree of flexibility in setting the agendas.

Also the association of stakeholders and think tanks to the HLG's discussions could help to get reactions and view from industry on various internal market, industry and competitiveness issues.

## **CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

It is necessary to agree on the priority areas to be addressed in 2015. The areas listed in the proposed work programme constitute essential elements of the EU competitiveness agenda that fall within the remit of the HLG. Each of these issues was also raised by a large number of delegations at the HLG meeting in November 2014.

Therefore at the HLG meeting on 11 February 2015, Member States expressed broad support for the proposed work programme, exchanged views, made suggestions and endorsed it for submission to COREPER for consideration and approval.

DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2015

The HLG's work in 2015 should focus in particular on the following areas:

- A. Preparing the Competitiveness Council policy debates** through discussions in HLG where required, and if necessary discussing on an analysis paper covering topical issue(s) for competitiveness, which will then be presented to the Competitiveness Council.
- B. Discussion and expression of views on major Commission initiatives**, covering a range of issues within the responsibility of various Council formations affecting EU's competitiveness, starting with the Investment Plan for Europe, the Digital Single Market package, the Internal Market Strategy for goods and services and other forthcoming initiatives relating to industrial policy.
- C. Discussion and exchange of views on planned major REFIT actions**, inviting the Commission to provide an update on the wide range of ongoing activities carried out under the umbrella of the REFIT programme, including impact assessments, competitiveness proofing, cumulative cost/benefit studies, public consultations, fitness checks and evaluations of existing legislation, followed by an exchange of views. Includes opportunity for Member States to discuss current and future REFIT priorities and to make suggestions to the Commission.
- D. Monitoring and the mainstreaming of competitiveness**. The HLG should be kept updated and be given the opportunity to provide its views on important issues, having a significant impact on industrial competitiveness and on the functioning of the internal market, including those based on Art. 114 and 173 of the TFEU and those dealt with by other Council formations, such as the Energy and Climate package and external aspects of competitiveness. These discussions could form the basis of an analytical study that then becomes the paper for the Competitiveness Council debate. Discussion and analysis should also draw upon regular reporting from the EU institutions on competitiveness, existing barriers and proper functioning of the Single Market, and SMEs.
- E. Follow-up discussions of previously adopted Council conclusions**. To enable Member States to ascertain what progress has been made on the Council's previous requests (for example, by the Commission or Member States), and what remains unfulfilled.
- F. Discussion and exchange of information with relevant stakeholders and experts on growth and competitiveness issues**.