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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: High-level conference on "A new start for social dialogue"
Brussels, 5 March 2015

Delegations will find attached the note from the Commission on the above subject, with a view to the meeting of the EPSCO Council on 9 March 2015 (Any Other Business item).

With this note the Commission aims at drawing the attention of the EPSCO Council to the recent high level conference " A new start for social dialogue", which took place in Brussels on the 5th March.

In his Political Guidelines, the European Commission President Juncker declared that he wishes to be the President of the social dialogue. Evidence shows that countries with strong social dialogue institutions are among the EU's best performing and most competitive economies, with a better and more resilient social situation.

Against this background, on 17th November 2014, Vice-President Dombrovskis and Commissioner Thyssen met with the leaders of the EU social partners and committed to work together towards a new start for the social dialogue. The first important step in this process was the high-level conference which took place on the 5th March 2015.

The conference brought together over 400 participants, mainly representatives of cross-industry and sectoral social partner organisations and the EU and national levels, but also representatives of other EU institutions and bodies, the Member States (social and employment attaches, economic and financial attaches, experts from capitals), international organisations and think tanks.

As noted by the European Commission President and other Members of College at the event, effective social dialogue is the cornerstone of the European social model. It is a prerequisite for the functioning of Europe's social market economy and crucial to promote both competitiveness and fairness. As such, the greater involvement of the social partners can effectively contribute to the implementation of the Investment Plan proposed by President Juncker.

The Conference identified how social dialogue can contribute in six specific areas: "the European Semester"; "industrial relations and capacity building at national level"; "the EU's macro-economic strategy"; "social dialogue and better regulation"; "the digital single market" and "skills, education and training needs in a changing working environment". Summary of discussions in the workshops is available on the conference webpage: www.ec.europa.eu/social/socialdialogue2015.

The conference was not a one-off event – it marked the beginning of a process, which will be followed up by concrete implementation, including:

1. Improving social partners' involvement in the European Semester, putting special emphasis on the social partners' contribution to the implementation of the priorities outlined in the Annual Growth Survey 2015, namely: investment, structural reforms and fiscal responsibility. This also entails strengthening industrial relations and capacity building at national level with the support of the European Social Fund (ESF). An event dedicated to this subject will be held in Riga on the 30th March.
2. Improving the contribution of social dialogue into EU policy making as well as into EU legislation in the frame of the better regulation agenda. This will include contribution in the area of employment and social affairs, where Commission foresees initiatives on employability and combating long-term unemployment and the mobility package. In addition, the Social Partners expressed their interest in policy areas, such as migration, skills development, energy union, digital single market, trade and transport.

The potential of the existing processes of tri-partite social dialogue, such as the Tripartite Social Summit (TSS) and the Macro-economic dialogue (MED) could be maximised for taking these actions further.

As highlighted by President Juncker, the new start for social dialogue should take place both at EU and national levels, and in the context of both tri-partite (between the social partners and the institutions) and bi-partite social dialogue (between the social partners themselves).

The Commission hopes that the Member States will be in the position, while respecting their social dialogue institutions and national traditions, to involve the national-level social partners in the European Semester process, in particular when it comes to consultations on the national reform plans and the country analysis. This could be further discussed during the forthcoming Tripartite Social Summit (19th March) as well as during the informal EPSCO which will be devoted to social dialogue