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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	Social dimension of Europe post 2020 - Policy debate

Delegations will find attached a discussion paper prepared by the Presidency, in preparation of the policy debate at the EPSCO Council on 15 March 2019.

Social dimension of Europe post 2020

Policy debate

EPSCO Council on 15 March 2019

The social dimension of Europe is just as much an economic imperative as a political requirement. The success of the European Union's internal market depends to a large extent on both the efficiency of its labour markets and social protection systems and the ability of European economies to adapt to shocks.

With this premise, the Europe 2020 strategy was established in 2010 as a strategy for transforming the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy with a view to delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

The White Paper on the future of Europe adopted by the European Commission on 1 March 2017 launched a broad debate on the future of the European Union with 27 Member States. And on 9 May 2018, the Commission opened a first public consultation on this topic. The final report will be presented at the first EU27 Summit in Sibiu, Romania, on 9 May 2019.

In April 2017, the Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension of Europe launched a topical debate with a view to clarifying two elements of great importance for the social future of the EU: What challenges should our countries tackle together in this area? And what added value can the existing EU instruments offer?

Linking into the international perspective, the Commission presented on 30 January 2019 a Reflection Paper on a more sustainable Europe by 2030, which aimed to stimulate a discussion on how to follow up on the Sustainable Development Goals within the EU.

Against the background of the continued disparities between Member States, the persistence of economic and social imbalances risks jeopardizing economic and social convergence and is a potential source of political and economic instability in all Member States. There is a clear need to strengthen the social dimension of Europe, building on the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Commission's Reflection Paper on a more sustainable Europe highlights the fact that the Social Pillar will serve as a framework for European action to address the relevant sustainable development goals, contributing to the pursuit of sustainable and equitable economic growth. For the further implementation of the Pillar, all existing tools can be used: legislation, economic policy coordination and financial support.

Delivering on the Social Pillar is a shared political commitment for us all. By continuing to build on it, we can show that Europe can respond to the new social challenges such as the need for new skills, digitalisation, and the development of artificial intelligence, the need for sustainable growth that leaves no one behind, the ageing of our societies, increasing inequalities and the challenge of integrating migrants and other communities at risk of marginalisation.

As a new vision for Europe post-2020 takes shape, it is important to properly assess the progress made towards the objectives that were set in the Europe 2020 Strategy. At the same time, the new vision should take into account the outcome of the Commission's recent report on citizens' dialogue and citizens' consultations on the future of Europe, so that the EU will be ready to deliver in the areas that matter most to its citizens.

Against this background, Ministers are invited to consider the following:

1. *What are the key aspects which should define the future social dimension?*
2. *Bearing in mind that the European Pillar of Social Rights provides a compass for a renewed process of upward convergence, what would be the priority action areas for the EU and the Member States in order to preserve and improve the European social model post-2020?*