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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject: Demography: Demographic Challenges - the way ahead
- Policy debate

Delegations will find attached a guidance note prepared by the Presidency, with a view to facilitating the discussion in the EPSCO Council on 19 March 2020.

Demographic challenges – the way ahead

Europe is going through a period of a profound demographic and societal change creating both, challenges and opportunities. In this context, it is very timely and relevant that the European Commission will publish in April the *Report on the Impact of Demographic Change*. Its findings are expected to inform the next steps and to help identify actions at Union level to mitigate or adapt to the impacts of demographic change in a fair way across generations.

This Report will also provide an opportunity to the Member States for discussing next steps, by mapping the drivers of demographic change and exploring their impacts on peoples' lives. It is expected that the Report will call on policy-makers to zoom into the reality on the ground because trends play out more strongly at the regional level. Union as a whole, its Member States and its regions have a shared interest in managing demographic change to the benefit of people living in the EU, today and in the future.

This goal should also be at the heart of the debate that the Commission intends to launch with its *Green Paper on Ageing* and its *Long-term vision on Rural Areas*, expected early next year, as well as in all subsequent initiatives. These two follow-up papers are only the starting point to address the full amplitude of the challenge.

If we do not address the needs of a changing demographic landscape, it could give rise to negative sentiments towards decision-making and deliberation processes and fuel the '*geography of discontent*' that has become visible in many places. This is the reason why tangible action is needed now.

In an effort to find suitable solutions for developing demography at the EU level, the Croatian Presidency will organize in April a Ministerial conference on "Demographic challenges and opportunities for growth and development in the European Union". European ministers and leading experts will together make contributions in positive guidance of the European demographic changes. The conference will have a strong impact on the topical Council conclusions that will become one of the guidance documents for developing new demographic policies for the European Union.

Recognizing the transformational impact of the demographic change, and taking into account the upcoming Report, Ministers are invited to reflect on this topic in the context of necessary follow-up actions, in particular in relation to the following questions:

1. *What mix of policies is necessary to ensure that regions most acutely impacted by population decline – especially as a consequence of intensified intra-EU mobility triggered predominantly by a lack of job opportunities, adequate services, or transport connections – become vibrant and attractive again?*
2. *How can European funds, programmes and funding instruments be used to develop and implement policies that could tangibly contribute to addressing demographic challenges?*
3. *What can be done at the European level to develop timely, consistent, reliable, comparable and accessible data on addressing demographic developments, taking into account the demographic projections and identified impacts of demographic changes on the European society?*