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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject: A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions
- Policy debate

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

"A strong social Europe for just transitions"

Climate change, demographic challenges, digitalisation and technological developments: these all contribute to changes we have to adapt to and embrace. We have to adapt our economy, our industry, the way we travel and work, what we buy and what we eat.

Europe's demography is changing; today we live longer and healthier lives, thanks to progress in medicine and public health and to our high social standards. The urban/rural divide and the regional divide, however, are growing. Social protection systems and welfare systems are facing unprecedented challenges in terms of sustainability and adequacy.

The digital economy of today and tomorrow must have people at its heart. It is expected that artificial intelligence and robotics alone will create almost 60 million new jobs worldwide in the next five years, while 100 million jobs in the EU will change, with others disappearing¹.

In the New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024², European leaders called for 'inclusiveness and sustainability, embracing the changes brought about by the green transition, technological evolution and globalisation while making sure no one is left behind'. Among other concerns, this should be done with 'keen attention to social issues' and should deliver on the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights ('the Pillar').

This guidance was given concrete shape by, on one hand, the Commission's Communication 'The European Green Deal'³, which it considers to be the new EU growth strategy, and by on the other hand, the January 2020 Communication 'A strong social Europe for just transitions'⁴, which lays the groundwork for an action plan to deliver on the Pillar. A socially just transition requires targeted employment and social policies at EU, national and regional level.

¹ ST 5353/20, p. 1

² Annex to EUCO 9/19.

³ ST 15051/19 + ADD 1.

⁴ ST 5353/20 + ADD 1.

In its January 2020 Communication, the Commission presented a roadmap for concrete EU initiatives which, in its opinion, could contribute to ensuring that the transition to climate neutrality, and changes due to digitalisation and demographic developments are socially fair and just. Some of the actions for 2020-2021 outlined by the Commission include:

- fair minimum wages for workers in the EU
- a European Gender Equality Strategy and binding pay transparency measures
- an updated Skills Agenda for Europe
- a reinforced Youth Guarantee
- a Platform Work Summit
- Europe's Beating Cancer Plan
- a Green Paper on ageing
- an initiative on Roma equality and inclusion
- a report on the impact of demographic change
- a European Unemployment Benefit Reinsurance Scheme
- a Child Guarantee
- an action plan for the social economy
- a strategy for disability.

Furthermore, the Commission has launched a broad consultation of stakeholders and invited all EU, national, regional and local authorities, social partners and citizens to present their views by 30 November 2020 on the actions that would reinforce Social Europe. On the basis of the information gathered, the Commission plans to present a proposal for an action plan in 2021 and seek endorsement for it at the highest political level.

Against this background, the Croatian Presidency finds this an opportune moment for ministers to reflect on the intentions the Commission outlined in its Communications and for European employment and social ministers to voice their opinions on the best way forward to deliver on Social Europe in changing times.

Ministers are invited to include in their interventions views on the following issues:

- 1. In your opinion, does the roadmap outlined in the Commission's Communication 'A strong social Europe for just transitions' address the most important issues that should be dealt with in the next few years? Are there other issues that should be addressed in your view?*
- 2. Which concrete policies or actions would you like to see incorporated into the action plan?*