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**NOTE**

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From: Trio Presidency  
To: High Level Working Group on Competitiveness and Growth

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Subject: Working methods of the Competitiveness Council including the future of the competitiveness check-up

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Delegations will find in Annex a Trio Presidency note on the working methods of the Competitiveness Council including the future of the competitiveness check-up, in view of the meeting of the High Level Working Group on Competitiveness and Growth on 7 November 2019.

## Working methods of COMPET including the future of the Competitiveness check-up

### Setting the scene

1. The purpose of this discussion is to explore Member States' views on how the working methods of the Competitiveness Council (COMPET) should be developed in order to maximise the impact and visibility of its decisions and messages, for example, in the European Council's policy-making.
2. To achieve this objective, we need to encourage ministerial attendance at COMPET meetings. This in turn requires greater political interest in the discussion and genuine negotiation and decision-making at COMPET meetings. An integrated approach to different policy areas, as presented in the Finnish Presidency report *Vision for a Long-term Strategy on Sustainable Growth* should be better reflected in the work of COMPET.
3. The discussion on this topic is timely as the new Commission will start its work soon. At the beginning of the new institutional cycle it is possible to suggest changes to COMPET's working methods. To provide some background for the debate, the HLG Trio Presidency has put together a description of some of COMPET's working methods and some reflections on how to develop them further.

## Working methods of COMPET and initial ideas for their development

### I. The Competitiveness check-up

#### The initial concept

4. In an attempt to enliven discussions in COMPET and increase its reactivity to current events, the Luxembourg Presidency introduced the Competitiveness check-up (hereafter the check-up) in October 2015.
5. As initially conceived, the aim of the check-up was to foster an open and spontaneous debate between ministers and the Commission at the beginning of each COMPET meeting. As an opening standing item, it was meant to provide a snapshot of the latest economic trends, allowing ministers to freely discuss current issues/events and developments in areas of relevance to COMPET.

#### The Competitiveness check-up in practice

6. Since October 2015, all successive Presidencies of the Council have maintained the practice of scheduling a check-up at the beginning of each COMPET meeting. The format has progressively settled into a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation by the Commissioner for Industry and Internal Market, followed by a short table round.
7. As regards its content, while the initial Luxembourg concept called for broad analysis of the European economy and macro-economic trends, the Commission presentations have in practice progressively focused on specific policy and micro-economic issues.
8. Some of the main themes addressed in the check-ups have been regulatory barriers in the single market, industrial policy, value chains and sectoral focus.

### *Stock-taking and way forward*

9. Four years after its introduction, the check-up is now an established practice within COMPET, although quite different from what was originally envisaged by the Luxembourg Presidency. The check-ups have increasingly become specific policy presentations by the Commission. As such, they have been useful in highlighting the benefits of facilitating cross-border service provision and, more recently, in developing the concept of strategic value chains.
10. However, some delegations have questioned the format of the exercise, which has progressively turned into a more traditional policy discussion, rather than unscripted exchanges as initially planned. Content-wise, a number of delegations have also expressed disappointment about the technical nature of certain presentations, and the lack of scope for operational follow-up in the Council.
11. As a new institutional cycle is set to begin with the incoming Commission mandate, the future of the check-up and the evolution of its format could be considered.

## **II. The role of COMPET as a legislator**

12. In practice, many EU legislative issues are already decided at Coreper level. Therefore, although legislative proposals are usually discussed in COMPET to reach a general approach, the actual substance of the proposal is no longer negotiated. Hence COMPET's legislative role is often somewhat ceremonial.
13. Against this background, it would be interesting to discuss whether COMPET taking on a more active and decisive role on the political aspects of legislative files would make its work more influential and its meetings more interesting for ministers to attend. On the other hand, it is also important to assess whether this kind of approach in the legislative process would complicate and slow down the adoption of legislation.

### III. The scope of COMPET discussions and how they are seen in a wider context

14. It would also be useful to consider whether discussions in COMPET should more often be linked to broader issues and thus cover subjects from different policy areas that have significant impact on competitiveness. This kind of approach would make COMPET's agendas and discussions more politically orientated and could therefore provide Ministers more political interest to attend COMPET meetings. However, these kinds of debates should be carefully planned and coordinated to avoid duplicating discussions that take place in other Council configurations.
15. The Finnish Presidency report *Vision for a Long-term Strategy on Sustainable Growth* is an example, which promotes an integrated approach as a driver for effective growth policy for the EU.

### IV. Monitoring and operational follow-up of policy discussions held in COMPET

16. The policy debates in COMPET might be more influential and have a greater impact if their outcome were properly monitored to better ensure their operational follow-up. Some kind of reporting system could be put in place to communicate the results of the monitoring work back to COMPET. However, this should be organised in a manner that would not create unnecessary administrative burden for the Member States or the EU institutions. The HLG could possibly have a role in this kind of monitoring work.

### V. The frequency of COMPET meetings

17. At present, there are two formal COMPET meetings per Presidency. In addition, each Presidency usually organises an informal COMPET. It would be interesting to hear whether the Member States consider the frequency of COMPET meetings appropriate or not.

**Questions:**

1. *Should the Competitiveness check-up be revised? What would be your concrete suggestions, notably in view of enriching the output of the Competitiveness Council?*
  2. *What other changes should be considered to make the work of COMPET even more influential and to make it more attractive for ministers to attend? Your concrete ideas are very welcome.*
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