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**NOTE**

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From: Presidency  
To: Delegations

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Subject: Promoting social and employment policies within the European Semester:  
future challenges and development needs  
- Presidency steering note

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Delegations will find attached the Presidency steering note on the above subject, with a view to the lunch debate at the EPSCO Council on 10 December 2019.

## **Promoting social and employment policies within the European Semester: future challenges and development needs**

In the future European Union, there will be a need to intensify high-level policy discussions on matters close to its citizens. We must put people genuinely at the centre of all EU policy-making and better communicate the fact that the EU is also about social and employment policies. The European Semester provides a concrete tool and a framework for ministers to hold regular public policy debates in the Council on the social and employment situation in the Union and to consider together how to tackle the challenges. Increasing our policy profile would also make the social and employment field more prominent compared to other policy areas, and within the **European Council**, and this in turn would help strengthen the human wellbeing aspect in all policy making.

The European Semester is about coordination of Member States' economic policies and remains the key instrument for monitoring progress towards the targets set in the Europe 2020 Strategy and for supporting the implementation of the principles established in the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In the Council conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing, adopted on 24 October 2019, Member States emphasise the importance to undertake the horizontal analyses in the context of the European Semester process for enhancing broad, long-term policy perspectives and providing balanced policy recommendations. Human wellbeing is recognised as vitally important for ensuring economic growth, long-term fiscal sustainability and societal stability.

The joint assessment report of the **Employment Committee (EMCO)** and the **Social Protection Committee (SPC)** on the Europe 2020 Strategy<sup>1</sup> shows that Member States value the contribution that the European Semester has made to the pursuit of the objectives in the Strategy. They also consider that it has reinforced coordination and cooperation on employment and social protection issues at the EU and national levels.

According to the joint EMCO and SPC assessment report, the process has improved over the years, but there is still a need for further work, with a view to better balancing of employment and social protection issues with budgetary and macro-economic coordination, so as to further increase ownership by the Member States, and explore ways to streamline the process.

The joint report states that while cooperation has improved between the EPSCO and ECOFIN preparatory committees and with other relevant bodies, it could be developed further with a view to enabling the Committees to contribute on an equal footing to the Semester process. In addition, the Council conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing invite EMCO and the SPC to enhance their collaboration with the **Economic Policy Committee** and other relevant Council preparatory bodies in the field of health and education, so as to ensure a balanced horizontal analysis. It should be noted that more than half of the Country-Specific Recommendations currently address the social policy area, including employment, education and health issues.

The important role of the Semester and the need to strengthen cooperation between the EPSCO and ECOFIN was also highlighted in the EPSCO meeting in July.

The EMCO-SPC report emphasises that some streamlining and simplification of the Semester process and tools would be welcome. This could also enhance awareness of the outputs amongst a wider audience. The reports produced by the committees should be more concise and their key messages more political.

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<sup>1</sup><https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8256&furtherPubs=yes>

As regards the development of the European Semester, President-elect Ursula von der Leyen mentioned in her political agenda that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals could be integrated into the Semester in the future.

In view of the above, Ministers are invited to answer the following questions:

- 1) *What concrete measures are needed to improve Member State ownership and implementation and to give employment and social policies greater prominence alongside economic policies within the Semester?*
- 2) *What is your view on integrating the UN Sustainable Development Goals in the European Semester?*

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