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**COMPET 15**

**NOTE**

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From:	Trio Presidency
To:	High Level Working Group on Competitiveness and Growth
Subject:	Strategic work of COMPET and the HLG in advancing growth and competitiveness in the EU - Follow-up to the discussion on future working methods of COMPET

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Delegations will find in Annex a Trio Presidency note on strategic work of COMPET and the HLG in advancing growth and competitiveness in the EU, in view of the meeting of the High Level Working Group on Competitiveness and Growth on 14 February 2020.

**Strategic work of COMPET and the HLG in advancing growth and competitiveness in the EU**

*-Follow-up to the discussion on future working methods of COMPET*

**Setting the scene**

1. The purpose of this note is to follow up on the discussion held at the previous High Level Group (HLG) meeting on 7 November 2019 and to explore further 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 strategic work.
2. To improve political interest in COMPET, the Member States have stressed that COMPET should have a more prominent role, in line with the integrated approach, in mainstreaming competitiveness, by focusing on synergies in internal-market, industry and digital-related issues. The Ministers should negotiate legislative files, where necessary, and take decisions, give proper guidance and monitor the follow-up of Council conclusions.
3. One concrete action proposed was to review the way the competitiveness check-up is carried out, by enhancing its strategic level, broadening its scope and rendering it more attractive. In this note, some ideas for pilot testing of new working methods at COMPET are suggested. These suggestions are not intended to be comprehensive but rather to inspire the discussion.

## **I. FUTURE OF THE COMPETITIVENESS CHECK-UP**

4. The competitiveness check-up has not always triggered a fruitful debate. There is a need to move forward and review the way the check-up is carried out in order to allow Ministers to have open discussions, but also to facilitate strategic decision-making. The HLG has previously emphasised that the scope of the competitiveness check-up needs to be horizontal. This could stimulate more interactive discussion and strengthen COMPET's role when preparing strategic discussions at the European Council.
5. Furthermore, to make the competitiveness check-up more meaningful it could be linked to the work of the European Council in terms of topics and timing. The possibility of including the check-up on the COMPET agenda only once per half year/Presidency could be considered. An alternative would be replacing the check-up with another working method, for example as suggested under section II of this note.

## **II. PILOT TESTING OF NEW WORKING METHODS FOR COMPET'S STRATEGIC WORK**

6. In order to allow genuine negotiation and decision-making at COMPET meetings, there needs to be political interest for Ministers to participate. In the previous HLG meeting, many Member States emphasised that COMPET discussions should be linked to **broad horizontal issues** and thus cover subjects from various policy areas that have a significant impact on competitiveness. It is clear that such debates should be carefully planned and coordinated to avoid duplicating discussions that take place in other Council configurations.

It was suggested that **a list of topics discussed in all Council configurations** could be created, as many topics are horizontal. This would help to see linkages, encourage co-operation between Council configurations and avoid duplication.

7. Instead of the normal round-table discussions, different kinds of methods could be considered to enable an interactive discussion. One alternative could be to facilitate the discussion by using **digital online tools**, like Kahoot! ([kahoot.com](https://kahoot.com)) or Mentimeter ([mentimeter.com](https://mentimeter.com)), to stimulate or sum up discussions, for instance.
8. Several Member States suggested that COMPET could be inspired by ECOFIN breakfasts as a format that allows Ministers to get to know each other and have more informal discussions on major issues linked to competitiveness. As a pilot test, a '**Competitiveness breakfast**' could be tried out as an alternative to the COMPET lunch. With only Ministers present, they could kick-off the COMPET day by discussing either timely, horizontal competitiveness topics or issues to be discussed during the day's agenda in an informal setting. The breakfast debates could for example be inspired by a presentation by the Commission, by one of the Ministers or by an external keynote speaker. An alternative could be an informal ministerial dinner on the eve of the COMPET meeting.
9. **Break-out groups** have been tested as a working method in informal meetings of COMPET. Break-out groups encourage interaction between participants and more engagement in the topics discussed. Whilst it is understood that this may be challenging to organise in formal Council meetings, break-out groups could be considered as a pilot working method. The idea could be tested either as a preparatory method for COMPET (e.g. several Member States drafting a background note) or as part of the actual meeting, for example combined with a breakfast as outlined above. It is important to ensure that all participants have the possibility to give their opinion on all topics discussed. Therefore, the results of break-out groups should be taken to round-table discussions.

10. **Strategic follow-up** of the work of COMPET was emphasised in the previous HLG discussion. The HLG could take a more active role in facilitating the follow-up of the work of COMPET. One idea could be to give the HLG the mandate to monitor the follow-up of Council conclusions. This would strengthen the strategic approach in the work of the HLG.
11. After the possible pilot testing of new working methods at COMPET, the successful methods could be introduced in the near future. The new institutional period offers an ideal time to try out new methods. It would be timely to conclude discussions on the working methods now and move forward with concrete actions.

**Questions:**

1. *In view of the previous HLG discussions and based on the ideas presented in this note, which new working method(s) would you consider most useful to take forward?*
  2. *How could the HLG most effectively support the strategic work of COMPET in this context?*
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