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NOTE

from:	Presidency
to:	Delegations
Subject:	EU 2020 - preparation of mid-term review - Policy debate

The Europe 2020 Strategy, adopted in 2010, builds on the lessons drawn from the Lisbon Strategy and intends to make the EU a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. It is delivered and monitored in the context of the European Semester, which is the yearly cycle for economic and budgetary policy coordination.

In March 2014, the European Commission launched the first steps towards a mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy through a Communication, ‘Taking Stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’, followed by a public consultation launched in May 2014 and aimed at bringing together evidence on the strategy’s progress so far from all interested stakeholders. The Commission aims to draw lessons from the first four years of the strategy and to identify the elements to take into account for its further development.

The Digital agenda for Europe (DAE) was set out as one of the 7 flagship initiatives of the “Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”. In accordance with the Roadmap (doc. 11645/14) for the Europe 2020 strategy mid-term review the TTE (Telecommunication) Council on November 27th should contribute, with the aim of identifying future priorities in the Digital area. The debate should take into account, among others, the 2015 Annual Growth Survey.

Digital Agenda for Europe. Progress achieved, main challenges and evolution of the debate

The Digital agenda for Europe (DAE), as reviewed in December 2012, identified key areas for further efforts to stimulate the conditions to create growth and jobs in Europe: completing Digital Single Market; speeding up structural reforms of public services; enhancing the broadband networks; increasing trust & security in the digital environment; enhancing the cloud computing; stimulating entrepreneurship, jobs and skills creation; supporting research and innovation.

The Digital Agenda Scoreboard reports positive results from the start of the DAE, namely an increased use of Internet, especially among disadvantaged groups; rising of domestic online shopping; doubling of the availability of high-speed broadband (however concentrated in urban zones). However progress is assessed as insufficient in areas such as eGovernment, the use of the Internet as a sales channel by SMEs; the public support for R&D in ICT.

The October 2013 European Council was devoted to the digital economy. It highlighted the necessity of completing the Digital Single Market (DSM) by 2015, the need to step up investments (through an improved regulatory framework and the best use of EU funds), the importance of Big Data and Cloud computing, the enhancement of interoperability and portability of content and data, the significance of fostering trust in the digital economy as well as of modernising the public administration; the importance of improving the necessary digital skills and of boosting innovation.

President Juncker placed the completion of the digital single market among his top priorities, highlighting that this would generate € 250 billion of additional growth and hundreds of thousands of new jobs. To this end, he announced ambitious legislative steps, in the first six months of his mandate, on several key issues such as data protection, telecom, consumer and copyright rules. He also committed to promote digital skills and innovative start-ups, highlighting the need to enhance the use of digital technologies and online services as a horizontal policy.

Italy placed the digital sector at the core of the presidency agenda, convinced of the value of internet accessible by all end users as a driver of innovation and growth. In July Venice hosted a top level political debate on digital priorities. At the October Informal TLC Council, Italy confirmed its line on broadband Internet access and secure digital economy expansion, stressing that the EU should speak with one voice on internet governance considered a pillar of the digital ecosystem.

At the legislative level, the Presidency is currently chairing the negotiations on the Network and Information Security Directive (NIS), the Web accessibility Directive (WebAcc) and the Telecom Single Market Package (TSM). These packages reveal a deep interconnection between themselves. A single secure and trustable digital market (TSM+NIS), in fact accessible by all the European citizens (WebAcc), represents the key driver to sustain the economic growth revamping on the whole European territory. Thus, among others, spectrum policies, roaming issues, net neutrality, broadband development, digital skills and job diffusion must represent the pillars of a single and common European strategy where the MS acts together in a shared and agreed vision. Furthermore, the development of the networks must be adapted, step by step, in order to accomplish the ever changing requirements of the “bandwidth & quality of service hungry” services. Thus all the MS must have the courage to see, in a perspective way, the 30Mbps and the 100Mbps DAE agenda targets as minimum requirements to be addressed. All the European citizens must have the chance to connect with a reasonable level of service whenever they want independently of their position and the technology used.

In light of the above and of the evolving debate on the digital sector in Europe, Ministers are invited to present their views on the main priorities that should guide the EU digital action in the next five years, thus contributing to the review of the Europe 2020 strategy.

Questions

The Presidency suggests to structure the Council debate with the following questions:

Q1) Do Ministers think that the Europe 2020 strategy has made a difference and has been implemented effectively at EU, national and local levels? What were the main hurdles? How can we improve the effectiveness of policy measures to achieve the 2020 targets?

Q2) Has the setting of Flagship Initiatives, such as the DAE, helped in delivering the Strategy and raising the importance of Digital in Europe?

Q3) What are the elements of the DAE which should be given priority in the context of the review of the Europe 2020 strategy, notably those contributing to the completion of the Digital Single Market?

As usual delegations at Council will be invited to focus on their key messages and should therefore provide more detailed written submissions in advance of the Council.