

European Council conclusions on jobs, growth and competitiveness and on climate and energy, 17 March 2016

I. JOBS, GROWTH AND COMPETITIVENESS

1. To steer the Council's discussions on the 2016 European Semester, the European Council endorsed the policy priority areas of the Annual Growth Survey: re-launching investment, pursuing structural reforms to modernise our economies, and conducting responsible fiscal policies. Member States will reflect these priorities in their forthcoming National Reform Programmes and Stability or Convergence Programmes. Such policies will contribute to placing the current recovery on a more sustainable basis and to fostering growth and employment. The European Council notes the Commission consultation on social issues and stresses the importance of well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems.

2. At its June meeting, the European Council will discuss the progress achieved in the work towards completing the Economic and Monetary Union. It will also adopt an Agenda for the implementation of all aspects of the Single Market, including delivery of the Commission's Single Market, Digital Single Market and Capital Markets Union strategies, with a view to exploiting in full its untapped growth and productivity potential.

3. In the light of the difficult situation of the European steel sector, in a context of overcapacity at global level, the European Council calls on the Council to rapidly examine the Commission's communication with a view to taking strong action in response to this challenge

4. The European Council notes the situation of farmers, notably in the dairy and pig sectors, who are seriously affected by the drop in prices. It invites the Commission to quickly act upon the outcome of the Council (Agriculture) meeting of 15 March. It will closely follow the evolution of this sector of such importance for Europe.

5. The European Council notes that the Commission intends to publish shortly a communication on an action plan on VAT. It welcomes the intention of the Commission to include proposals for increased flexibility for Member States with respect to reduced rates of VAT, which would provide the option to Member States of VAT zero rating for sanitary products.

II. CLIMATE AND ENERGY

6. The European Council welcomes the submission by the Commission of the package on energy security as well as of the Communication "Road from Paris". It encourages the legislators to proceed with work on the proposals to reinforce the EU energy security as a matter of priority on the basis of its previous conclusions and the relevant strategies endorsed by the European Council. It also recalled the importance of a fully-functioning and interconnected energy market. Based on the Climate Communication, it underlines the EU's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions domestically and to increase the share of renewable energies and improve energy efficiency as agreed by the European Council in October 2014. Adapting the legislation in order to implement this framework remains a priority. The European Council invites the Commission to rapidly present all the remaining relevant proposals to this end so as to swiftly engage the legislative process. The European Council looks forward to the signature of the Paris Agreement in New York on 22 April and underlines the need for the European Union and its Member States to be able to ratify the Paris Agreement as soon as possible and on time so as to be Parties as of its entry into force.

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