



## **COMPETITIVENESS Council**

### **2 and 3 March in Brussels**

The Competitiveness Council will take place against the background of the main [priorities of the Latvian presidency](#) to achieve a competitive and digital Europe.

The agenda for Monday 2 March includes debates on the EU **single market** and on **industrial competitiveness**. During the debate on the single market it is planned to discuss the priorities for the future single market policy and it will serve as Council's input to the Commission's work in that regard, namely on the future internal market strategy for goods and services and the digital single market package. The debate on digitalisation of EU industry will contribute as an input for the digital single market package.

In both policy debates ministers are expected to pay particular attention to the benefits that the creation of a truly **single market**, including a **digital single market**, will bring for consumers, services, enterprises and industrial sectors.

The debates will also be fuelled by the **annual growth survey 2015**, which outlines priority actions to be taken by member states in order to ensure better coordinated and more effective policies for fostering sustainable economic growth.

In this context, the Council will be invited to adopt conclusions covering a broad range of issues where the single market can increase its capacity for delivering **economic growth and jobs**.

On Tuesday 3 March, ministers will discuss the investment plan for Europe and the 2015 annual growth survey from a **research and innovation** perspective. It will include key actions to foster innovation and ways to increase the quality and quantity of investments within the European Research Area.

They will also look into how Europe can better support and accelerate the transition towards a **data-driven economy** through open, networked and data-intensive research, within the context of the digital agenda for Europe.

The sessions will be chaired by Mrs **Dana Reizniece-Ozola**, Minister for Economics, and Mrs **Māriņa Seile**, Minister for Education and Science, of Latvia.

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#### Press conferences:

- internal market and industry: Monday 2/3 at +/- 17.50;
- research and innovation: Tuesday 3/3 at +/- 13.30.

Press conferences and public deliberations can be followed by video streaming:

<http://video.consilium.europa.eu/>

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<sup>1</sup> This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

## **2015 annual growth survey**

In separate sessions, ministers will have debates on the Commission's 2015 annual growth survey, as a part of all relevant Council deliberations in preparation for the spring European Council on 19 and 20 March.

In November 2014 the Commission published its 2015 annual growth survey , which sets out policy priorities for jobs and growth in the EU and its member states and marks the starting point of the 2015 European semester.

The European semester forms part of a governance architecture that was approved in 2010. It is the six-month period every year during which the member states' budgetary and structural policies are reviewed to detect any inconsistencies and emerging imbalances. The aim is to reinforce coordination while major budgetary decisions are still under preparation.

The Council broadly shares the Commission's analysis of the economic situation and policy challenges in the 2015 growth survey.

Despite recent improvements, the economic recovery is weaker than expected with low productivity gains, low levels of investment and high unemployment. If not addressed, these factors will significantly weaken Europe's growth potential, thereby making it harder to achieve societal goals.

Against this background, the Council underlined the need not only to foster investment, improve the overall business environment and address market failures in Europe, but also to pursue and intensify member states' efforts to implement structural reforms and pursue growth -friendly fiscal consolidation, in order to provide the foundation for growth and jobs and progress on the Europe 2020 headline targets.

The Latvian presidency will conduct the debates by putting a strong focus on the measures that can improve the economic performance and create added value in both the short and the long term and which are within the remit of the Competitiveness Council:

1. Single Market Policy
2. Industrial competitiveness
3. European Research Area

Two overarching subjects will be embedded into the ministerial debates: the new investment plan for Europe and the way forward towards the creation of a truly digital economy.

### **1. Single market policy**

The Council will hold a debate with a view to adopting conclusions on the single market policy. The outcome of the debate and the conclusions will provide guidance to the Commission for the upcoming internal market strategy for goods and services and the digital single market package, which the Commission is due to present in the coming months.

In order to structure the debate, the Latvian presidency will put forward a [policy document](#) and a questionnaire inviting ministers to express views on the main existing barriers and bottlenecks in the single market and on the actions and instruments that should be taken up in the upcoming strategies for the internal market and the digital single market

The 2015 annual growth survey and the investment plan for Europe will be taken as reference points as they also seek to further reinforce the single market by creating the optimal framework conditions for investment in Europe.

In spite of its success, the single market is still not fully exploited yet. Eliminating remaining unjustified barriers, particularly in goods and services, can be of great benefit to citizens. The completion of the single market, in sectors such as energy, transport and digital technologies, will offer real benefits, encourage public-private partnerships and attract new investment.

## **2. Industrial competitiveness and digital transformation**

The Council will hold a debate on aspects and dimensions of industrial policy within the future digital single market strategy.

In order to structure the debate, the presidency will put forward a [policy document](#) and a questionnaire inviting ministers to express views on the following key issues:

- effects of incorporating industry within the future digital single market strategy,
- obstacles that prevent industry from embracing digital innovations and possible solutions, and
- concrete measures that could contribute to creating a fertile digital startup ecosystem for companies.

Latvia has pinpointed a competitive and digital EU as one of the main horizontal priorities for its presidency, based on the assumption that innovative enterprises and enterprises exploiting digital opportunities are the future of a modern economy and a precondition for creating growth and jobs.

## **3. European Research Area: actions to foster innovation**

The Council will hold a debate on actions to foster innovation in the European Research Area.

In order to structure the debate, the presidency will put forward a [policy document](#) and will invite ministers to express views on the following questions:

1. The 2015 annual growth survey stresses that member states should focus on structural reforms of their research and innovation (R&I) systems to improve the quality of R&I strategies, programmes and institutions and maximise the impact of R&I investments. Are there in your view particularly effective reforms which should be considered in this context?
2. The investment plan for Europe highlights the transfer of knowledge, open access to results of scientific research and greater mobility of researchers as important elements to reinforce a level playing field and eliminate barriers to investment in R&I in Europe. What in your view is most needed to ensure an investment-friendly environment for business investment in R&I?
3. The investment plan for Europe is intended to support strategic investments of European significance in areas such as research and innovation. It will also support risk finance for SMEs and mid-cap companies across Europe. Against this backdrop, how can the benefits of the Investment Plan be maximised for R&I, including for sustainable research infrastructures and e-Infrastructures?

On 5 December 2014, the Council adopted [conclusions on R&I as sources of renewed growth](#), which refer to the quality and effectiveness of public spending and the implementation of growth-friendly actions and reforms in research and innovation as imperative for improving the European Research Area.

## **Towards a data-driven economy: open, networked and data intensive research**

The Council will have a debate on ways of boosting innovation through open, networked and data intensive research.

The outcome of the debate will contribute to identifying key aspects in this field to be addressed in the forthcoming digital single market strategy.

It will also contribute to the preparation of Council conclusions on open, data-intensive and networked research as a driver for faster and wider innovation that will be submitted to the Competitiveness Council in May.

In order to structure the debate, the Latvian presidency will put forward a [policy document](#) and a questionnaire.

The European Council's conclusions of October 2013 highlight the digital economy, innovation and services as drivers for growth and jobs. They called for EU action to provide the right framework conditions for a single market for big data and cloud computing.

In July 2014 the Commission responded to this call through its communication ["Towards a thriving data-driven economy"](#), which outlines the features of the data-driven economy of the future and sets out actions to support and accelerate the transition towards it. It also sets out current and future activities in the field of cloud computing.

A thriving data-driven economy will contribute to the well-being of citizens and to socio-economic progress through accelerated innovation, productivity growth and increased competitiveness in data across the whole economy.

The ["Open Europe: open data for open society"](#) conference, held in Riga on 18 and 19 February under the auspices of the Latvian presidency, allowed high-level experts from the private and public sectors to share experiences and present proposals for the use and reuse of open data and address current and upcoming big data challenges in Europe.

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