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PRESS RELEASE

The Europe 2020 strategy

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In 2010, the EU resolved to revitalise its economy, not only to speed up the emergence from the crisis but also to lay the foundations for "smart, sustainable and inclusive" growth. The Europe 2020 strategy establishes the framework within which the European economy is going to evolve in the decade to come. It thus identifies seven action areas in which concrete initiatives have been undertaken or are expected. The EU has also adopted five key targets with regard to employment, innovation, education, sustainable development and social inclusion.

To ensure that all the players in the EU work together for the success of the Europe 2020 strategy, starting with the Member States, the EU has put in place a three-pronged mechanism for policy surveillance incorporating fiscal, macroeconomic and thematic aspects. It is in the context of the thematic procedure that the commitments made by States in favour of the Europe 2020 strategy are examined and their progress measured. The national reform programmes filed each year with the European Commission effectively contain the translation of the key European targets into national targets and also the measures that the countries are intending to implement in order to achieve them.

The new model of governance was implemented for the first time in 2011, during what has been named the "European Semester". The impetus was provided by the Annual Growth Survey carried out in January by the European Commission, which served as a basis for the adoption of priority actions by the European Council in the Spring. In April, the Member States compiled their national reform programmes and their stability or convergence programmes. The Commission examined them in May and the Council issued specific recommendations to each country in June. These recommendations, which simultaneously affect the budgetary, macroeconomic and social elements, are focussed on strengthening the consistency of the national policies implemented during the following six months, referred to as the "National Semester".

The recommendations directed at Belgium number six in total and are concerned with correcting the government deficit, improving the long-term sustainability of public finances by curbing expenditure linked to ageing, correcting the structural weaknesses in the financial sector, taking measures in order to reform the system for negotiating and indexing wages, boosting participation in the labour market and strengthening competition in the retail sector and on the markets for electricity and gas.

The compilation of the national reform programmes shows that the mobilisation of countries in favour of the Europe 2020 strategy is proving insufficient in a certain number of fields.

Thus, assuming that the commitments made by the Member States are honoured, the European strategic target of an employment rate of 75 % for people between 20 and 64 years of age in 2020 would not be met. It should only amount to 73.7 % or 74 % according to whether the minimum or maximum value of the ranges given by certain Member States is taken into consideration. In this regard, the Belgian authorities have set themselves an employment rate target equating to 73.2 % by 2020, that is to say an improvement of 5.6 percentage points in ten years.

In the field of research and innovation, in the light of the quantitative targets at national level, the average share of GDP taken up by gross domestic expenditure on R&D across the EU would remain below 3 % in 2020, the target that Belgium has signed up to.

With regard to energy, the targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and raising the share of renewable energy in final consumption of energy originate from the overall effort contained in the European energy and climate package, to be shared between the 27 Member States. In the context of these commitments, Belgium would need to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 15 % in 2020 compared to the level of 2005 and increase the share of renewable energy to 13 %. The efforts to improve energy efficiency - the third element of the European "20/20/20" target - set out in the national reform programmes are not directly comparable between the countries.

The education target is two-fold: to lower the school drop-out rate below a level of 10 % and to increase the share of those with tertiary education to at least 40 % amongst people between 30 and 34 years of age. Once again, the national targets do not allow the overall European commitment to be ensured; the European Commission has calculated that the share of young people leaving school early would lie in the range between 10.3 % and 10.5 % in 2020 and that the percentage of highly skilled people would not exceed 38 %. Belgium has signed up to targets of 9.5 % and 47 % respectively.

Lastly, with regard to social cohesion, the Member States are free to choose their national targets on the basis of the indicators that they deem most appropriate depending on their own situation. The European target is to take action to ensure that at least 20 million people are no longer faced with the threat of poverty or social exclusion in the EU as a whole between now and 2020. In Belgium, the goal is to reduce this figure by 380 000 people between 2008 and 2020.