



TEXTS ADOPTED

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European Semester for economic policy coordination: Annual Growth Survey 2016

European Parliament resolution of 25 February 2016 on the European Semester for economic policy coordination: Annual Growth Survey 2016 (2015/2285(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), and in particular Articles 121(2), 136 and 148 thereof,
- having regard to Article 9 TFEU (horizontal social clause),
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1175/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 November 2011 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1466/97 on the strengthening of the surveillance of budgetary positions and the surveillance and coordination of economic policies¹,
- having regard to Council Directive 2011/85/EU of 8 November 2011 on requirements for budgetary frameworks of the Member States²,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1174/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 November 2011 on enforcement measures to correct excessive macroeconomic imbalances in the euro area³,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EU) No 1177/2011 of 8 November 2011 amending Regulation (EC) No 1467/97 on speeding up and clarifying the implementation of the excessive deficit procedure⁴,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 November 2011 on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances⁵,

¹ OJ L 306, 23.11.2011, p. 12.

² OJ L 306, 23.11.2011, p. 41.

³ OJ L 306, 23.11.2011, p. 8.

⁴ OJ L 306, 23.11.2011, p. 33.

⁵ OJ L 306, 23.11.2011, p. 25.

- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1173/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 November 2011 on the effective enforcement of budgetary surveillance in the euro area¹,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 473/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2013 on common provisions for monitoring and assessing draft budgetary plans and ensuring the correction of excessive deficit of the Member States in the euro area²,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 472/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2013 on the strengthening of economic and budgetary surveillance of Member States in the euro area experiencing or threatened with serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability³,
- having regard to the conclusions of the European Council of 25-26 March 2010 and 17 June 2010, as well as to the Commission communication of 3 March 2010 entitled ‘Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ (COM(2010)2020),
- having regard to Council Recommendation (EU) 2015/1184 of 14 July 2015 on broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and of the European Union⁴,
- having regard to Council Decision (EU) 2015/1848 of 5 October 2015 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States for 2015⁵,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2015/1017 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 June 2015 on the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the European Investment Advisory Hub and the European Investment Project Portal and amending Regulations (EU) No 1291/2013 and (EU) No 1316/2013 – the European Fund for Strategic Investments⁶,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 13 January 2015 on making the best use of the flexibility within the existing rules of the stability and growth pact (COM(2015)0012),
- having regard to its resolution of 24 June 2015 on the review of the economic governance framework: stocktaking and challenges⁷,
- having regard to the Report on completing Europe’s economic and monetary union (‘Five Presidents’ Report’),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 21 October 2015 on steps towards Completing Economic and Monetary Union (COM(2015)0600),
- having regard to the G20 Leaders’ communiqué from the Antalya Summit of 15-16 November 2015,

¹ OJ L 306, 23.11.2011, p. 1.

² OJ L 140, 27.5.2013, p. 11.

³ OJ L 140, 27.5.2013, p. 1.

⁴ OJ L 192, 18.7.2015, p. 27.

⁵ OJ L 268, 15.10.2015, p. 28.

⁶ OJ L 169, 1.7.2015, p. 1.

⁷ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0238.

- having regard to the International Monetary Fund’s Update of Staff Sustainability Assessments for the G-20 Mutual Assessment Process on Imbalances and Growth (October 2015),
 - having regard to the COP 21 agreement adopted at the Paris Climate Conference on 12 December 2015,
 - having regard to the Commission’s European Economic Forecast of Autumn 2015,
 - having regard to the studies and in-depth analyses on economic policy coordination in the euro area under the European Semester prepared for the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee (November 2015),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 26 November 2015 on the Annual Growth Survey 2016 (COM(2015)0690), the Alert Mechanism Report 2016 (COM(2015)0691) and the draft Joint Employment Report (COM(2015)0700),
 - having regard to the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the Structural Reform Support Programme for the period 2017 to 2020 and amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) No 1305/2013 (COM(2015)0701),
 - having regard to its resolution of 25 November 2015 on tax rulings and other measures similar in nature or effect¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 17 December 2015 on completing Europe’s economic and monetary union²,
 - having regard to the Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area,
 - having regard to the debate with representatives of national parliaments on the priorities of the 2016 European Semester,
 - having regard to the Commission’s report of 14 December 2015 on Public Finances in the EMU 2015 (Institutional Paper 014),
 - having regard to the debate with the Commission in the European Parliament on the European Semester package – Annual Growth Survey 2016,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and the opinions of the Committee on Budgets, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Committee on Regional Development (A8-0030/2016),
- A. whereas economic recovery in the European Union is under way, but recovery remains weak and uneven between and within Member States and is partly driven by temporary and external factors, including low oil prices;
- B. whereas some Member States face the persistent problem of very low growth rates;

¹ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0408.

² Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0469.

- C. whereas global economic growth is slowing down amid economic and financial turmoil in several emerging economies, resulting in new strategic challenges to which the European Union needs to adjust appropriately;
- D. whereas Europe still faces an important investment gap, which significantly weakens the EU's longer-term growth potential, while the euro area's current account surplus is rising; whereas public and private debt remains high in many countries even though current account deficits have been reduced; whereas several Member States should step up efforts to implement meaningful structural reforms;
- E. whereas despite several Member States having experienced significant reductions in their current account deficits and the reduction in unit labour costs, net external debt in percentage of GDP has not decreased in most Member States;
- F. whereas the employment rate is improving but is still insufficient to significantly curb unemployment, particularly youth and long-term unemployment, as well as poverty;
- G. whereas Europe is the economic area that is the most dependent on imported resources, compared with its competitors; whereas building a truly circular economy in Europe is thus a prerequisite for future economic growth;
- H. whereas the 2008 crisis was not only cyclical, but also structural, in nature, which explains its lasting effects;
- I. whereas the free movement of people, goods, services and capital is the cornerstone of sustainable economic growth in the European Union's Single Market;
- J. whereas tax avoidance, tax evasion and aggressive tax planning have caused billions of losses in potential revenues for the public finances of several Member States, to the benefit of large corporations, undermining the basis for solidarity between countries and fair competition between enterprises;

Policy mix

1. Welcomes the 2016 Annual Growth Survey package and the proposed policy mix of investment, structural reform and fiscal responsibility, aiming to further promote higher growth levels and strengthen European recovery and upward convergence; underlines that major national efforts in terms of effective implementation of structural reforms, as well as stronger European coordination, are needed to achieve a more robust economic recovery and sustainable, widely shared prosperity;
2. Welcomes the improvements in public finances, in particular the gradually declining debt/GDP ratios for the EU and euro area and falling headline budget deficits; notes, however, that public debt ratios continue to rise in several Member States with low nominal GDP growth and low inflation, and that the Excessive Deficit Procedure is still ongoing for nine Member States; points out that many Member States have limited fiscal space to cope with possible new economic shocks and that stronger European coordination should therefore be considered in order to support fiscal consolidation without hindering growth;
3. Notes that the European Union's global competitiveness remains an important objective and points to the importance of structural reforms, investment in R&D, resource efficiency, productivity-enhancing innovation and a reduction of macroeconomic

imbalances; at the same time considers that the worsening global outlook also calls for domestic demand to be strengthened in order to make Europe's economy more resilient; is concerned notably by a possible slow-down in global demand;

4. Considers that macroeconomic imbalances should be addressed through a coordinated effort involving all the Member States, building on relevant reforms and investments; stresses that each Member State must deliver on its individual responsibilities in this context; notes that high current account surpluses imply the possibility of greater domestic demand; stresses that high public and private debt levels represent a significant vulnerability and that responsible fiscal policies and higher growth are needed to reduce them faster;
5. Calls for further efforts to support recovery and foster convergence towards the best performers and correct macroeconomic imbalances, including by increasing productivity and boosting investment;
6. Is encouraged by mild improvements in labour market indicators, while recognising that divergence between Member States remains wide, and unemployment still remains unacceptably high; notes the need to build on recent improvements by also increasing the quality of jobs created and their productivity; calls for a greater effort to step up investment in skills, make labour markets more inclusive, create quality employment and reduce poverty, social exclusion and growing inequalities in income and wealth while maintaining budgetary discipline; stresses that employment indicators should be given the same status as existing indicators, allowing an in-depth analysis to be triggered, in order to avoid a two-class approach, and that they should be properly taken into account in EU policy and guidance to the Member States;
7. Welcomes the renewal of the Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines, and calls for a strengthening of the role of the Europe 2020 Strategy in guiding the European Semester, in line with Treaty objectives and applicable legislation, and preventing the recurrence of a sovereign debt crisis; highlights the importance of ambitious policies and instruments to ensure that Europe makes the best out of the energy and digital transitions, also thanks to adequate investment in R&D&I and skills, reducing Europe's gap vis-à-vis its main global competitors in terms of total factor productivity; considers it crucial to tackle economic inequalities which act as an obstacle to long-lasting economic growth; calls on the Commission to address environmental fiscal reforms in country-specific recommendations, also in the context of fiscal responsibility; calls for consistent and holistic monitoring of convergence towards best performers on the targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy;

Investment

8. Calls for the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) to be used to maximum effect to support strategic projects not otherwise financed, in line with its mandate; calls on Member States and the EFSI vehicle to closely involve local and regional authorities in developing project pipelines and investment platforms, with the help of the European Investment Advisory Hub and the European Investment Project Portal; stresses also the importance of achieving synergies between EFSI and European Structural and Investment Funds;
9. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to use the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to their full potential and in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy

in order to strengthen cohesion and mitigate divergence in the Single Market by enabling all regions to develop their competitive advantages and facilitating additional private investment; considers that these investments should serve a consistent industrial policy and should involve a particular focus on quality job creation, especially for young people; underlines the need for adequate administrative capacity, an active role for the regions and better coordination at all levels of government and among them; calls for consideration of further possible policy action to reduce the investment gap in the EU;

10. Is aware of the ongoing deleveraging process in the private sector; stresses that Europe's investment rate is well below the pre-crisis period; points in this context to the importance of rapidly implementing the banking union and bank structural reform, as well as the importance of boosting equity investments in SMEs thanks to a Capital Markets Union; calls for maximum use of the EFSI and the COSME in order to improve SMEs' access to finance; considers that greater regulatory predictability in the Single Market would improve investors' confidence;
11. Highlights the need for greater investment in human capital, notably education and innovation, also in the context of labour market reforms; stresses the need to improve national education, vocational training and lifelong learning systems and to adapt them to the new skill and knowledge demands of the EU labour market; underlines that all this will enable innovation as a key driver of growth, productivity and competitiveness; calls on the Member States, in this context, to improve the productivity of public investments;
12. Welcomes the country-specific investment profiles identifying some of the main challenges to investment in individual Member States; invites the Commission and the Member States to involve all levels of government and relevant stakeholders in the identification of obstacles to investments, focusing in particular on the internal market, subdued domestic demand and structural reforms, as well as on making available adequate instruments bringing together public and private financing; points to the importance of high levels of productive investment for a sustained economic catch-up process between Member States; notes that an appropriate balance between current expenditure, long-term sustainability of public finances and investment in economic growth potential needs to be found in each country, and that the Single Market and European instruments such as EFSI and ESIF have an important role to play in supporting a healthy level of investment; stresses that low public investment in research and innovation in several countries might further anchor them within a middle-income trap;

Structural reforms

13. Considers that, after a long period of macroeconomic adjustment, focus should be put on delivering structural reforms and investments with the aim of strengthening growth potential based on quality jobs and productivity, of promoting fair, robust, efficient and fiscally sustainable welfare systems, and of fostering a sustainable transition of Member States' economies towards greater resource efficiency;
14. Calls for sustainable reforms in the product, services and labour markets, as well as in connection with pension schemes, and for better regulation, which promotes innovation, job creation and welfare-enhancing, fair competition without watering down consumer protection;
15. Highlights the importance of greater resource and energy efficiency, including through the development of the circular economy; underlines the importance of developing further a

true Energy Union based on solidarity, efficiency and diversity while not ignoring indigenous energy sources, including renewable energy; calls on the Commission to include these concerns in country-specific recommendations where they are most relevant for competitiveness and sustainable growth;

16. Urges that further steps be taken towards stimulating quality job creation and creating resilient labour markets with reduced segmentation; stresses the importance of sustainable and effective welfare systems; recalls that an important factor for maintaining the sustainability of pension systems is to ensure a high employment rate;
17. Emphasises the need for modern, efficient, democratic and citizen-friendly public administration at all levels of government, as well as for efficient and transparent public procurement rules; stresses the importance of taking further steps towards a true e-administration in and among the Member States; asks the Commission and the Member States to identify and correct deficiencies in their respective administrations, which can prove detrimental in crisis situations;
18. Calls for a greater shift of taxation away from labour, to be decided at national level, while ensuring the sustainability of social protection systems;
19. Takes note of the proposal for a Structural Reform Support Programme, designed to strengthen the implementation of growth-friendly reforms in the Member States, which is to be decided under the ordinary legislative procedure; reiterates that it is the Member States that are responsible for the implementation of structural reforms;

Fiscal responsibility

20. Reiterates the need for responsible, growth-friendly fiscal policies, ensuring debt sustainability and taking account of the economic cycle and investment gaps, while at the same time respecting citizens' social rights; recalls that the very high indebtedness of some Member States constitutes a substantial risk in the event of possible future shocks within the euro area; emphasises that efforts to increase the resilience of public finances and boost growth will need to be stepped up in countries with high debt/GDP ratios in order to place them on a sustainable downward path;
21. Insists on implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact, while making full use of its existing flexibility clauses, in line with the Commission communication of 13 January 2015 (COM(2015)0012), inter alia to support greater investment and structural reforms, as well as to deal with security threats and refugee inflows;
22. Emphasises the need for improving tax collection, combating tax fraud and evasion, enforcing action against aggressive tax planning and tax havens, as well as for improved tax policy coordination within the EU; calls for tax systems that are effective and transparent in order to increase tax collection, prevent tax avoidance and fight organised crime; takes the view, therefore, that the tax and customs authorities should be provided with sufficient human, material and financial resources;
23. Supports rational and country-specific efforts towards improving the quality, efficiency and growth-friendly character of public expenditure, especially by shifting unproductive expenses towards growth-enhancing investments, but without jeopardising essential provision of public and social services;

Specific focus on the euro area

24. Welcomes the recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area, proposed by the Commission six months before country-specific recommendations, as a step towards deepening policy coordination in the follow-up to the Five Presidents' Report and relevant resolutions of the European Parliament;
25. Emphasises that, given its high level of interdependence and the singleness of its monetary policy, the euro area is an economic entity where convergence towards best performers must be promoted and supported by stronger coordination of national policies; emphasises the importance of enhanced action by all national governments to implement inside their Member States the economic reforms and investments needed to reduce macroeconomic imbalances and to prevent negative spillover effects of national policies into other Member States; calls therefore for an in-depth assessment of these macroeconomic imbalances and spillovers to complement the assessment of each country's specific vulnerabilities and the Macroeconomic Dialogue; insists on full coherence between the euro area recommendation and country-specific recommendations;
26. Welcomes increased attention to the euro area's aggregate fiscal stance, which does not divert attention away from individual Member States' responsibilities; recalls that a fiscal deficit in one Member State cannot be offset by a fiscal surplus in another as far as the Excessive Deficit Procedure is concerned; calls for regular monitoring of whether the aggregate fiscal stance is appropriate in view of the existing investment gap;
27. Supports the recommendation to differentiate fiscal effort by individual Member States, taking into account their respective positions vis-à-vis Stability and Growth Pact requirements and stabilisation needs, as well as spillover effects; notes that for many Member States this implies pursuing growth-friendly fiscal consolidation; notes on the other hand that some countries have increasing fiscal space vis-à-vis the requirements of the Stability and Growth Pact, which could be used at the present juncture to help to support the domestic economy;
28. Notes that while the euro area's high current account surplus is a welcome sign of the euro area's external competitiveness, its current level also reflects lack of internal investment, with adverse effects on growth and employment; considers that stronger domestic demand would be better for the euro area's sustainable growth, as well as from a global viewpoint; is aware that some Member States' current account surplus goes together with positive spillover effects across the value chain, which can benefit some other Member States in various ways; acknowledges also the role of the single currency in helping more competitive countries to maintain high surpluses vis-à-vis the rest of the world; welcomes the finding in the Commission's 2016 winter forecast that economic growth in some Member States in 2015 has been driven mainly by domestic demand; considers it important that Member States with higher current account surpluses continue to expand their domestic demand for their own and general benefit; at the same time calls on less competitive Member States to implement effectively structural reforms and high-quality investments in order to modernise their economies and establish a sustainable business environment for long-term investment in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy; considers this to be the best way to reduce macroeconomic imbalances inside Member States rather than internal devaluation, which weakens demand and slows down economic growth across the euro area;
29. Emphasises the need to foster real economic and social convergence driven by improvements in productivity and non-cost factors; underlines the importance of all Member States effectively implementing structural reforms, improving the quality of

public expenditure and having sufficient investment capacity, in order to enable balanced and sustainable growth, which is crucial also to reducing debt/GDP ratios; acknowledges that high public and private debt significantly reduce the capacity to invest and thus slow down growth;

30. Recalls that wage-setting is a matter of autonomous collective bargaining, and calls on relevant actors to ensure both responsible and growth-friendly wage developments that should reflect increases in productivity; in particular, calls on relevant actors in countries with current account deficits or near-balance to continue efforts at strengthening productivity and maintaining competitiveness; at the same time calls on relevant actors in high-surplus countries to use excess savings to support domestic demand and investment;
31. Calls for measures preventing a race to the bottom in terms of taxation and social standards, which leads to an increase in inequalities; recalls the need to maintain international competitiveness based on productivity and upward convergence; welcomes the increased attention to three employment-related indicators in the macroeconomic imbalances scoreboard and asks the Commission to put them on an equal footing with the others; also considers that analysis of the existing scoreboard of key employment and social indicators and relevant indicators of resource efficiency should be properly taken into account in policy guidance;
32. Notes the December 2015 European Council conclusions on Economic and Monetary Union and calls on the Commission to start preparing the longer-term measures as soon as possible;

More effective European Semester with stronger democratic accountability

33. Deplores the poor implementation of country-specific recommendations and believes that, in order to improve implementation, there is a need to better identify clearly articulated priorities at European level as well as to increase genuine public debate, political willingness and commitment at national level, leading to greater relevance and national ownership; welcomes in this respect the visits made by members of the Commission to Member States in order to discuss the European Semester process and its documents;
34. Calls for the right balance to be struck between making country-specific recommendations focused on key priorities and ensuring that they address all key challenges, including the need to prevent a recurrence of a sovereign debt crisis, as well as the need to increase competitiveness, growth and employment, taking into account Europe 2020 Strategy targets;
35. Welcomes the plenary debate with the Presidents of the Commission and of the Eurogroup on the draft euro area recommendation on 15 December 2015, and requests that such plenary debates become a regular feature of the European Semester; considers that such debates strengthen and complement existing democratic dialogue, notably the economic dialogue, helping to increase the accountability of the executive;
36. Underlines that the spring European Council should remain the central moment where policy priorities are defined; welcomes the discussion with the Commission in plenary on the Annual Growth Survey priorities before and after its adoption; recalls that the setting of the economic policy following the recommendation by the Council to the Member States is an executive act which needs to be subjected to democratic scrutiny and debate by the European Parliament; calls therefore on the Council to adopt the euro area

recommendations and conclusions on the Annual Growth Survey package after Parliament has been able to express its views on them; affirms its resolve to consider these documents swiftly and to take a position well before the Spring European Council; welcomes the invitation extended to the European Parliament to have its President convey its position to the Spring European Council; points out, furthermore, that the Treaty requires the European Parliament to be informed after the Council has adopted recommendations, as well as on the results of the multilateral surveillance;

37. Highlights the importance of national parliaments debating country reports and country-specific recommendations and voting on national reform programmes, as well as national convergence or stability programmes; calls on the Member States to involve the social partners, local and regional authorities and other relevant stakeholders in a structured manner, taking advantage of the early publication of country reports; highlights the irreplaceable role of the social partners in wage-setting and the vital role they should play in wider economic discussions, particularly when it comes to promoting productivity; calls, furthermore, for stronger cooperation by national parliaments with the European Parliament;
38. Urges the Commission to launch negotiations on an interinstitutional agreement on economic governance; insists that this IIA should ensure that, within the framework of the Treaties, the structure of the European Semester allows for meaningful and regular parliamentary scrutiny of the process, in particular as regards the Annual Growth Survey priorities and the euro area recommendations;

Budgetary policies

39. Deplores the fact that there is no satisfactory lever available, given the modest scale of the EU budget, while it is impossible to modify the own-resources system, and economic forecasts, economic policy priorities, and the annual and multiannual budget-making process do not stand in any form of coherent relationship;
40. Points out that the EU budget helps directly to achieve two out of the three objectives charted in the Annual Growth Survey 2016 (relaunching investment, pursuing structural reforms, and implementing responsible and honest fiscal policies that are commensurate with stated political commitments); welcomes the Commission's proposal to channel EU funding into technical assistance to support structural reforms;
41. Considers that the EU budget could help relieve the strain on national budgets and bolster fiscal consolidation efforts by providing own resources as well as rationalising expenditure; firmly believes that wider-ranging forms of management of public money at EU level would make it possible to achieve economies of scale and hence cut spending, for example in the diplomatic and military fields, while not calling into question the principle of shared management, particularly for the Structural Funds;
42. Stresses that it is illegal for the EU budget to be in deficit; notes that the Member States are making the EU budget an adjustment variable of national budgets;
43. Stresses that greater integration within the euro area is indispensable in order to complete economic and monetary union (EMU), and that budgetary union is a cornerstone of the proper operation of the euro;

44. Calls, as regards Parliament's position on the euro area and its budget capacity, for account to be taken of the conclusions of the own-initiative report on the budgetary capacity of the euro area, which will be prepared in the course of 2016;
45. Calls on the Commission to carry out the review of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) provided for in the political agreement concluded between Parliament, the Commission and the Council in June 2013; points out that the financial and humanitarian crises that hit the EU between 2009 and 2014 highlighted the inadequacy of the current MFF; stresses, furthermore, the need for a far-reaching reform of EU financial programming that will take proper account of the objectives, funding and duration of the instruments available;

Environment, Public Health and Food Safety policies

46. Stresses that if the reform of waste legislation and the action plan on the circular economy are to advance the transition of the European economy into a circular model, it is essential to integrate recommendations to this effect into the European Semester process to boost competitiveness, create jobs and generate sustainable growth; recommends that the principles of the circular economy should be integrated into country-specific recommendations;
47. Reiterates the need for a fiscal framework that rewards development of sustainable policies and is in accordance with the 'polluter pays' principle, providing the right signals for investment in resource efficiency, the modernisation of production processes and the manufacturing of more repairable and durable products; reiterates the need to phase out environmentally harmful subsidies, including fossil fuels, and to shift taxes away from labour to environmental pollution;
48. Considers it important to assess the performance and sustainability of healthcare systems in the framework of the European Semester and supports a shift to an outcome-based approach as well as the focus on disease prevention and health promotion; calls on the Commission to develop tools, together with all stakeholders, to monitor health outcomes, measure access to high-quality healthcare and encourage transparency of medical research costs with the aim of reducing social divergences and health inequalities between and within Member States; calls on the Commission to take into account in country-specific recommendations the long-term health and fiscal impacts of measures targeting prevention programmes;
49. Stresses the importance of the sustainability of the healthcare sector, which plays an important role in the overall economy as it accounts for 8 % of the total European workforce and 10 % of GDP in the EU, and of being able to provide equal access to healthcare services for all citizens, as health is an essential factor for stability, sustainability and further development of Member States and their economies;

Regional policies

50. Notes the significance of EU investment for less developed regions and the importance of ensuring its capacity to attract further investment, thus promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion;
51. Notes the links between the objectives of the European Semester process and the programming of the ESI Funds for 2014-2020, reflected in the Partnership Agreements;

considers therefore that, following the 2014-2020 reform, cohesion policy instruments could play a very important role in the implementation of the relevant CSRs, thus supporting structural reforms and contributing to the fulfilment of the EU's strategic goals and the effective implementation of the Partnership Agreements; underlines nevertheless the multiannual and long-term nature of programmes and objectives under the ESI Funds in contrast to the annual cycle of the European Semester, and the need for coordination between the European Union's priorities, national needs, regional needs and local needs;

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52. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, and to the governments of the Member States, the national parliaments and the European Central Bank.