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Betreft: Stand van zaken werkgroep o.l.v. dhr. Van Rompuy over versterkte
coördinatie in de EU

Ons kenmerk
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Geachte voorzitter,

Uw Kamer heeft per brief (kenmerk 146706u, d.d. 1 juli 2010) verzocht om een brief waarin wordt ingegaan op versterking van budgetdiscipline binnen Europa en op de modaliteiten van economische beleidscoördinatie in de toekomst. Met deze brief kom ik tegemoet aan uw verzoek.

Achtergrond

Ten behoeve van het waarborgen van de financiële stabiliteit in het eurogebied zijn de afgelopen tijd vier belangrijke besluiten genomen: 1) het verstrekken van een stevig geclausuleerde lening aan Griekenland, 2) het opzetten van een tijdelijk noodmechanisme om snel in te kunnen grijpen indien ontwikkelingen in andere eurolanden de stabiliteit van het eurogebied zouden bedreigen, 3) het versnellen van de budgettaire consolidatie om de budgettaire houdbaarheid te garanderen, en 4) het opzetten van een werkgroep onder leiding van de voorzitter van de Europese Raad Herman van Rompuy. Deze werkgroep heeft tot opdracht om in oktober met voorstellen te komen op het terrein van economisch en budgettair toezicht, crisisresolutie en economisch bestuur.

Griekenland

Waar 2010 begon met voorzichtig optimisme over het economisch herstel dat eind 2009 ingezet leek te zijn, zorgde de groeiende onrust rondom de overheidsfinanciën in Griekenland voor nieuwe angst over de economische vooruitzichten in het eurogebied. Hoewel objectief gezien duidelijk was dat de problemen van Griekenland nadrukkelijk ernstiger waren dan die van andere eurolanden (Griekenland had een ernstig geloofwaardigheidsprobleem door foutieve statistieken en de hoogste staatsschuld uitgedrukt in percentage BBP in combinatie met een fors tekort op de lopende rekening), zorgde het wantrouwen dat op financiële markten was ontstaan voor toenemende druk op andere eurolanden. Bovendien stond, door gebrek aan vertrouwen, de

gemeenschappelijke munt onder druk. De koers ten opzichte van de dollar daalde fors. De financiële stabiliteit van het eurogebied liep gevaar.

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Het werd duidelijk dat een interventie in Griekenland noodzakelijk was omwille van het behoud van de financiële stabiliteit in het eurogebied. De landen van de eurogroep hadden reeds op 11 februari 2010 verklaard dat zij vastberaden en gecoördineerde actie zouden ondernemen, indien nodig om de financiële stabiliteit in het eurogebied te waarborgen.

Gaandeweg werd duidelijk dat alleen een fors leningenpakket aan Griekenland de grote onzekerheid op de financiële markten over de (her)financiering van de Griekse schuld zou kunnen wegnemen en noodzakelijk was om de financiële stabiliteit in het eurogebied terug te brengen. Op 2 mei 2010 kondigde daarom de Eurogroep tegelijkertijd met het IMF aan dat er een leningenpakket van 110 miljard euro beschikbaar zou worden gesteld aan Griekenland. Om de leningen te kunnen ontvangen zou Griekenland gedurende meerdere jaren zeer vergaande beleidsaanpassingen moeten doorvoeren. Bovendien moest Griekenland een zeer forse renteopslag betalen. Van de 80 miljard die door de eurolanden beschikbaar is gesteld, is het Nederlandse aandeel 4,7 miljard euro. Dit aandeel is bepaald door de ECB kapitaalsleutel. Een absolute vereiste voor Nederland om in te stemmen met het pakket was sterke IMF betrokkenheid. Daarnaast was het voor Nederland essentieel dat Griekenland een hoge rente zou betalen en dat er geen sprake zou zijn van schending van artikel 125 van het Verdrag (de zogeheten 'no bail-out' clause).

Tijdelijk noodmechanisme

Ondanks het leningenpakket voor Griekenland keerde de rust niet terug op de financiële markten. De onrust had zich verlegd naar andere landen van het eurogebied met fors verslechterende overheidsfinanciën en tekorten op de lopende rekening. Ook de euro stond onder toenemende druk. Er dreigden parallellen met de eerdere crisis in de financiële sector. Die beginnende uitslaande brand moest snel en adequaat worden geblust. Het is daarom dat de regeringsleiders en staatshoofden van de landen van het eurogebied op 7 mei jl. besloten tot een oplossing met twee belangrijke pijlers. Ten eerste committeerden alle lidstaten van het eurogebied zich opnieuw aan het op orde brengen van de overheidsfinanciën. Waar nodig zouden landen sneller consolideren.

De tweede pijler was het opzetten van een noodmechanisme waarmee snel financiële steun verstrekt kan worden aan lidstaten indien dat nodig is om de stabiliteit te waarborgen. De modaliteiten hiervan zijn op 9 mei jl. verder uitgewerkt door de Ecofin Raad. Het mechanisme bestaat uit twee onderdelen. Een eerste communautaire deel is het *European Financial Stability Mechanism* (EFSM). Het EFSM behelst 60 miljard euro die de Commissie kan lenen op de kapitaalmarkt en kan doorlenen aan de EU-lidstaten. De lidstaten geven via hun aandeel op de Europese begroting een garantie af op deze leningen. De Nederlandse regering heeft op 10 mei jl. ingestemd met een verordening dienaangaande.

Een tweede onderdeel van dit mechanisme is de *European Financial Stability Facility* (EFSF). De EFSF is een tijdelijke faciliteit waarop gedurende 3 jaar een beroep kan worden gedaan. De landen van het eurogebied staan voor 440 miljard euro garant voor de verplichtingen die EFSF aangaat voor de financiering van deze leningen. Nederland zal maximaal 26 miljard euro aan garanties verstrekken.

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Aanspraak op het noodmechanisme kan enkel worden gemaakt als aan alle strikte condities is voldaan. Deze zijn vergelijkbaar met de condities die aan Griekenland zijn gesteld. Het mechanisme is sterk geënt op de leenvoorwaarden en beleidscondities van het IMF. Vastgelegd is dat het IMF op substantiële wijze financieel zal deelnemen aan dit noodmechanisme met ongeveer de helft van het bedrag dat de Europese landen zullen bijdragen.

Werkgroep Van Rompuy

Naar aanleiding van de situatie in Griekenland werd reeds vroeg in het voorjaar aan de orde gesteld hoe de economische (beleids)coördinatie in de EU, en in het bijzonder de werking van het Stabiliteits- en Groeipact (SGP), kan worden verbeterd. Bovendien werd geconstateerd dat er meer aandacht moet komen voor andere macro-economische onevenwichtigheden. Wat betreft dit laatste is het namelijk opvallend dat niet alleen landen met een slechte budgettaire uitgangspositie hard zijn geraakt door de crisis, maar dat ook sommige landen met een goede budgettaire uitgangspositie kampen met een sterk verslechterende tekort- en schuldpositie. Budgettaire problemen kunnen immers ook veroorzaakt worden door macro-economische problemen.

De Europese Raad op 25 en 26 maart jl. heeft daarom ER-voorzitter Van Rompuy gevraagd om een werkgroep in te stellen om samen met de Commissie, de lidstaten, de ECB en het roulerend Voorzitterschap voor het einde van het jaar maatregelen te presenteren om het raamwerk voor budgettaire en economisch toezicht te versterken. Bovendien hebben de regeringsleiders verzocht om een verbeterd raamwerk voor crisisresolutie. Namens Nederland neem ik deel aan deze werkgroep.

De werkgroep heeft tot dusver met name gekeken hoe het SGP kan worden versterkt en hoe macro-economische onevenwichtigheden kunnen worden voorkomen. De Nederlandse inzet richt zich hierbij op betere implementatie van de begrotingsregels door de besluitvorming zo veel mogelijk automatisch of 'rules-based' te maken. Gebleken is namelijk dat de huidige systematiek, waarin alle besluiten over de buitensporigtekortprocedure worden genomen door de Raad, niet heeft geleid tot voldoende strikte toepassing van het SGP. Bovendien vindt Nederland het belangrijk dat landen ook in goede tijden hun economische en budgettaire positie verbeteren, hetgeen in het verleden onvoldoende is gebeurd. Daarom zet ik mij in de werkgroep ervoor in dat er meer aandacht komt voor schuld en houdbaarheid. Bovendien is er veel bewijs dat landen met goede nationale budgettaire raamwerken betere budgettaire uitkomsten kennen. Daarom vind ik het nodig dat er minimumeisen gesteld gaan worden aan nationale budgettaire raamwerken. Tot slot is het belangrijk dat er een beter toezichtproces komt op het ontstaan van onevenwichtigheden.

De Commissie heeft op 30 juni jl. een mededeling uitgebracht, die op basis van de nog lopende discussie alvast een tijdspad voor mogelijke Commissievoorstellen schetst. Deze mededeling sluit in grote lijnen goed aan bij de wensen van Nederland.

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Belangrijke voorstellen in de mededeling zijn onder andere:

- *Het opzetten van een toezichtprocedure om macro-economische onevenwichtigheden te voorkomen.*
In deze procedure vindt er een jaarlijkse analyse plaats van enkele indicatoren (een zogenoemd scorebord) die kunnen wijzen op het ontstaan van onevenwichtigheden. Als op basis van deze analyse blijkt dat er mogelijk onevenwichtigheden ontstaan in een lidstaat, voert de Commissie een nadere analyse uit. Indien nodig zal de Commissie de Raad adviseren om te besluiten dat een lidstaat 'buitensporige onevenwichtigheden' kent, en aan de lidstaat te vragen om actie te ondernemen om deze onevenwichtigheden aan te pakken. Desgewenst kan de Raad hiertoe aanbevelingen doen. De Commissie stelt voor om voor eurolanden een mechanisme op te zetten om actie af te dwingen indien deze landen zich niet aan de aanbevelingen van de Raad houden, maar laat in het midden hoe dit mechanisme eruit moet zien.
- *Het stellen van minimumeisen aan nationale budgettaire raamwerken.*
De Commissie stelt voor om kwaliteitseisen te stellen die onder andere betrekking hebben op statistiekvoorziening, begrotingsregels, en meerjarenramingen voor de begroting. Daarnaast zullen de bevoegdheden van Eurostat uitgebreid worden.
- *Het meer aandacht geven aan schuld binnen het SGP.*
Het SGP kent zowel een tekort- als een schulddoelstelling. In het verleden is er echter nog nooit een procedure opgestart voor landen die niet voldeden aan deze schulddoelstelling. De Commissie stelt voor om dit in de toekomst wel te doen. Daarnaast geeft het SGP aan dat landen geacht worden om een middellangetermijndoelstelling (MTO) na te streven, die er op neerkomt dat landen grofweg een structureel evenwicht of overschot dienen na te streven. De Commissie stelt voor om deze ook beter afdwingbaar te maken door ook voor landen die deze doelstelling niet halen een sanctiemechanisme te ontwikkelen.
- *Het effectiever maken van sancties.*
De Commissie geeft aan dat sancties automatisch moeten worden toegepast en dat alle sancties op alle lidstaten van toepassingen moeten kunnen zijn. Op dit moment is dit niet het geval, omdat een belangrijke sanctie, namelijk het opschorten van cohesiefondsen, niet geldt voor alle lidstaten (sommige lidstaten komen immers niet in aanmerking voor cohesiefondsen). Daarom kijkt de Commissie met name of er nog andere mogelijkheden zijn binnen de EU-begroting. Wat betreft het meer rules-based toepassen van sancties geeft de Commissie aan dat bij de start van

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een buitensporigtekortprocedure automatisch bepaalde toewijzingen van EU-subsidies in latere jaren kunnen worden gekort. Als de lidstaat vervolgens voldoet aan de eisen die de buitensporigtekortprocedure stelt, dan worden deze toewijzingen alsnog ingevuld. De bewijslast wordt in die zin omgedraaid. Nu moet de Raad beslissen om een sanctie op te leggen als een lidstaat niet voldoet aan de eisen, maar met dit voorstel moet de lidstaat bewijzen dat voldaan is aan de eisen en kan de Raad dus een beloning geven in de vorm van het alsnog uitkeren van de EU-subsidie. Een gevolg hiervan is dat de besluitvormingsprocedure in feite omgekeerd wordt. Nu moet er een gekwalificeerde meerderheid zijn om een sanctie te geven. Straks moet er een gekwalificeerde meerderheid zijn om een EU-subsidie alsnog uit te keren. Een gekwalificeerde minderheid kan dus alsnog de uitkering van de EU-subsidie tegenhouden.

- *Het opzetten van een EU-semester.*

Het EU-semester beoogt dat lidstaten in het vervolg de Stabiliteits- en Convergenceprogramma's, waarin lidstaten hun begrotingsbeleid beschrijven, in het voorjaar indienen en meer toekomstgericht maken. Op dit moment dienen lidstaten hun programma in het najaar in en wordt met name de al bij het parlement ingediende begroting beschreven. Het is niet de bedoeling van het EU-semester om deze procedure om te keren, dus een begroting voor te leggen aan Brussel, alvorens die wordt ingediend bij het parlement. Het is wel de bedoeling dat er op hoofdlijnen in het voorjaar informatie wordt versterkt over de komende begroting, zodat het voor de Commissie en de Raad mogelijk is om vroegtijdig mogelijke budgettaire problemen te identificeren en zonodig in te grijpen om deze problemen te voorkomen. Gezien de meerjarensystematiek die Nederland kent, lijkt Nederland aan de voorgestelde informatieplicht te kunnen voldoen zonder dat het nationale begrotingsproces moet worden aangepast.

Quo vadis?

De ontwikkelingen in de afgelopen maanden hebben laten zien dat het noodzakelijk is om tot een betere economische en budgettaire samenwerking in Europa te komen, omdat economische problemen grensoverschrijdende gevolgen hebben.

Op dit moment richt de Europese discussie zich erop snel verbetering te boeken op het terrein van de economische coördinatie. In eerste aanleg wordt vooral gekeken naar voorstellen die passen binnen het Verdrag van Lissabon. Positief is hierbij dat het Verdrag van Lissabon meer mogelijkheden bevat dan het Verdrag van Nice om dit te bewerkstelligen. Lidstaten zijn zich onder andere door de crisis zeer bewust van de noodzaak om de coördinatie te verbeteren en lijken bereid om de mogelijkheden die het Verdrag van Lissabon biedt maximaal te benutten. Omdat de discussie zich nu afspeelt binnen de grenzen van het Verdrag, verwacht ik niet dat eventuele voorstellen zullen conflicteren met de Nederlandse grondwet.

De EU staat voor de grote uitdaging om tot een verbeterd en beter afdwingbaar raamwerk van budgettaire en economische regelgeving te komen. Dat hier

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overeenstemming over wordt bereikt is essentieel om op een structurele manier de financiële stabiliteit in het eurogebied te waarborgen. Uiteraard tracht ik hierover steeds zo goed mogelijk het parlement, alsmede de burger, te informeren.

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Ik zie er naar uit om op 6 juli a.s. met u te spreken over bovenstaande onderwerpen, en de Nederlandse positie verder toe te lichten.

Hoogachtend,
de minister van Financiën,

mr. drs. J.C. de Jager

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels,
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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN
CENTRAL BANK, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE
AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Enhancing economic policy coordination for stability, growth and jobs –
Tools for stronger EU economic governance**

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
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**Enhancing economic policy coordination for stability, growth and jobs –
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Europe has learned many lessons from the recent financial and economic crisis. We see very clearly now that in a highly integrated Union, and even more so in a monetary union, our economies and our successes are linked. Although the EU has a number of instruments for the co-ordination of economic policy the crisis has shown that they have not been used to the full and that there are gaps in the current governance system. There is broad political agreement that this has to change and that the EU needs to be equipped with a broader and more effective set of policy instruments to ensure its future prosperity and standards of living.

The EU has taken bold, comprehensive and consistent measures to overcome the crisis and draw lessons for the future. The launch of the European Economic Recovery Programme in 2008 helped cushion the shock of the downturn on our economies. Coordinated support was provided to EU Member States that needed it and to safeguard the stability of the Economic and Monetary Union. A set of measures to strengthen the supervision and regulation of the financial system is under negotiation, in the EU and beyond. Now that the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy is in place, a series of initiatives will follow, designed to unlock the EU's potential to boost growth and create jobs.

What the EU needs is a well defined policy approach that supports economic recovery, puts public finances back on a sound footing and actively promotes sustainable growth and jobs. This is the policy vision set out in the Europe 2020 strategy that has just been endorsed by the European Council. All relevant instruments need to be brought together to ensure that future policy decisions are coherent, serve these goals and, once decided, are implemented and enforced. By strengthening its economic policy co-ordination the EU can deliver a new and sustainable growth agenda for its citizens.

In this context, the purpose of this Communication is to:

- Develop the proposals for greater economic policy co-ordination and surveillance set out in the Commission's 12 May Communication on reinforcing economic policy coordination into concrete proposals by (i) addressing imbalances through stronger macroeconomic surveillance, including alert and sanction mechanisms; (ii) strengthening national fiscal frameworks by specifying minimum requirements for domestic fiscal frameworks, and notably moving from annual to multi-annual budgetary planning; (iii) strengthening the Stability and Growth Pact, in particular by focusing on the issue of debt dynamic as well as deficits.
- Set out effective enforcement mechanisms to ensure that Member States will act in compliance with the EU framework they have agreed. Where developments in Member State economies pose a risk to the overall development of the Union, a series of preventive and corrective measures are proposed, including a range of sanctions that could be applied where breaches occur.

- Establish a European semester for policy co-ordination and explain the process and timing that will provide a European input to national policy decisions, leading to more effective ex-ante policy co-ordination. This also applies to the structural reforms and the growth enhancing elements of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The proposals in this Communication can all be agreed under the terms of the Lisbon Treaty. They are addressed to all 27 Member States although aspects of some of them will apply only to those Member States that are in the euro area. They are designed to bring together, at the same time, the country monitoring under the Stability and Growth Pact and Europe 2020 and to make sure that the thematic monitoring of the Europe 2020 targets is anchored in sound economic and fiscal policies. These proposals develop further the policy ideas set out in the Commission's Communication of 12 May 2010¹ and build on the orientations agreed at the 17 June 2010 European Council, reflecting the progress to date of the Task Force on economic governance. They respond to the invitation of the European Council to the Task Force and the Commission to develop its orientations further and to make them operational.

Taken together, this combination of proposals will equip the EU and national levels to have confidence in the quality of the policy and decision making process and to have earlier warning of where national situations are going off track. This will enable all Member States to maximise the positive synergies of belonging to the same Union. It will bring greater transparency and mutual confidence through a more collective process. It will also minimise the negative spillover effects where Member States do not stick to agreed limits and ultimately, sanction those who endanger the common good through unsustainable national actions. By bringing the Stability and Growth Pact and Europe 2020 processes together the EU can build on the necessary consolidation measures as essential steps in its longer term growth strategy, building a smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive EU for the future.

1. BROADER MACROECONOMIC SURVEILLANCE

The EU needs stronger macro-economic country surveillance integrating all relevant economic policy areas. Macroeconomic imbalances should be looked at jointly with fiscal policy and growth-enhancing structural reforms. The objective is to ensure macroeconomic stability, prevent occurrence of harmful imbalances and establish broad macroeconomic framework conditions which allow for sustainable and dynamic growth.

1.1. Surveillance of macroeconomic imbalances

The emergence of large macroeconomic imbalances, including large and persistent divergences in competitiveness trends, proved highly damaging to the EU and in particular to the euro when the crisis struck. It is therefore important to develop a new structured mechanism for the surveillance of harmful macroeconomic imbalances and their correction in all Member States. Following a two-stage approach, the Commission is proposing a mechanism comprising:

- a **preventive arm** with regular (annual) assessments of the risk of macroeconomic imbalances, including an **alert mechanism**,

¹ COM(2010) 250 on Reinforcing economic policy coordination.

- a **corrective arm**, designed to enforce the implementation of **remedies** in case of harmful macroeconomic imbalances.

Preventive arm: an alert system

Within the framework of the macro-structural country surveillance under Europe 2020, the Commission would assess macro-structural weaknesses, deteriorating competitiveness and emerging macro-economic imbalances on a country-by-country basis, taking into account the economic and financial interlinkages in particular within the euro area.

A scoreboard establishing a set of indicators revealing external and internal imbalances combined with qualitative expert analyses will be the basis for an alert mechanism. The use of indicators would provide important guidance, but there will not be a mechanical link between the results of the scoreboard and the policy follow up.

For countries exhibiting significant risks, in-depth country analysis would be conducted. Where emerging risks are confirmed, the Commission will propose country-specific Council recommendations to tackle harmful macroeconomic imbalances. The Commission could also issue an early warning directly to that Member State.

Depending on the nature of the imbalances identified in the Member State(s), the recommendations could address a broad range of policy issues covering macroeconomic policies, wages and labour markets as well as the functioning of goods and services markets and macro-prudential policies. These will be incorporated into the single set of country-specific recommendations that the Commission will propose annually, together with the recommendations issued under the thematic surveillance of structural reforms, as described below.

This mechanism will be the central part of the enhanced (non-fiscal) macroeconomic country surveillance foreseen under Europe 2020. Together with fiscal surveillance under the Stability and Growth Pact, country surveillance aims at ensuring a stable macroeconomic environment conducive to growth and employment creation, taking full account of the interdependence between Member States economies, particularly in the euro area. This will ensure consistency within Europe 2020, in particular by identifying the macro/fiscal constraints within which Member States are to implement structural reforms and can invest in the growth-enhancing policies of Europe 2020.

In particularly serious cases, the Commission would recommend placing the Member State in an "excessive imbalances position". This would trigger the 'corrective arm' of the mechanism described below. In such a case, the Commission could also issue an early warning directly to that Member State.

Main features of the alert mechanism for macroeconomic imbalances

The alert mechanism will identify Member States with potentially problematic levels of macroeconomic imbalances and where further in-depth country-specific analysis is required.

The alert mechanism will consist of a scoreboard of indicators, complemented by more qualitative analysis. These indicators would include measures of the external position and price or cost competitiveness as well as internal indicators. The use of internal indicators is justified on the ground that external imbalances necessarily have internal counterparts. For examples, indicators such as current account balances, net foreign asset positions, real effective exchange rate based on unit

labour costs and a GDP deflator, increases in real house prices, government debt, and the ratio of private sector credit to GDP could be part of this scoreboard.

Alert thresholds will be defined and announced for each indicator. The thresholds could be calculated on the basis of a simple and transparent statistical concept. A possible approach could be to use the 75% and 25% percentile of the statistical distributions of each variable (across countries and time) at the level above or below which a further analysis is warranted. It is however important to bear in mind that absolute threshold levels for individual variables have only limited economic meaning and need to be complemented by economic reasoning as appropriate levels can vary depending on the economic circumstances of the country.

A differentiated scoreboard for euro-area and non-euro area Member States appears warranted. Due to differences in exchange rate regimes and in key economic characteristics, the behaviour of some economic variables in the euro area is quite different from the non-euro-area countries. This argues in favour of using different alert thresholds for euro-area and non euro-area Member States. Moreover, in the absence of nominal exchange rates within the monetary union, the euro area deserves also a special analysis of real effective exchange rate developments.

Corrective action

The imbalances surveillance framework would include an **enforcement mechanism**. A Member State presenting significant risks would be placed by the Council in a position of "excessive imbalances" on the basis of a Commission recommendation. Risk warnings and/or recommendations issued by the European Systemic Risk Board on macro-financial stability would be taken into account.

A Member State in "excessive imbalances position" would be subject to stricter surveillance. The Council would issue **policy recommendations** (based on Article 121(4) and Article 136 TFEU for euro-area Member States) and the Member State would be required to report regularly to the Ecofin Council and the Eurogroup (e.g. within 6 months following the Council recommendation and on a quarterly basis thereafter) on progress in implementing the recommended reforms.

This mechanism would apply to all Member States. As with the EU's fiscal framework, which also applies to all EU Member States, more stringent rules would apply to euro area Member States. Taking account of the deep economic and financial inter-linkages within the euro area and their impact on the single currency, **specific enforcement mechanism could be envisaged for euro-area Member States in case of repetitive non-respect of the recommendations to address harmful macroeconomic imbalances that risk jeopardizing the proper functioning of economic and monetary union.**

Insufficient compliance with the recommendations under the surveillance of imbalances would be considered an aggravating factor in the fiscal assessment under the Stability and Growth Pact.

By end-September, the Commission will make formal proposals for secondary legislation, establishing a framework for dealing with **excessive imbalances** based on Articles 121 and 136 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. These proposals will specify the role of the alert mechanism; the role and obligations of the Commission, Member States and the Council; the procedure for the adoption of recommendations; and the rules and procedures as well as the enforcement mechanisms for euro area Member States.

1.2. Thematic surveillance of structural reforms

To return their economies to sustainable growth and increase competitiveness, Member States need to restore macroeconomic stability and sound public finances. At the same time they need to focus their efforts on the delivery of Europe 2020 objectives and the five headline targets agreed by the European Council. An integrated approach to policy design and implementation is essential given the constraints on public finances. The identification of the bottlenecks which impede or delay the attainment of the Europe 2020 objectives is a key element of the thematic surveillance.

The objective of thematic structural reform surveillance is therefore two-fold:

- (i) To facilitate the attainment of the Europe 2020 objectives, in particular the five headline targets². This includes measures in the areas of employment, social inclusion, research and innovation, education, energy and climate change as well as measures to tackle any other factors that hinder Member States' economic development or growth.
- (ii) To ensure ambitious implementation of the structural reforms in a manner that is consistent with the macro-fiscal constraints.

This surveillance will be carried out in accordance with Article 121 and 148 TFEU and on the basis of the Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines. Based on Member States' National Reform Programmes the Commission will assess the way each country is addressing the bottlenecks it has identified and how it is progressing towards its national Europe 2020 targets.

In case of insufficient progress, or when policies are not sufficiently consistent with the integrated guidelines (i.e. the Integrated Guidelines for economic and employment policies), a country-specific or euro-area recommendation will be issued.

In cases where economic policies are not consistent with the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, or when they risk jeopardising the proper functioning of the economic and monetary union, the Commission will directly address a **warning** to the relevant Member State(s).

Building on this country-specific monitoring, the Commission will make an overall assessment of progress towards the five EU headline targets, assess performance against that of main (international) trading partners and examine the underlying reasons in case of insufficient progress. In this examination the Commission will also assess how the implementation of the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives is progressing both at EU and at national level as they support and complement the efforts towards these targets.

The Commission will report to the Spring European Council each year, and will propose specific orientations to enhance the implementation of the corresponding reform measures. These orientations will also feed into the single set of country specific recommendations which the Commission will propose in early July.

2. NATIONAL FISCAL FRAMEWORKS

Resilient and effective domestic fiscal frameworks play a crucial role in strengthening fiscal consolidation and sustainable public finances. While Member States' specific needs and

² See targets at: http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/council_conclusion_17_june_en.pdf

preferences must be respected, a number of features stand out as being needed in terms of ensuring minimum quality and complementarity with EU rules³:

- (1) First, in order to ensure **quality standards** in all Member States, a consistent approach is essential regarding accounting (ESA95 accounting is required for EU level fiscal surveillance); the capacity of national statistical offices must be sufficient to ensure compliance with EU data and reporting requirements; and forecasting systems must allow for the provision of reliable and unbiased growth and budget projections. Ideally, Commission forecasts should be used as the benchmark.

The Commission proposes to specify clearly the correspondence between national cash data and ESA95 data with monthly data provision on a cash basis with translation in ESA95 terms on a quarterly basis. Forecasting methodologies and macroeconomic assumptions used for budgetary purposes should be the subject of appropriate auditing.

- (2) Second, Member States should have in place **national fiscal rules** ensuring that domestic fiscal frameworks reflect the Treaty obligations. Provisions of national fiscal rules should ensure the respect of the Treaty reference values on deficit and debt and be consistent with the Medium-Term budgetary Objective (MTO). Fiscal rules and credible enforcement mechanisms should be codified by national law.
- (3) Third, reforms of national fiscal frameworks should promote the switch to **multi-annual budgetary planning**. Yearly budgetary objectives should be underpinned by multi-annual frameworks, including a breakdown for projected revenue and expenditure and indications of where the adjustment towards the objectives is planned to come.
- (4) Finally, domestic frameworks must be **comprehensive** and cover the whole system of general government finance. This is particularly important in decentralised economies. The assignment of budgetary responsibilities across levels of government should be clearly specified and appropriate monitoring and enforcement provisions put in place.

The Commission will make formal **proposals in September specifying the minimum requirements for the design of domestic fiscal frameworks** and the procedural (reporting) requirements to allow for verification of compliance. These will take the form of a new regulation based on Article 126(14) TFEU, to foster the application of Treaty Protocol No 12 on the Excessive Deficit Procedure. Infringement proceedings could be instigated in the case of failure to comply.

3. INCREASED FOCUS ON PUBLIC DEBT AND FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE SGP

The Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) should take greater account of the interplay between debt and deficit to improve incentives to run prudent policies.

As regards the **preventive arm** of the SGP, the Commission proposes that a faster pace of progress towards a general government balance that provides a safety margin with respect to the 3% of GDP deficit limit and that ensures rapid progress towards sustainability, i.e. the so-

³ See also Ecofin Council Conclusions of 18 May 2010 on Budgetary Frameworks.

called Medium-Term budgetary objective (MTO) be required for Member States with a high level of debt or pronounced risks in terms of future debt developments.

As regards the **corrective arm**, the Commission proposes that the debt criterion of the excessive deficit procedure be implemented effectively **through a clear and simple numerical benchmark** for defining a satisfactory pace of debt reduction: Member States with debt ratios in excess of 60% of GDP could become subject to the EDP if the decline of debt in a given preceding period falls short of this benchmark (fraction of the gap between the debt level and the 60% of GDP threshold). In the same vein, bringing the deficit below 3% of GDP may not be sufficient for the abrogation of the EDP if the debt has not been put on a sustainable declining path. The precise parameters would be set out in the Code of Conduct accompanying the Stability and Growth Pact.

More than the deficit, public debt developments are subject to factors outside the direct control of governments (in particular inflation, interest rates and cyclical growth developments), therefore judgement is necessary before deciding whether they warrant placing the country in EDP. An overall assessment should be made, taking into account a range of parameters. These include the degree of closeness of the debt ratio to the 60%-of-GDP reference value and whether the debt is temporary and/or exceptional; and other relevant factors reflecting risks of future debt increases and financing strains, such as:

- the maturity structure and currency denomination of debt;
- guarantees to corporations, financial institutions and households;
- accumulated reserves and other government assets;
- implicit liabilities, notably related to ageing;
- the level and change in private debt, to the extent that it may represent an implicit liability for the government;
- the factors behind debt change (primary balance, inflation, growth, interest rates, one-offs); and
- stock-flow operations.

In case of failure to comply with recommendations, sanctions should be applied.

In September the Commission will propose **amendments to both the preventive** (Regulation (EC) No 1466/97) **and corrective arm of the SGP** (Regulation (EC) No 1467/97) to make these principles operational.

4. EFFECTIVE ENFORCEMENT OF ECONOMIC SURVEILLANCE THROUGH APPROPRIATE SANCTIONS AND INCENTIVES

The common rules and co-ordination procedures enshrined in the Treaty and the Stability and Growth Pact have not prevented a number of Member States from implementing fiscal policies in defiance of the existing framework. There is clearly a need to strengthen the credibility of the EU's fiscal surveillance framework through a more rules-based application of sanctions. To increase their effectiveness in the future, a wider range of sanctions and

incentives should be used more preventively and kick in at an earlier stage. The deterrent effect of financial sanctions should constitute a real incentive for compliance with the rules.

Several types of sanctions are foreseen in Article 126(11) TFEU in cases where a Member State fails to comply with EU guidance. These comprise the requirement to publish additional information, an invitation to the European Investment Bank to reconsider its lending policy towards the Member State concerned, the requirement to make a non-interest-bearing deposit of an appropriate size until an excessive deficit has been corrected, and the possibility to impose fines of an appropriate size.

In refining the functioning and scope of possible financial incentives, it is important and necessary to seek effectiveness and equal treatment between Member States. To ensure proportionality, financial sanctions linked to the EU budget could be defined as a percentage of the GNI or GDP of the relevant Member State up to an identical upper limit for all Member States. This upper limit will ensure that all Member States can de facto be subject to sanctions. Moreover, the amounts of commitments and payments concerned by suspension and/or cancellation would be set on a pro-rata basis for the eligible funds up to this upper limit.

The new sanctions "toolbox" would therefore contain different types of sanctions and incentives, which will be activated depending on the set of circumstances and gravity of the situation. The proposed improvements to the existing enforcement mechanisms would require amending the preventive and corrective arms of the SGP (Regulations 1466/97 and 1467/97) as well as through an appropriate mechanism based on the various legal acts on which EU expenditure programmes are based.

As regards the **preventive arm**, (i.e. when a Member State is not making sufficient progress towards its Medium term budgetary Objective) in good economic times) two sets of incentives/sanctions will be proposed.

First, for euro-area Member States, the incentive will consist of **an interest-bearing deposit** temporarily imposed on a Member State which is making insufficient progress with budgetary consolidation. One option would be to define a simple expenditure-rule consistent with the adjustment towards the country-specific MTO. A significant deviation from the agreed expenditure path would be judged as imprudent fiscal policy-making and give rise to a warning from the Commission in line with the provisions of Article 121(4) TFEU. In case of persistent violations, an interest-bearing deposit would be imposed by the Council until the violation has been corrected. The deposit would be released once the situation giving rise to its imposition had come to an end.

Second, still within the preventive arm, the Commission will propose to establish ex-ante conditionality linking disbursement of cohesion policy support to **structural and institutional reforms** directly linked to the operation of cohesion policy with a view to improving its effectiveness and efficiency.

As regards the corrective arm, (i.e. when a Member State is subject to an excessive deficit procedure) the Commission proposes a new system of financial sanctions and incentives to complement the use of deposit and fines. This would deploy the EU budget as complementary leverage in terms of ensuring respect of the key macro economic conditions of the SGP. Sanctions should not affect end beneficiaries of EU funds but rather payment to Member States or payments for which Member States act as an intermediary. The following criteria

will be proposed to establish which EU spending categories and programmes could be considered:

- effectiveness of the funds concerned is dependent on sound fiscal policies,
- clearly attributable to the Member State found not to comply with the SGP or other conditions,
- programmed and implemented under shared management, i.e. where Member States have the main responsibility or representing reimbursements of EU funds to Member States,
- sizeable enough to create credible sanctions or incentives,
- with an impact (potentially) on the quality of public spending and structural adjustment.

These criteria are met in the case of most expenditures related to cohesion policy, Common Agricultural Policy (EAGF and EAFRD) spending and fisheries fund (EFF) expenditures. With regard to the CAP and EFF, a situation in which a reduction of EU spending would lead to a reduction of farmer's and fisherman's income would be excluded. Conditionality on payments should therefore target the EU reimbursements to the national budgets only: Member States would have to continue to pay the farm subsidies, but the reimbursement of this expenditure by the EU budget could be (partially) suspended.

In cases of non-compliance with the rules, incentives can therefore be created by suspending or cancelling part of current or future financial appropriations from the EU budget. Resources cancelled should remain within the EU budget.

As a complement to the provisions of Article 126(11), two types of financial sanctions could be envisaged earlier in the EDP process.

- Step 1 – the establishment of an excessive deficit (Article 126(6) TFEU) would result in the suspension of commitments related to multiannual programmes. This suspension would not have an immediate impact on payments and would therefore allow time for effective remedial action to be taken. Member States could be asked to redirect funds to improve the quality of public finances. Similarly, for CAP reimbursements (EAGF), an announcement of the decision to cancel payments by a set deadline would be made. Re-budgeting would be foreseen as soon as the Member State meets the Council recommendations.
- Step 2 – non-compliance with the initial recommendations to correct the excessive deficit (Article 126(8) TFEU) would result in cancellation of commitments of year n. Similarly, CAP reimbursements (EAGF) for year n would be cancelled. This would lead to a definitive loss of payments for the Member State concerned.

Other incentives could also be created by modulating co-financing rates or introducing a **performance Union reserve** to reward sound fiscal policies. Such a reserve could be funded with cancelled commitments under the above-mentioned step-2-procedure.

The financing side of the EU budget also contributes to reinforcing compliance. The present Own Resources system provides that fines paid by the Member States in the context of the EDP automatically reduce the contribution of participating Member States without a deficit that is excessive to the budget (according to their share in the total GNI of the eligible Member States). This system ensures that the contribution of the fined Member State to the

budget would effectively increase and the contribution to all other Member States decreases. The Commission will also assess whether the EU budget revenue side can be adequately used as an incentive for compliance.

The required changes will be incorporated in the Commission's 2011 proposals for the next multi-annual financial framework. In the meantime, a regulation based on Article 136 TFEU creating a new sanction toolbox having similar effects will be proposed for the euro-area Member States by end-September. The Commission will explore ways of extending these sanctions and incentives "toolbox" to all Member States as soon as possible.

5. THE CO-ORDINATION CYCLE UNDER THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER

The setting up of a European Semester will integrate the different strands of economic policy coordination and allow for better and ex-ante coordination of economic policies.

Ex ante coordination of economic policies. The core objective of the proposal is to give a clear ex-ante dimension to economic policy coordination in the EU and the euro area. Under the European Semester, complementarity of national economic policy plans will be ensured at European level through policy guidance before final decisions on the budget for the following year are taken in Member States. For the euro area a horizontal assessment of fiscal stance should be carried out on the basis of the national Stability Programmes and the Commission forecasts. Special consideration to the aggregate stance should be given in the cases of serious economic stress in the euro area, when sizeable fiscal policy measures taken by individual Member States are likely to produce important spill-overs. In case of obvious inadequacies in the budget plans for the following year, a revision of the plans could be recommended.

Better integrated surveillance. The European Semester will cover all elements of economic surveillance, including policies to ensure fiscal discipline, macroeconomic stability, and to foster growth, in line with the Europe 2020 strategy. Existing processes – e.g. under the Stability and Growth Pact and the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines – will be aligned in terms of timing while remaining legally separate. Stability and Convergence Programmes (SCPs) and National Reform Programmes (NRPs) will be submitted by Member States at the same time and assessed simultaneously by the Commission.

The content of Stability and Convergence Programmes (SCPs) has to be adapted to the rationale of having a European semester. The intention is obviously not to require Member States to submit full-fledged budgets to the EU for "validation" before they present them to their national Parliaments. However, these Programmes should include the necessary information for meaningful ex-ante discussions on fiscal policy. The minimum requirements should include:

- a full-fledged updated macroeconomic scenario;
- concrete indications on plans for year t+1;
- a description of the envisaged policies;
- medium-term projections for the main government finances variables;
- an assessment of fiscal developments in year t-1;

- an update of the fiscal plans for the current year.

The European Semester. The cycle starts in January with an "Annual Growth Survey" (AGS) prepared by the Commission, reviewing economic challenges for the EU and the euro area as a whole. By end February, the European Council provides strategic guidance on policies, which is taken into account by Member States in their SCPs and NRPs which will be submitted in April. The Council issues country-specific policy guidance as mentioned in section 1 in early July. In the second part of the year, Member States finalise national budgets. In its AGS of the following year, the Commission assesses how Member States took EU guidance into account.

Policy guidance under the European Semester. Recommendations will be candid and concrete. In the area of fiscal policy, there will be a strong focus on year $t+1$, and surveillance will give clear indications on whether the envisaged targets and underpinning policies are appropriate. Regarding policies to foster growth and address macro-financial risks, recommendations will focus on a limited number of key reforms and deadlines will be set for their implementation.

Stronger involvement of the European Parliament. Every year in January the Commission will present its AGS to the European Parliament.

National Parliaments. This enhanced economic governance of the EU would benefit from an early and strong association of national parliaments to the European semester process and from greater dialogue with the European parliament.

Early implementation. The Commission proposes to implement the European Semester as of 2011. Amendments to the existing Code of Conduct for SCPs⁴, including inter alia the new date of submission of SCPs will be presented to the ECOFIN Council for endorsement. Immediate legislative changes do not appear to be necessary.

Transition to the European Semester. The Commission will provide guidance on the contents of the future National Reform Programmes in July. It will also propose bilateral dialogue with Member States in autumn 2010 to discuss:

- A medium term national macro economic scenario to frame policy programmes for the period up to 2015, including growth expectations and broad budgetary orientations;
- Confirmation of national targets in line with the five agreed Europe 2020 targets. Member States should indicate for each target the policies they will pursue to meet their national targets and the public investment needed to meet them;
- How to remove the bottlenecks preventing Member States from meeting their targets and the broader Europe 2020 objectives.

⁴ Full title is 'Specifications on the implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact and Guidelines on the format and content of Stability and Convergence Programmes'.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The Commission will make the necessary formal proposals contained in this Communication by end-September – see annex for details.

In the meantime, the Commission invites the Ecofin Council of 13 July to confirm the launch of the surveillance cycle under the European Semester as of January 2011 and to endorse the revised Code of Conduct for the Stability and Growth Pact SCPs as annexed to the Communication.

Annex 1: Roadmap

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Expected delivery date</i>
Broader Macroeconomic Surveillance	Proposal for legislation under Art. 121(6) and Art. 136 establishing a framework for dealing with excessive Imbalances	End-September
Thematic Surveillance of Structural Reforms	Issue specific recommendations to enhance the implementation of reform measures	Starting with the Annual Policy Cycle of Europe 2020: first report to the 2011 Spring European Council
Fiscal Surveillance: national fiscal frameworks	Proposal for a Regulation under Art. 126(14) specifying the minimum requirements for the design of domestic fiscal frameworks and the reporting requirements to allow for verification of compliance	End-September
Fiscal surveillance: increased focus on public debt and sustainability in the SGP	Proposals for amending both the preventive (Regulation 1466/97) and corrective arm of the SGP (Regulation 1467/97). Revise Code of Conduct (expenditure rule for implementing adjustment toward MTO; numerical benchmark for minimum pace of debt reduction)	End-September
Enforcement of economic surveillance (sanctions/incentives): Interest-bearing deposit temporarily imposed on a euro area Member State	Proposal for a Regulation under Art. 121(6) and Art. 136(1)(a).	End-September
Enforcement of economic surveillance (sanctions/incentives): deploy the EU budget as additional leverage	Introduce specific provisions in the legal acts underpinning certain EU expenditure programmes Proposal for a Regulation under Art. 136(1)(a) for euro-area Member States introducing sanctions having similar effects	To be included in the Commission's 2011 proposals for the next multi annual financial framework End-September
Setting up of a European Semester	Revise the Code of Conduct for the Stability and Growth Pact (SCPs)	Launch of the surveillance cycle under European Semester as of January 2011