Policy briefing on the European Semester

May 2015

What is the European Semester?

The European Semester is a mechanism to enable the closer monitoring of the implementation of policies towards the achievement of the EU2020 objectives. It is a multi-stakeholder annual process that covers an entire policy and decision making as well as reporting procedure between the European Commission, the Council, the Member States and additional actors. It was one of the EU’s replies to the economic and financial crisis, which has profound effect on the EU’s Social Model and resulted high level of unemployment, growing inequalities and poverty, fall in living standards and quality etc. in many EU Member States.

The European Semester cycle in 2015 – Key instruments

The European Semester cycle is focused on the first six-months of each year, time during which Member States have to align their budgetary and economic policies with the objectives and rules agreed under the Stability and Growth Pact and the Europe 2020 Strategy.

At the end of 2014 the European Commission adopted its Annual Growth Survey (together with the Alert Mechanism Report) and set the direction of EU policies towards growth and job creation. At the beginning of 2015 the Survey was discussed at the level of the European Parliament and a related report was adopted by its Members. In March 2015, the Spring meeting of the European Council took stock of the overall economic situation and progress towards the EU2020 targets, at the same time, the Commission published a single analytical economic assessment (Country Reports) per Member States.

In April, Member States presented their Stability or Convergence Programmes, planning for sound public finances, and their National Reform Programmes. The presented plans and measures aim to make progress towards growth in areas such as employment, education, social inclusion etc. In May, the Commission proposed Country Specific Recommendations providing tailor-made policy advice to each Member State as priorities for the next 12-18 months. Finally, at the end of June or in early July, the Council formally adopts the recommendations.

The COFACE European Semester Seminar

The COFACE European Semester seminar (April 2015) aimed to bring together the various member organisations of COFACE, EU level stakeholders, Belgian and Hungarian civil society organisations etc. and through the presentation of the European Semester cycles of Hungary and Belgium introduce the EU semester process, present the roles of the various institutions and actors in the procedure, and seek further the ways of civil society engagement in the cycle’s procedures.
Over the course of the one-day seminar participants get a **general introduction** of the main steps, as well as, the **involved stakeholders and institutions** (governments and ministries of the EU28, European Commission, Brussels based permanent representations of the EU28, European Parliament, Social Protection Committee etc.) of the European Semester cycle. Furthermore, participants get up-dated with the newest introductions of the Semester such as the specific Country Reports.

**Main findings of the COFACE EU Semester Seminar**

Every May **Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)** are being proposed by the European Commission providing tailor-made policy advice to each 28 Member States and priorities for the next 12-18 months. The implementation of CSRs in each member state is critical, at the same time, it is important to understand why specific recommendations are being put forward by the Commission and how they connect to the **National Reform Programs (NRPs)**. One planning to get engaged with the EU semester process must be aware of the 4 previous years’ recommendations and perceive the cycle in a 10-year scope.

**Personal relationships and contacts are key** in almost every steps of the semester cycle. The European semester is a “board game” in which many of the key actors, like everything that is related to policy making at every level in the European Union, interact in a day-to-day basis that not just helps the writing and drafting of important documents but makes it comprehensive and up-to-date.

**Timing is crucial.** Many of the complicated steps of the EU semester process is closely linked with deadlines and a well-structured timeframe (starting each year November/December and lasting till June/July), therefore organisations must be time-keepers. Keeping deadlines is key, but knowing that the staff of the European Commission have to, basically, monitor the semester process and member states level policies throughout 365 days a year is equally paramount.

In addressing the different reforms needed in member states of the EU the European Commission has wheeled towards tailored recommendations and parted from the application of a **“one-size-fits-all”** solution. This trend has been warmly welcomed by all the actors involved in the semester cycle and we can see a very committed will in continuing this tendency.

Actual **participation of civil society organisations** in the semester cycle is relatively limited though we can meet encouraging examples on how governments include local and national level partners in the drafting of the NRPs by organising consultations, roundtable discussions, working groups (focusing on specific social problems) and provide opportunities to react on the CSRs as well. To further improve such practices time-frame problems (organisations must react to certain documents in only 2-3 days) must be addressed.

**Do not wait! Get engaged!**

The 2015 European Semester cycle kicked off last November and already published its Annual Growth Surveys, Country Reports, National Reform Programmes and Country Specific Recommendations. Negotiations and meetings are continuously taking place in between the many stakeholders. Do not wait! Read, comment the latest published documents of the Semester Cycle (CSRs, NRPs) approach your government and ask for engagement possibilities, bring your expertise and concerns to the negotiation table that relate to all the relevant targets of the EU 2020 goals and EU Semester priorities.


The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE), brings together a large number of civil society organisations with the aim of advocating non-discrimination and equal opportunities between persons and family forms. COFACE supports the development of policies aimed at increasing equality between women and men, with a specific focus on reconciliation between work, care and private life.

Contact: Tel: +322 511 41 79 | E-mail: secretariat@coface-eu.org | Website: [www.coface-eu.org](http://www.coface-eu.org)