



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



6753/08 (Presse 46)

**PRESS RELEASE**

2855th Council meeting

**Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs**

Brussels, 29 February 2008

President            **Marjeta COTMAN**  
Minister for Labour, the Family and Social Affairs of  
Slovenia

**P R E S S**

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6753/08 (Presse 46)

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## **Main results of the Council**

The Council held a policy debate and adopted the key messages in the fields of Employment, Social Policy and Gender Equality, intended to be reflected in the Spring European Council conclusions.

The Council reached a general approach on guidelines for the **employment policies** of the member states and a political agreement on the a Council recommendation for 2008 as well as a resolution on the situation of **persons with disabilities** in the European Union.

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

The governments of the Member States and the European Commission were represented as follows:

### **Belgium:**

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Minister for Employment

**United Kingdom:**

Mr James PLASKITT

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for  
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Mr Vladimír ŠPIDLA

Member

**Other participants:**

Mr Emilio GABAGLIO

Chair of the Employment Committee

Ms Elise WILLAME

Chair of the European Social Protection Committee

**ITEMS DEBATED****PREPARATION OF THE SPRING EUROPEAN COUNCIL****Key Messages**

The Council held a wide-ranging policy debate with a view to finalising key messages to the Spring European Council in the fields of employment, social policy, and equal opportunities.

The debate was based, in particular, on the following documents:

- the Communication from the Commission: Strategic report on the renewed Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs: launching the new cycle (2008-2010) "Keeping up the pace of change " (16714/07);
- the draft Joint Employment Report 2007/2008 (5984/08);
- the draft Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008 (6214/08);
- the proposal for a Council Decision on Guidelines for the Employment Policies of the Member States, based on the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2008-2010);
- the Commission Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2008 update of the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and the Community and the implementation of Member States' employment policies (5985/08);
- the report from the Commission on equality between women and men, 2008 (5710/08).

At the end of the debate, the Council adopted the following key messages and agreed to transmit them to the Spring European Council as the EPSCO Council's contribution:

"The EPSCO Council submits the following key messages to the Spring European Council:

**The new Lisbon cycle**

The assessment of Member States' progress, using agreed indicators and good quality statistics, is an essential part of the Lisbon Strategy and country-specific characteristics must be taken into account in the evaluation of the performance of each Member State and of the EU as an entity.

The European Employment Strategy is delivering results, but they remain uneven and are still falling short of meeting the objectives. In the light of the persistent employment challenges and the current uncertain economic outlook, it will be crucial to maintain the momentum to pursue further structural reform, which in combination with a growth-oriented macro-economic framework, should further encourage more and better jobs and strengthen social cohesion.

The Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs should therefore be characterised by stability so that the focus can be on the implementation of policies, in particular in response to the Country-Specific Recommendations. The simultaneous adoption by the Council of the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion clearly shows the complementarity with the Open Method of Coordination. Giving more social visibility to the Lisbon Strategy, however, requires a stronger integration of economic, employment and social policies.

Ownership is key to success. Further efforts should be made, in particular at national level, to strengthen the active involvement of the social partners and other relevant stakeholders to take forward the reform agenda.

Action at Community level should complement and support national policies. The EPSCO Council therefore broadly endorses the Community's Lisbon Programme, in particular the priority given to the need to invest in people and modernise labour markets, of which the actions should be examined in accordance with the appropriate procedures.

### **Prioritising action for more and better jobs**

Building on the priority area of **investing in people and modernising labour markets**, the Council underlines the need for action on the following issues.

Member States should develop and implement effective **flexicurity** approaches in accordance with the agreed common principles. The Mission for Flexicurity should contribute to this end. The Council underlines the importance of reinforcing mutual learning programmes to ensure that Member States benefit from one another's experience. The illustrative pathways are a useful reference in this process.

The EU labour market should be responsive to changing global trends. Investing in human capital within a life-cycle approach to work is crucial to take full advantage of creativity and innovation. Through **anticipating skills needs**, more effort should be given to ensure the reallocation of labour to more productive jobs where the European economy has a comparative advantage. The implementation of the New Skills for New Jobs approach is important in this respect. The impact of the EU's climate-change policy on employment and the opportunity to create "green jobs" needs to be considered.

The inactive, and people at the margins of the labour market, need particular attention to tackle segmentation, promote **inclusive labour markets** and avoid leaving anyone behind. Labour market policies should be combined with an active inclusion strategy in order to combat poverty. Making work more attractive than benefits should be developed through appropriate incentives. A balanced approach could consist of individually-tailored measures, appropriate minimum wages or targeted payroll tax cuts. More efforts should be undertaken to create opportunities for the low-skilled and to support upward occupational transitions.

Increasing employment rates of older workers, young people, the foreign-born, and persons with a disability is of great importance if Europe is to successfully include people outside the labour market and counter-balance the effects of an ageing population. The gender equality dimension should be more effectively taken into account in the employment policies of the Member States. **Youth employment** is a pressing issue. The variation in the situation of the young indicates the scope for mutual learning as a basis and incentive for policies promoting youth employment. Reducing early school leaving and improving the transition between education and employment remains of utmost importance. Easy entry points in the labour market are necessary and are linked to a better matching process.

The European Union should further facilitate geographic and occupational **mobility**. The **portability of social rights** should also be considered in the future.

**Economic migration** can play a role in addressing the needs of the labour market and can contribute to help reduce skills shortages. It therefore considers that the employment and social impact of migration by third country nationals needs to be addressed in the context of the Commission proposals for a common policy on immigration.

The EPSCO Council looks forward to the Commission proposal for a renewed **Social Agenda** by mid 2008 which should provide a vision and concrete measures to address the labour and social challenges the EU is facing by using all instruments and tools available at Community level. The Social Agenda should play a key role in strengthening the social dimension of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the **Single Market** in order to better articulate the principle of free movement with social standards and workers' rights.

### **Strengthening social cohesion and modernising social protection**

The **Common Social Objectives** remain valid. Against this background, the Council underlines the need for action as follows:

- Preventing and tackling poverty and social exclusion and modernising social protection, combining both social adequacy and economic sustainability in a framework of sound fiscal policies, is fundamental to Europe's sustainable development. Policy consistency and coordination, including mainstreaming gender equality and solidarity between and within generations, are essential to enhance social cohesion and to achieve the objective of fully including the most vulnerable in society. Active inclusion measures combining adequate financial support, enabling services and quality job opportunities with strengthened incentives to work, help to eliminate obstacles to participation in the labour market and in society, and need to be sustained.



- 19 million children in the EU live at risk of poverty. Ensuring equal opportunities for all and an increase in efforts to improve educational outcomes for each child are required to break the transmission of poverty and exclusion to the next generation. The best-performing Member States target the most disadvantaged children within a broader universal approach. **Efforts to tackle poverty** – of children and overall – will gain leverage from an evidence-based diagnosis of the main causes of poverty and exclusion in each Member State. In this context national quantified objectives can be instrumental in making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty. This can be further strengthened by regular monitoring of impact and effectiveness of policies and, where needed, by a reinforcement of statistical capacity. Sustained efforts will be required during, and beyond, the next cycle of the Lisbon strategy.
- **Modernisation of pension systems** can promote **active ageing** by raising employability, reducing early retirement schemes, increasing flexibility in retirement and strengthening incentives to work. This needs to be accompanied by efforts to open up the labour market to older workers and by adequate protection for those for whom work is not an option, for example due to severe disability or care duties. Today's pension **reforms** will have impact several decades ahead, hence they require **regular monitoring** as to their impact on future adequacy and sustainability. Raising awareness of various issues associated with different schemes is required to allow citizens to make informed choices.
- Social policies have a major impact on health; and health is an important determinant of life chances. Action is necessary to reduce persistent health inequalities. A **health-in-all-policies approach** is needed; social protection should ensure access for all to prevention, quality healthcare and long term care, including the most difficult to reach. As demographic and societal change trigger rising needs for quality long term care, providing access for all, improving care coordination and ensuring support for informal carers remain a challenge. Member States need to strike the right balance between public and private responsibilities and formal and informal care."

**Communication from the Commission "Keeping up the pace of change": Strategic report on the renewed Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs: launching the new cycle (2008-2010)**

The Commission presented its annual progress report which represents the essential background to the whole of the Council's preparation of the Spring European Council ([16714/07 + ADD 1](#)).

It is clear from the Report that the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy remains uneven from Member State to Member State, for example in the areas of the reform of pension and benefit systems and in the promotion of lifelong learning.

The report consequently focuses on actions which are still needed in the four priority areas of **investing in people** and **modernising** labour markets, unlocking the business potential, especially of SMEs, investing in **knowledge** and **innovation**, and responding to the **challenges** of **energy** and **climate** change.

In this context, a number of examples of ambitious new actions have been identified, such as reducing the number of early school leavers, giving Europe a new "fifth freedom", the free movement of knowledge, rolling out high-speed internet to stimulate innovation, adopting a Small Business Act for Europe, reinforcing the education-research-innovation triangle, and improving substantially the energy efficiency of our buildings.

## Joint Reports on Employment 2007/2008 and on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008

The Council has adopted the 2007/2008 joint Commission and Council reports on Employment and on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and has agreed to transmit them to the Spring European Council.

The two reports take stock of progress made and of that still to be made on the achievement of the objectives of the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs.

The joint **employment** report ([5984/08 + COR 1](#)) is intended to contribute to the European Council's conclusions, on which the employment part of the 2008 guidelines will be based<sup>1</sup>. It assesses the employment policy part of national reform programmes, addressing the following issues:

- Progress in achieving the objectives of the European Employment Strategy:
  - Full employment;
  - Quality and productivity at work;
  - Social and territorial cohesion.
- Implementing the priorities for action:
  - Attract and retain more people in employment, increase labour supply and modernise social protection systems;
  - Improve the adaptability of workers and enterprises;
  - Increase investment in human capital through better education and skills.

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<sup>1</sup> Under the heading "Employment", Article 125 of the Treaty provides that the Member States and the Community are to work towards developing a coordinated strategy for employment, the objectives of which it defines. The joint employment report, the recommendations to the Member States and the annual employment guidelines are all components of the European Employment Strategy (EES) launched by the European Council meeting in Luxembourg in November 1997. The annual EES procedure is defined in Article 128 of the Treaty: on the basis of a *joint annual report by the Council and the Commission*: the European Council shall each year consider the employment situation in the Community and adopt conclusions thereon. On the basis of those conclusions, the Council shall each year draw up *guidelines* which the Member States shall take into account in their employment policies. The Member States shall provide the Council and the Commission with *annual national reform programmes* on the principal measures taken in the light of those guidelines. On the basis of those programmes, the Council shall each year carry out an examination of the implementation of the employment policies of the Member States, and it may make *recommendations* to Member States. In addition, on the basis of the results of that examination, the Council and the Commission shall make a *joint annual report* to the European Council on the employment situation in the Community. Since 1997 the EES has been reinforced by initiatives taken at spring European Council meetings. At present, within the framework of a three-year cycle, the EES has three general objectives: full employment, quality and productivity at work, cohesion and an inclusive labour market.

- Prioritising action for more and better jobs.

The joint report on **social protection** and **social inclusion** ([6214/08 + COR 1](#)) covers the policies in the fields of social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care. It looks into the interaction between the open method of coordination<sup>1</sup> and the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs in these fields and outlines future developments of the open method of coordination.

While last year's joint report examined the first set of national strategic reports submitted under this coordination method, the 2008 joint report provides a deepened analysis of selected themes, summarising the lessons learnt. It addresses the following topics:

- Mutual interaction between the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs:
  - Efforts to reduce child poverty;
  - Promoting longer working lives;;
  - Securing privately funded pension provision;
  - Reducing inequalities in health outcomes;
  - increasing access to quality long-term care.
- Future developments of the Open Method of Coordination

The joint report confirms the continuing validity of the common social objectives agreed in 2006<sup>2</sup> and stresses the importance of mutual supportive interaction between social and economic policies. It notes that agreement has been reached on improving working methods, in particular by a more context- and process-orientated approach, better use of all available instruments, and continuous involvement of stakeholders and better dissemination of results.

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<sup>1</sup> The open method of coordination, set up in 2000 by the Lisbon European Council, provides a flexible framework for political coordination between Member States without legal constraints. It concerns areas falling within the competence of Member States and involves common objectives and indicators, national strategic reports and joint evaluation of the strategies in co-operation with the European Commission.

<sup>2</sup> Common objectives: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/spsi/common\\_objectives\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/common_objectives_en.htm)

## **Integrated guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2008-2010): proposal for a Council Decision on Guidelines for the Employment Policies of the Member States.**

The Council has reached a general approach on a decision on Guidelines for the Employment Policies of the Member States, in the framework of Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (6752/08). The Council will return to the Employment Guidelines after the Parliament's opinion has been received (due in May).

The previous Integrated The Guidelines including both the Employment Guidelines and the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines were adopted as an integrated package<sup>1</sup>, whereby the European Employment Strategy has the leading role in the implementation of the employment and labour market objectives of the Lisbon Strategy.

The draft Employment Guidelines -part of the Integrated Guidelines for the period 2008 -2010-are the following:

### **Employment guidelines:**

- 17 Implement employment policies aiming at achieving full employment, improving quality and productivity at work, and strengthening social and territorial cohesion.
- 18 Promote a life-cycle approach to work.
- 19 Ensure inclusive labour markets, enhance work attractiveness, and make work pay for job-seekers, including disadvantaged people, and the inactive.
- 20 Improve matching of labour market needs.
- 21 Promote flexibility combined with employment security and reduce labour market segmentation, having due regard to the role of the social partners.
- 22 Ensure employment-friendly labour cost developments and wage-setting mechanisms.
- 23 Expand and improve investment in human capital.
- 24 Adapt education and training systems in response to new competence requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 205, 6.8.2005 p. 21 (Employment Guidelines) and p. 28 (Broad Economic Policy Guidelines).

## **Council Recommendation on the 2008 update of the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and the Community and the implementation of Member States' employment policies**

The Council has reached political agreement on the 2008 Joint Council recommendation ([6775/08](#)), with a view to its being formally adopted at a forthcoming Council session following endorsement by the European Council.

According to the recommendation, each Member State should take action at national level along the lines set out in the Annex and report on their follow up in their next programmes in the framework of the renewed Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs.

Some specific actions are foreseen for those Member States belonging to the Euro Area.

On 11 December 2007 the Commission submitted the above mentioned recommendation for a Council Recommendation based, as far as the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPGs) are concerned, on Article 99(2) of the Treaty and, as far as the Member States' employment policies are concerned, on Article 128(4).

As in 2007, the Recommendation combines in a single text, in the spirit of the Integrated Guidelines, elements which had in earlier years been the subject of separate instruments based on the two different Treaty articles.

## **Commission's 2008 Report on equality between women and men**

The Commission has submitted its annual report on equality between women and men ([5710/08](#)), as requested by the European Council in Spring 2003<sup>1</sup>.

The report acknowledges the progress achieved in terms of quantity, but underlines the need to boost the qualitative aspect of equality. It recommends focusing attention in 2008 on:

- creating more and better jobs for women in order to foster equal economic independence;
- including a gender perspective in all aspects of job quality;
- improving the supply and quality of services that help reconcile professional and private life for both men and women;
- tackling stereotypes in education, employment and the media;
- developing tools to assess the impact of policies from the gender perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> Submitted by the Commission as requested by the European Council in March 2003 (*see 8410/03, section 47*).

## **PREPARATION OF THE TRIPARTITE SOCIAL SUMMIT**

As part of the preparation of the Spring European Council, the Council's exchange of views covered the preparation of the tripartite social summit for growth and employment to be held in Brussels on 13 March, prior to the Spring European Council.

The participants will have the opportunity to comment on two main topics to be considered by the European Council, namely the new cycle of the Lisbon Strategy and the climate and energy package.

In addition the social partners will be invited to present their plans with regard to the follow-up of the joint analysis of European labour markets which they presented a few months ago.

The task of the tripartite social summit for growth and employment, which was established by Decision 2003/174/EC<sup>1</sup>, is to ensure that there is a continuous social dialogue between the Council, the Commission, and the social partners at the highest level.

The troika ( currently the Slovenian Presidency and the subsequent French and Czech Presidencies) of the Heads of State or Government and of the Ministers for Employment, President Barroso, Commissioner Špidla, responsible for social affairs, and delegations of the social partners meet before each Spring European Council to examine the components of the re-launched Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 70, 14.3.2003, p. 31.

## **SINGLE MARKET REVIEW**

The Council endorsed the joint Employment Committee (EMCO) and Social Protection Committee (SPC) opinion on the Commission Communication on the Single Market Review ([6768/08](#)).

It was considered essential that both Committees look closely at the Commissions' review package containing, respectively, communication on:

- A single market for 21st century Europe;
- Services of general interest, including social services of general interest: a new European commitment;
- Opportunities, access, and solidarity: towards a new social vision for 21st century Europe.

The EMCO-SPC Joint Opinion lays particular emphasis on two major objectives:

- the Single Market Review should be complemented by an enhanced Social Agenda by mid-2008, which should set out a work programme using all the instruments available at Community level and opening ways to mainstream employment and social goals in all EU policies;
- The recognition of the diversity of situations across the Member States and the responsibility of public authorities, at the relevant level, to decide on the nature and scope of social services of general interest is essential. There is a clear demand from public authorities, service providers, users and civil society for enhanced legal certainty regarding the application of Community rules to these social services.

In December 2007, the Council had an important policy debate on this subject (*see press release* [16139/07](#)).



## **RESOLUTION ON THE SITUATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

The Council reached political agreement on a resolution on the situation of persons with disabilities ([6769/08](#)).

The resolution, a legally non-binding instrument, responds to the Commission's Communication on this subject, which sets out the priorities for 2008-2009 in the context of the European Disability Action Plan (2003-2010). It invites the Member States and the Commission to ensure that:

- persons with disabilities enjoy their human rights in full, and
- employment, education and training, mainstream goods, services and infrastructure as well as information and communication technologies are better accessible for persons with disabilities, as this is a precondition for their autonomy and their inclusion and participation.

In order to achieve these objectives, it calls for various actions, including:

- concluding, ratifying and implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>1</sup>, signed by the European Community and its member states in 2007;
- further developing a comprehensive policy-mix of all appropriate instruments with a view to eliminating discrimination and integrating persons with disabilities into society;
- encouraging the gradual replacement of care institutions by community-based alternatives, wherever appropriate;
- starting work on a future European disability strategy to succeed the current action plan;
- maintaining a dialogue among all stakeholders.

In addition, the institutions of the European Union should continue to apply an equal opportunities policy to job applicants and to further improve the accessibility of their buildings for people with disabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

**OTHER BUSINESS**

- (a) Work Programme of the Employment Committee 2008 - Oral information from the Chair**
- (b) Work Programme of the Social Protection Committee 2008 - Oral information from the Chair**

The Council took note of the work programmes for 2008 presented by Mr. Emilio GABAGLIO chair of the Employment Committee, and Ms Elise WILLAME chair of the Social Protection Committee, respectively.

- (c) Mission for Flexicurity – Information from the Commission**

The Commission submitted the Mission for Flexicurity ([6793/08](#)) to the Council.

On 5 December, the Council adopted the "Common Principles on Flexicurity". The Council invited the Commission to launch a public initiative on these and to keep it fully informed of its actions in this respect (see press release [16639/07](#)).

The "Mission for Flexicurity" has been established by the Commission in partnership with the Slovenian and French presidencies in order to ensure the full integration of the Common Principles of Flexicurity in community processes.

The mandate of the Mission will be twofold:

- to assist member states in promoting the ownership and visibility of the Common Principles of Flexicurity at national and sub-national level, in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders;
- to consider ways to facilitate the integration of flexicurity into the process and tools of the 2008-2010 cycle of the Lisbon Strategy and European Employment Strategy, and in particular into the implementation of the Integrated Guidelines.

The mission will report to the Council by the end of 2008.

- (d) Language regime of the European Institute for Gender Equality – Request from the Spanish delegation**

The Council took note of the information given by Commissioner Špidla in response to concerns expressed by the Spanish delegation supported by the Italian, German, Greek, French, Cypriot and Portuguese delegations, with regard to the language regime of the Management Board of the European Institute for Gender Equality ([6770/08](#)), and of the concerns raised by the Lithuanian delegation concerning the procedure for appointing the first Director of the Institute.

## **OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

### **COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY**

#### **Democratic Republic of the Congo - Restrictive measures**

The Council adopted a common position amending common position 2005/440/CFSP on restrictive measures against the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in order to adapt it when necessary, in light of determinations made by the United Nations Security Council ([6726/08](#)).

The measures established by common position 2005/440/CFSP against the DRC are also extended until 31 March 2008, in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1799 (2008).

Following the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1596(2005) in April 2005, the Council adopted Common Position 2005/440/CFSP implementing the Resolution by imposing an arms embargo, a visa ban to prevent entry into or transit through the EU and a freeze of funds and economic resources for persons and entities who act in violation of the arms embargo.

Resolution 1596 has since been modified by resolutions 1649(2005), 1698(2006), 1771(2007) and 1799 (2008), and common position 2005/440/CFSP has been adapted accordingly.

### **STATISTICS**

#### **Community job vacancies**

The Council adopted a regulation laying down requirements for the regular production of statistics on Community job vacancies in support of the EU decision-making procedure for labour market policies ([3668/07](#)). The regulation was adopted at first reading by approving the European Parliament amendments.

The regulation aims at improving monitoring and analysis of the level and structure of labour demand in the EU, and at identifying labour shortages, bottlenecks and mismatches by region, sector of economic activity and occupation.

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