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3114th Council meeting

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

Luxembourg, 3 October 2011

President

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Minister for Labour and Social Policy

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Main results of the Council

*The Council held a policy debate on the future shape of the **European Social Fund** and its role in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy.*

It took stock of preparations for the Tripartite Social summit on 17 October.

*The Council adopted conclusions on the role of **voluntary work** in social policy and on managing **demographic challenges** through better reconciliation of work and family life.*

*It took note of the comments of different member states on the French and Slovenian initiative regarding the **aid programme for the most deprived persons in the 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>).
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Deputy Permanent Representative**United Kingdom:**

Mr Andy LEBRECHT

Deputy Permanent Representative

Commission:

Mr László ANDOR

Member

ITEMS DEBATED**Tripartite Social summit**

The Council took stock of preparation for the Tripartite Social summit, which will take place on 17 October just before the European Council. As the latter will focus on growth-enhancing measures through the finalisation of the economic governance package, the Social summit will need to discuss how to enhance trust and social dialogue to sustain recovery and structural change.

The Social summit brings together the troika of Heads of State and Government (the current and two forthcoming presidencies: this year PL, DK and CY), accompanied by the respective Employment Ministers, the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission, the Employment Commissioner and the Presidents/General Secretaries of the principal European employers' and trade union organisations. Employers will be represented by BusinessEurope and trade unions by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

Use of the European Social Fund under the Europe 2020 Strategy

In view of the forthcoming submission by the Commission of its cohesion package, the Council held a comprehensive and fruitful debate on the future role of the European Social Fund (ESF) in the framework of the EU 2020 Strategy, based on a Presidency background paper ([14224/11](#)).

In the light of the forthcoming discussions on the Union's budget for the period 2014-2020, Employment ministers considered how the ESF could be part of a more performance-oriented EU cohesion policy, which requires the focus to be shifted from financial inputs and outputs to efficient policy objectives.

They acknowledged that the ESF should be used in a more efficient way by eliminating cumbersome administrative procedures and bureaucracy, and should assure complementarity between different operational programmes.

ESF targets should be linked to the EU 2020 Strategy, but should also correspond to the specific needs and priorities of the member states at national as well as at regional levels.

In addition to combating social exclusion and reducing poverty, the ESF should play an important role in helping young people to participate in the labour market at a time when unemployment hits record high.

The Council discussions concentrated on the following questions :

- how the ESF could contribute to the implementation of the EU 2020 objectives and headline targets in the areas of employment, educational attainment, social inclusion and poverty reduction;
- the goals of the various flagship initiatives to which the ESF should provide priority support;
- how to reorient the ESF towards a more result-based approach and how to simplify procedures, in particular for the beneficiaries;
- possible ways for actors at EU, national, regional and local level to improve the effectiveness of the ESF and how the ESF could be made more efficient in delivering on these targets;
- how the coordination between the Structural Funds could be improved in order to achieve comprehensive policy objectives.

The debate showed that a consensus did exist on the need:

- to streamline the ESF procedures;
- to make full use of the ESF in order to achieve the EU 2020 objectives;
- to ensure a proper articulation of the ESF with other Structural Funds;
- to target the most vulnerable and promote inclusion for those who do not participate in the labour market.

The **ESF** is the main funding instrument at European level to promote employment, social inclusion and equal opportunities, and to develop skills and competences. In the 2007-13 programming period, EUR 75 billion have been made available to national and regional authorities from the ESF. Around EUR 20 billion have been allocated to enhancing access to employment and preventing unemployment, and around EUR 10 billion have been earmarked to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. The member states have made extensive use of ESF funding to cushion the impact of the economic crisis, prevent unemployment and reintegrate into the labour market those people who have lost their jobs.

The ESF is one of the key financial levers for putting the **Europe 2020 Strategy** into effect. The Europe 2020 Strategy, adopted in 2010 for the next decade, sets out a vision of Europe's social market economy for the 21st century.

The Fund has a particular role to play in supporting several of the 2020 Strategy's flagship initiatives, such as "an agenda for new skills for new jobs", "youth on the move" and the "platform against poverty". The ESF should also contribute to the achievement of several headline targets, notably the employment, the educational attainment and the poverty reduction targets.

The future of all European instruments and programmes will depend on the shape of the next financial framework for the years 2014-2020. In this context, the successful implementation of the 2020 Strategy can be achieved by ensuring substantial funding for the ESF in the next EU budget. In "A Budget for Europe 2020", the Commission proposes that the ESF allocation be increased by 10% compared to the 2007-2013 period, reaching a total of EUR 84 billion.

Voluntary work in social policy

The Council adopted conclusions on the role of voluntary work in social policy ([14552/11](#)), taking account of the activities and discussions in the context of 2011, European year of voluntary activities promoting active citizenship.

The conclusions stress that voluntary activity is an expression of active citizenship in all areas of social life. Volunteering strengthens common European values like solidarity and social cohesion. It is crucial to the development of democratic values, human dignity, equality and subsidiarity, which are among the founding principles of the EU.

Volunteering has furthermore the potential to contribute to the well-being of individuals and to the harmonious development of European societies. It offers important learning opportunities, as involvement in voluntary activities can provide people with new skills and competences. It can even improve employability and thus furthers the achievement of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

It can also help the transmission of knowledge, the inter-cultural dialogue and be instrumental in bridging the generation gap, addressing gender inequalities, reducing existing social barriers, intolerance and all forms of discrimination.

The conclusions furthermore invite the Commission and the member states to take specific actions in their respective fields of responsibility.

Managing demographic challenges through better reconciliation of work and family life

The Council adopted conclusions on demography and reconciliation of work and family life ([14553/11](#)).

The population of the EU is ageing considerably and the resulting change in the composition of the population is expected to have a great impact on the structure of Europe's social and economic life. Tackling the various facets of demographic challenges has therefore become a key priority.

The conclusions aim in particular to strengthen institutional cooperation in this field and to facilitate information exchange between various bodies and initiatives at both European and national level.

They also aim to strengthen existing methods of cooperation and knowledge-sharing on care systems for dependent persons, including childcare and long-term care, and to involve the social partners in looking for the best solutions to deal with the consequences of the demographic challenges.

Any other business**– First annual convention of the European platform against poverty and social exclusion**

The Presidency informed the Council about the message that it intends to deliver at the first annual convention of the European platform against poverty and social exclusion which will be held in Krakow, on 17 and 18 October ([14500/11](#)).

– Meeting of G20 Labour and Employment ministers

The Presidency briefly reported on the outcome of the meeting of the G20 Labour and Employment ministers in Paris, on 26-27 September. The main topics of the meeting were the following:

- Enhance employment policies, especially for youth and the most vulnerable sectors of the population;
- Strengthen social protection, including through the development of social protection floors;
- Promote social and labour rights;
- Enhance coherence among international organisations and among economic, social, finance, trade and development policies.

Social partners were consulted throughout the preparatory process, including in separate consultations with the G20 social partners on 26 September 2011 prior to the ministerial meeting. Business (B20) and Labour (L20) summits are scheduled prior to the Cannes summit.

– Informal meetings

The Presidency informed delegations about the outcome of the informal EPSCO meeting (7/8 July) and Presidency conferences.

– **Meeting of ministerial working group**

The German delegation informed the Council about the main points of the meeting dedicated to national strategies to ensure the supply of skilled labour, which the MWG held in Potsdam on 31 August and 1 September.

– **Future of the aid programme for the most deprived persons in the Union**

The Council took note of the comments of various member states on the French and Slovenian initiative ([14670/11](#)) regarding the aid programme for the most deprived persons in the Union, following the ongoing debate in the Agriculture Council.

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Over lunch, ministers also discussed migration and workers' mobility from the point of view of future challenges and opportunities.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOREIGN AFFAIRS****EU Association Council**

The Council approved the position of the European Union for the fifth session of the EU-Chile Association Council, to be held in Brussels on 7 October 2011.

INTERNAL MARKET**Credit agreements for consumers - Calculation of percentage rate of charge**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption by the Commission of a directive updating the assumptions on standards for the calculation of the annual percentage rate of charge included in directive 2008/48/EC ([13263/11](#)).

Directive 2008/48/EC harmonises certain aspects of agreements on credit for consumers within the EU.

The draft directive is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

TRADE POLICY**Anti-dumping - Bicycles - China**

The Council adopted a regulation imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of bicycles originating in China following an expiry review pursuant to regulation (EC) No 1225/2009 ([13949/11](#)).

CUSTOMS UNION

Andorra - Customs security measures

The Council authorised the conclusion of a protocol extending to customs security measures the EU-Andorra agreement ([17403/10](#)). The protocol is provisionally applicable from 1 January 2011.

The agreement, signed in 1990 between the European Economic Community and Andorra, provides that the Principality of Andorra is to adopt the customs security measures applied by the EU and that a detailed list of the provisions in question is to be drawn up by the joint committee set up under the agreement.

ENERGY

Ecodesign requirements for air conditioners and comfort fans

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption by the Commission of a regulation implementing directive 2009/125/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council with regard to ecodesign requirements for air conditioners and comfort fans ([13029/11](#)).

The draft regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny, now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

Energy Community - Ministerial Council Meeting

The Council adopted a decision on establishing the European Union position within the Ministerial Council of the Energy Community, which will take place in Chişinău (Moldova) on 6 October 2011.

The Treaty establishing the Energy Community entered into force in 2006. The Energy Community extends the EU internal energy market to South-East Europe and beyond on the basis of a legally binding framework. It provides a stable investment environment based on the rule of law, and binds the contracting parties, together with the European Union.

For more details see: <http://www.energy-community.org/>

FOOD

Food additives, health claims and steviol glycosides

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of the six following Commission regulations concerning food additives, health claims made on food and steviol glycosides:

- regulation amending directive 2002/46/EC , regulation (EC) No 1925/2006 and regulation 953/2009 as regards the list of mineral substances that can be added to foods ([13267/11](#));
- regulation amending annex II to regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 by establishing a EU list of food additives ([13059/11](#));
- regulation refusing to authorise certain health claims made on foods and referring to the reduction of disease risk ([13420/11](#));
- regulation refusing to authorise certain health claims made on foods, other than those referring to the reduction of disease risk and to children's development and health ([13421/11](#));
- regulation on the authorisation and refusal of authorisation of certain health claims made on foods and referring to the reduction of disease risk ([13422/11](#));
- regulation amending annex II to regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 with regard to steviol glycosides.

The Commission regulations are subject to the so-called regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt them, unless the European Parliament objects.

FISHERIES**Convention on fishery resources in the South Pacific Ocean**

The Council adopted a decision on the approval, on behalf of the EU, of the convention on the conservation and management of high seas fishery resources in the South Pacific Ocean ([8135/11](#)).

This adoption follows the consent of the European Parliament.

In 2006, the governments of Australia, Chile and New Zealand took the initiative to launch the process of international consultations on the establishment of the South Pacific regional fisheries management organisation (SPRFMO). The purpose of the consultations was to cooperate in addressing the gap in the international conservation and management of non-highly migratory fisheries and protection of biodiversity in the marine environment in high seas areas of the South Pacific Ocean, consistent with international law and best practice. Having fishing interests in the South Pacific the EU cooperated in this process from the start with other interested parties in the management and conservation of the region's resources.

The text of the convention was agreed in November 2009 and has been open for signature since 1 February 2010. The EU signed the convention text on 26 July 2010 in accordance with the Council decision on the signing, on behalf of the EU, of this convention, adopted on 24 June 2010 ([9825/10](#); [11442/10](#))

The EU has still to ratify the convention in order to show continued support for the establishment of this regional fisheries management organisation and facilitate the process of entry into force of this convention.

APPOINTMENTS**Committee of the Regions**

The Council appointed:

Mr Paweł ADAMOWICZ, Mr Olgierd GEBLEWICZ, Mr Krzysztof HETMAN, Mr Witold KROCHMAL, Mr Marek SOWA and Mr Witold STEPIEŃ (Poland) ([14617/11](#));

and

Ms Luisa Fernanda RUDI ÚBEDA, Mr Francisco ÁLVAREZ-CASCOS FERNÁNDEZ, Mr José Ramón BAUZÁ DÍAZ, Mr Juan Ignacio DIEGO PALACIOS, Ms Dolores de COSPEDAL GARCÍA, Mr José Antonio MONAGO TERRAZA, Ms María Yolanda BARCINA ANGULO and Mr Alberto FABRA PART (Spain) ([14662/11](#)),

as members of the Committee of the Regions for the remainder of the current term of office, which runs until 25 January 2015.
