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**NOTE**

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from: General Secretariat  
to: Delegations  
Subject: Euro-Mediterranean Employment and Labour High Level Working Group  
(14 February)  
- Information from the Presidency and the Commission

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Delegations will find attached an information note on the meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Employment and Labour High Level Working Group, which took place in Brussels on 14 February 2012, with a view to the meeting of the EPSCO Council on 17 February 2012 (Any other business item).

## **Euro-Mediterranean Employment and Labour High-Level Working Group**

**14 February 2012**

In line with the conclusions of the first Euro-Mediterranean Employment and Labour Ministerial Conference held in 2008 in Marrakesh in the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and the second Ministerial Conference held in 2010 in Brussels, the Euro-Mediterranean Employment and Labour High-Level Working Group (hereafter the Working Group) met to take stock of regional and national trends and policy developments, and progress made in implementing the Euro-Mediterranean Framework of Actions on Employment, Employability and Decent Work. In the morning session, particular emphasis was given to assessing the situation following last year's events in the Southern Mediterranean. In the afternoon session, the Working Group focused on the development of concrete initiatives of regional and bilateral cooperation in line with the priorities identified by Ministers in 2010.

The Working Group meeting was hosted by the European Commission and co-chaired by the UfM co-presidency France and Egypt, the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU, and the European Commission. Euro-Mediterranean partners were well represented at the meeting.

The meeting underlined the timeliness of this dialogue, and the high expectations for concrete action. The Working group agreed to start preparations for the forthcoming 3rd Euro-Mediterranean Employment and Labour Ministers Conference, building further on the previous ministerial meetings on employment and labour and taking into account also the conclusions of Euro-Mediterranean high-level meetings in related fields<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. the 9<sup>th</sup> FEMIP Conference (Tunis, March 2011); the Conference of the Ministers for Industry of the UfM (Malta, May 2011)<sup>1</sup>, and the UfM 1st Conference on Sustainable Urban Development (Strasbourg, November 2011).

Last year's events in the Southern Mediterranean countries underlined the central role of addressing employment, labour and social concerns. In view of these developments, the Working Group reaffirmed that the key policy challenges identified at the 2010 Euro-Mediterranean Employment and Labour Ministers Conference remain pertinent more than ever, namely:

- Boosting employment creation to avoid a jobless recovery;
- Enhancing decent work opportunities;
- Tackling high youth unemployment and under-employment;
- Enhancing women's participation in economic and social life;
- Skills development matching the changing needs of labour markets;
- Enhancing the capacity of public employment services;
- Prioritising poverty alleviation;
- Modernising social protection and developing a social protection floor;
- Promoting effective social dialogue.

The working group took stock of reports by the partners on the progress in addressing these challenges, taking note of an overview presentation by the International Labour Organisation and the European Training Foundation.

It also took note of the EU aid provided to Southern Mediterranean partners in areas related to employment and social policy, based on a presentation by the European Commission.

The debate recalled the urgent need for an integrated approach of reconciling employment, social, education, economic and fiscal policy objectives. In this context, the Europe 2020 Strategy and the linking of the objectives of smart, inclusive and sustainable growth was mentioned as an important source of inspiration.

The Working Group welcomed the presentations and the valuable input to the debate by the partner countries' representatives, the European Commission, and the EEAS, as well as from the International Labour Organisation, the European Training Foundation, and the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat.

The Working Group underlined the key importance of moving towards concrete action to address employment and social challenges within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The meeting reviewed the list of initiatives identified by Ministers in December 2010 and, as a first step, addressed the potential of developing projects related to the pooling of expertise, networking among public employment services, skills development and vocational training, and health and safety at work. Based on presentations from the European Commission and partner countries taking the lead in certain initiatives, the meeting explored different options for practical steps forward. It also welcomed reports on bilateral activities between Member States and partner countries and on the European Training Foundation's activities in the region.

The meeting also reaffirmed the crucial role of an effective social dialogue, and the need to promote genuine trilateral and bilateral social dialogue at all levels, i.e. company, sectoral, national, regional and inter-regional level. The Working Group is looking forward to the report from the next meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Social Dialogue Forum 2012, which will gather social partners from both shores of the Mediterranean, and which should feed into the preparations of the Ministerial Conference.

**Next steps:**

- Building on the debate at the Working Group meeting and taking account of social partners' views, the European Commission, in close cooperation with the UfM co-presidency and the EU Council Presidency, will draw up a first synthesis report of the meeting, which will then feed into the draft EU guidelines for conclusions. These draft EU guidelines will undergo EU internal procedure at the Council and then the text will be negotiated and finalised with the partner countries to become Ministerial conclusions.
- The draft ministerial conclusions will be discussed at a second meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Employment and Labour High Level Working Group, which is envisaged to take place in autumn 2012, in due advance of the Ministerial Conference.
- Within this context, the Euro-Mediterranean Employment and Labour High Level Working Group will continue to steer the preparation of concrete actions of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on employment and social policy.

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