



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 30 November 2012

17045/12

SOC 979

NOTE

from: The Presidency
to: COUNCIL
Subject: Conferences during the Cyprus Presidency

Delegations will find attached information on conferences, provided by the Presidency, in view of the EPSCO Council on 6 December 2012 (Any other business item).

Informal Meeting of Ministers for Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) - Ministers of Employment and Social Policy
12 – 13 July, Nicosia, Cyprus

The meeting confirmed the need, in parallel with fiscal consolidation, for promoting multi-dimensional policies for growth and employment, as well as for social cohesion, promotion of immediate actions to fight poverty, support sustainable employment and combat labour market segmentation, promote quality jobs, appropriate education and training for upgraded skills, active social policies and smart investment conducive to job creation, high efficiency of public spending that is aimed towards job rich growth and boosting entrepreneurship.

The main outcomes of the meeting can be summed up as follows:

- there is a need to invest in areas which have potential for growth and job creation (green economy, health care, information technology and communication) and make better use of the opportunities of these areas.
- the Council and the Commission should review the process of the European semester in order for this process to be more productive and to evolve into a process that will be the end product of genuine dialogue with both the Member States and with the civil society throughout the whole semester from the Annual Growth Survey up to the formulation of country-specific Recommendations.
- improving the mobility of workers, within the spirit of the basic principles of the EU, may help in the fight against unemployment and to meet the needs of Member States where there is demand for labour.
- social dialogue, the effective mobilization of all actors and the restoration of public confidence in the European Union are necessary elements for the efficient recovery from the crisis and the successful realisation of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, in particular those related to the promotion of sustainable employment and combating poverty and social exclusion. Regional and local authorities, social partners and NGO's are actively involved at national level in policy areas linked to Europe 2020 and can provide an early warning system on developing micro-trends long as regards employment, poverty and social exclusion before they would be seen at national or European level.

- the economic, financial and social governance should be placed on equal footing in order to make the job rich growth and the social policy agendas more visible in the process of the semester.

European Conference on: "Working together for the future of occupational safety and health in Europe"

18 October 2012, Nicosia, Cyprus

A Conference titled «Working together for the future of occupational safety and health in Europe» was organized by the Department of Labour Inspection, in cooperation with the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, within the framework of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The outcome of the presentations and the ensuing discussions was that close cooperation between employers and employees in the field of protection from work hazards is the key component to achieve high level goals in Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). What is more, good leadership is instrumental in achieving improved OSH levels in businesses and both employees and managers need to exploit all possible opportunities to excel in the area of prevention of occupational health and safety risks.

There is a need:

- To carefully assess the overall economic and social impact of OSH policy as this is of utmost importance against the current economic crisis in Europe,
- For a coherent approach regarding the occupational safety and health that is integrated into other policy areas, taking into account the current economic crisis, demographic changes, new risks and emerging sectors of work,
- To provide European workers and businesses with a fit-for-purpose and predictable regulatory framework,
- To focus more closely on the OSH needs of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises,

- To support Europe's smallest employers, especially those with less than 10 employees, in order to be aware of the hazards and risks faced by their workers and provide them with accessible, interactive tools to support their prevention activities,
- To invest more into evaluation as well as shift the focus from the traditional angle of legal control and monitoring towards a truly ex post evaluation of the social and economic impact of OSH legislation,
- To apply joined-up policy actions and on-going research in a broad range of areas to ensure that those implementing OSH prevention in Europe's workplaces are suitably informed.
- To help shape students' attitudes towards Health and Safety from a young age, ensuring this attitude is eventually carried into the workplace.

The new European Strategy on Health and Safety at Work should focus on:

- The need to move away from specifying decreasing numbers of accidents and instead focus on health (psychosocial, new and emerging risks),
- A more effective implementation of the legislation, especially on SMEs,
- The need to make workplaces more sustainable, taking into account the aging population of Europe, demographic changes as well as new and emerging risks.

Investing in children: Tackling and preventing child poverty and social exclusion, promoting children's well-being.

18-19 October 2012, Nicosia, Cyprus

The aim of the Conference was to make a contribution to the European fight against child poverty and social exclusion and to the promotion of children's well-being, highlighting that investing in children is essential for the future economic and social recovery.

It was emphasised that the implementation of a holistic policy based on a rights-based approach, including a range of interventions related to promoting children's well-being and reducing child poverty and social exclusion, should be a priority for Member States. Recommendations were made which are expected to contribute to the forthcoming Commission Recommendation for the Prevention and Tackling of Child Poverty and Social Exclusion and Promoting Children's Well-being.

The recommendations of the conference can be summed as follows:

- despite the economic crisis, the policies designed and implemented should set the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion as a top priority;
- children's participation: it is important when making decisions concerning children to have their voices heard; a child-centred culture should be created in order to better facilitate the participation of children in matters that concern them; support mechanisms and procedures should be developed in consultation with children themselves;
- information should reach children in a child-friendly manner;
- adequate resources: the relevant authorities should support adequate family income, provide affordable and accessible childcare, facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life, and enhance family-friendly job creation;
- access to quality services: there should be continuous assessment of children's needs at the local level;
- need for better monitoring of the impact of the crisis on children and identifying those most at risk; such an approach should combine efficient data collection and the use of appropriate indicators;
- it is important to have cooperation between the European Commission, governments, local authorities, social partners, NGOs and others stakeholders for achieving these goals;

Presidency Conference on Developing sustainable youth employment policies in an era of fiscal constraints, 22 – 23 October 2012, Nicosia

In cooperation with the European Commission and jointly with EMCO and the HoPES network the Cyprus Presidency organized a conference to focus on the following key elements essential for the promotion of European youth employment:

- The key challenges for creating employment opportunities for young people being in line with stability and growth objectives
- The cooperation among the various stakeholders including primarily the public sector, the social partners' organisations, the local authorities and the civil organisations.
- The involvement of the youth themselves in the procedures of developing employment policies
- The potentials arising from the evolving sectors identified in the Commission's Employment Package

Under this spectrum the following topics were discussed:

1. How we can we promote quality youth employment trajectories during the economic crisis?
 - The interconnection of Education and Employment policies it has been always of paramount importance, although the complexity of the environment and the difference of the pace of change between the two systems (education and labour market) limit the effectiveness of this effort. The answer might be a permanent mechanism facilitating the transition from school to work while traineeships and apprenticeship schemes can contribute along this direction. Measures identified as best practices are valuable tools for Member States.
2. How to foster youth employment by exploiting new job creation opportunities?

- There is a need to identify the future job sectors which are able to offer new job opportunities to young people. The three sectors namely a) green economy, b) ICTs and c) the health sector suggested in the Employment Package regarding youth employment were taken into consideration. It was also stressed that school education should focus more to the direction of satisfying employment opportunities and skill acquiring relevant to the economy needs. A special attention was given to the importance of the transition from temporary to full-time job contracts, if we wish to avoid the risk of “losing a generation”.

Entrepreneurship and self employment present good opportunities for the employment of youth.

3. How to develop activation principles within employment compensation schemes? Listening to the voice of young people.

- Active inclusion is a strategy introduced in many EU member states. Is a strategy based on three pillars: a) Inclusive Labour Market, b) Access to Quality Services, c) Adequate Income Support. EU policy should combine activation measures to permanent capital investment. Life-long learning is considered valuable in terms of maintaining long-term jobs. Moreover it is very important to give incentive to employers in recruiting young trainees and in supporting traineeship and apprenticeship schemes. Youth should be encouraged to seek opportunities, so special schemes should be developed for the unemployed.

Main recommendations of the Presidency:

- Austerity measures alone cannot give an answer to the current problems of the labour market. A balanced approach between fiscal stability and social protection is needed.
- Focus on the results instead of the procedure. Exploiting national characteristics and specificities instead of focusing on uniformity will give better flexibility and improve the effectiveness of the policy measures

- The solidarity among the European Family cannot overlook the youth at risk – funding interventions by the Union should be reinforced for those States that suffered the most from the impact of the economic crisis.
- The effort to include the youth in the labour market cannot create new risks for them for economic and social exclusion –job quality and adequate income will minimize such risk
- The creation of new jobs should be derived from sustainable public and private investments in developing sectors such as the green economy, the ICTs and the health and social care
- The effective support of youth without educational qualifications and with limited skills and increased needs, demands effective coordination of the education, employment and social policies.

**Conference on the promotion of best practices to tackle the gender pay gap
29-30 October 2012, Limassol, Cyprus**

The gender pay gap formed the subject of a tripartite conference organised by the Department of Labour Relations of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, on 29-30 October 2012 in Limassol. The conference came under the auspices of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the scope of the project “Actions to reduce the wage gap between men and women”, which is co-financed by the European Social Fund and the Republic of Cyprus.

The conference was thematically organised around four perspectives to tackling the gender pay gap dealing, respectively, with (i) occupational segregation; (ii) job classification/evaluation; (iii) enforcement and sanctions, and (iv) the relation between social dialogue and equal pay. It was attended by over 100 delegates from the various Member States and Cyprus, including Ministers and other government officials, representatives of employers’, workers’ and other organisations, academics and representatives from the institutions of the European Union, the International Labour Organisation and the European Institute for Gender Equality.

The main conclusions of the conference were the following:

- The factors giving rise to the gender pay gap (GPG) are many and multifaceted.
- Current developments in the labour market and elsewhere add new risks for an increase of the GPG.
- At the same time new measures and processes for tackling the GPG are conceived and adopted across Member States and enterprises both in the public and private domains.
- Public and private sectors must work together to eliminate the GPG.
- Examples of best practices can be found in a large number of cases and their dissemination is particularly useful for tackling the GPG.
- Occupational segregation remains one of the hardest aspects to tackle.
- The development of transparent job evaluation schemes can help to reduce the GPG.
- The experience from existing job evaluation schemes can be utilised for the development of similar schemes in other cases.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on education about gender issues for a wide range of professionals, including the judiciary.
- The lack of adequate participation of women in trade union and employers' bodies may hamper the effort to tackle the GPG.
- Social dialogue is important in the effort to eliminate the GPG but its role in this respect can and should be strengthened.

**Conference on combating on combating domestic violence against women in the EU
8-9 November 2012, Nicosia, Cyprus**

In cooperation with the European Commission, the Cyprus Presidency organized a two-day conference on Combating Domestic Violence against Women on the 8-9 November 2012, at the Filoxenia Conference Centre in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The aim of the conference was to review progress at the EU level on preventing and combating domestic violence against women and provide a forum for the exchange of good practices and lessons learned in the Member States.

Specifically the objectives of the conference were:

- To explore and discuss current challenges in effectively addressing violence against women in Europe;
- To share best practice examples for effective prevention, protection, and prosecution on a national and EU level;
- To promote and give visibility to the actions and contributions of women's organizations and NGOs in combating domestic violence against women;
- To share and discuss the results of the EIGE study on victim support services for women victims of domestic violence in Europe, as well as other recent research in the area;
- To promote the establishment of networks among relevant stakeholders across the EU and boost EU initiatives in the area.

In order to achieve the above objectives, the Conference addressed four overall themes through discussions in plenary sessions as follows:

- European Policy Context to Combat Violence against Women: Recent Developments and Challenges;
- Toward a Common Understanding of the Causes of Domestic Violence against Women: Effective Prevention Strategies;
- Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence: Existing Support and Protection Measures in the EU;
- Challenges, Good Practices, and Opportunities in Criminal and Civil Justice Responses to Domestic Violence.

Each session consisted of three or four panelists, experts in the field, that gave a 15-20 minute presentation, and a Chair that facilitated each session. Expert speakers and Chairs included representatives of European institutions, policy makers, researchers, academics and NGOs. Each session ended with a facilitated Question and Answer session.

The recommendations and results of the Conference can be summed up as follows:

- Development of a coordinated European awareness campaign, which will target different groups including men and boys;
- Development of a common European Strategy for the Prevention and Combating all Forms of Violence against Women;
- Urge the European Commission to establish 2015 as the EU Year to End Violence against Women;
- Establishment of a European 24-hour helpline for victims of gender based violence;

- Signature and ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Combating All Forms of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence by all Member States and the European Union;
- Adequate national and European funding resources for gender equality and combating violence against women programmes and services must not be undermined or reduced in the face of the economic crisis;
- Coordinated, holistic and gender-sensitive approach in service/ support provision to women victims and children;
- Provision of victim support based on the special needs of women throughout the judicial procedures is essential for addressing the high attrition rates in Europe;
- Enhance awareness and increase specialized training among all relevant stakeholders from diverse perspectives;
- Improvement of systematic data collection and more research on prevalence, prosecution and prevention;
- Holistic approach to prevention must be employed with long-term view, involving men and boys;
- Implementation of youth and school based programmes contribute as early prevention measures;
- The European Council Conclusions prepared by the Cyprus Presidency to be adopted by the EPSCO Council must reflect a strong political message for combating violence against women and domestic violence taking into account all of the above recommendations.

Equality Summit 2012 “Promoting Equality for Growth”

22-23 November 2012, Nicosia, Cyprus

The Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission have co-organised the 6th Equality Summit that took place in Nicosia on the 22-23 November 2012, under the topic "Promoting Equality for Growth".

The Summit has brought together this year 250 high-level delegates (governments, NGOs, social partners, media, academics, businesses independent experts) from European Union Member States and acceding countries.

The main outcomes of the Summit can be summed up as follows:

- The latest Eurobarometer on discrimination shows that in the employment area, older citizens are seen as the most discriminated group in 2012.
- Stereotypes and wrong perceptions against older people lead to discrimination in both accessing and progressing in the labour market.
- Boosting the market for goods and services that are accessible for persons with disabilities and elderly persons can contribute to growth and improve the quality of life of millions.
- Gender aspects should be emphasized, as issues around elderly women and men as well as disabled women and men are different through their lives in the labour market, education, care and responsibilities. Any employment measure in order to be effective should take into account these differences.
- Creating employment and promoting equality in the labour market at micro level remain the best way to avoid poverty and social exclusion.
- Austerity measures taken at macro level may have a negative effect on the effectiveness of such measures and on achieving the headline targets of Europe 2020.

- Inclusive education benefits all, not only students with disabilities and diverse backgrounds who face special difficulties.
- Equality legislation is and should be a catalyst for growth because it seeks to protect the most vulnerable and can be the driver for both economic and social inclusion. Growth policies without a mainstreaming equality policy on all grounds of discrimination risk failure on the social cohesion dimension with a greater risk of poverty, inequality and conflict.
- Diversity management helps private and public organisations gaining clear benefits; these are innovation, creativity and growth.

The conclusions/recommendations of the conference can be summed as follows:

- The current economic crisis is putting pressure on the finances of all members of the European Union, which often results in austerity measures and cuts in social policies, including Equality.
- However, the Equality Summit has shown that equality policies can support growth, and growth cannot be achieved in a society where discrimination and exclusion exist.
- In times of crisis, human rights and non-discrimination principles should be taken into account when designing and implementing growth policies. Investing in Equality policies will contribute to create a more inclusive participatory and prosperous society by ensuring that persons with disabilities, older people, ethnic and religious minorities, women, sexual minorities and all groups at risk of discrimination can play a positive role for growth and are given the opportunity to show their talents.
- The responsibility lies on Member States, European Institutions, Equality bodies, NGOs, businesses, trade unions and employers. All have a role to play in combatting discrimination and reflecting diversity in the work force, but also in all spheres of life, making sure that growth and equality go hand in hand, as one cannot be achieved without the other.

2012 Convention of the Platform against poverty and social exclusion

5 - 7 December 2012, Brussels

The European Commission with the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU are organising the Second Convention of the Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The 2012 Convention focuses on social investment for growth and cohesion and sets out how this can contribute to inclusive growth and reaching the Europe 2020 poverty reduction target. The first day of the Convention consists of plenary sessions to take stock of actions at national and European level. The second day is dedicated to workshops on key themes relevant for the social investment package to be presented by the European Commission. We also envisage an interactive conference with a wider audience via video and web streaming. The morning of 7 December will be devoted to a ministerial session where Ministers will be asked to comment on the main findings from the workshops.

The Convention will bring together governmental delegations of the different EU Members States and candidate countries, delegates of the European institutions, representatives of the regional and local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), people experiencing poverty, academics as well as various actors active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

From Visions to Actions: Closing Conference of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012

10 December 2012, Nicosia, Cyprus

As Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second semester of 2012, Cyprus will celebrate the achievements of the Year for active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations with a closing conference in Nicosia. The Conference will be based on the main principles of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations.

The participants will include government and high level officials from EU member States, organisations from the EU Coalition for the European Year, European social partners and officials from the EU institutions.

The year 2012 has been designated as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations and intended to raise awareness of the contribution that older people make to society. It also aimed to facilitate the empowerment of older people so that they can remain in charge of their own lives as long and as much as possible. Finally, it aimed to encourage social dialogue on issues of policy and research on active ageing and solidarity between generations.

Against the demographic challenges, which each member state and the EU are facing and having in mind the momentum created by the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, the Conference aspires to:

- Celebrate the achievements and main highlights of the Year;
- Provide a forum for discussion on the ways forward ahead this momentum gained towards concrete actions based on main strands for active ageing and solidarity between generations;
- Enhance the commitment from key EU and national actors for political measures that are necessary in order to address the issues older people and all generations face;
- Identify and exchange good practices related to current policy reforms;