



018675/EU XXV.GP
Eingelangt am 26/03/14

**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



7388/14

(OR. en)

PRESSE 126
PR CO 14

PRESS RELEASE

3301st Council meeting

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

Brussels, 10 March 2014

President

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Minister for Employment, Social Protection and Welfare of
Greece

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Main results of the Council

*The Council adopted a recommendation on a **quality framework for traineeships** which addresses two shortcomings: insufficient learning content and inadequate working conditions. The recommendation provides guidelines and tools to member states, trainees, traineeship providers, and all other stakeholders in order to ensure that traineeships become an efficient means of easing transitions from training or inactivity to employment. The President of the Council, Ioannis VROUTSIS, Minister for Employment, Social Protection and Welfare of Greece, noted that "the recommendation is an important tool for improving the conditions of transition from school or unemployment and inactivity into working life. This recommendation, together with other initiatives - such as the youth employment initiative and the youth guarantee - will contribute to wider efforts for the social and professional integration of young people."*

*It held a policy debate on the employment and social policy aspects of the 2014 **European Semester** exercise, with a view to contributing to the broader discussions that the European Council will have at its meeting on 20 and 21 March.*

*The Council had a first exchange of views on the mid-term review of the **Europe 2020 strategy** after the Commission's presentation of its communication on "taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth".*

*The Council agreed in principle on a decision on the **tripartite social summit** for growth and employment.*

*The Council also took note of the information provided by the Presidency on current legislative work, especially the provisional agreement reached with the European Parliament on the **posting of workers directive**.*

The Council adopted without discussion :

- the **Fund for European aid to the most deprived (FEAD)**. With financial resources of almost EUR 3.5 billion for seven years (2014-2020), its aim is to provide food distribution, basic material assistance and aid social inclusion measures for the most deprived citizens of the European Union in all member states; and*
- a regulation defining the terms and conditions for car manufacturers for reaching the 2020 target for **CO₂ emissions** (95g CO₂/km) from **new passenger cars**".*

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¹ • 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.

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ITEMS DEBATED

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

Quality framework for traineeships (QFT)

The Council adopted a recommendation on a quality framework for traineeships ([7029/1/14 REV 1](#)).

The QFT is a further tool aimed at fostering employability, especially for young people, on the basis of quality criteria and minimum standards.

It addresses two shortcomings: insufficient learning content and inadequate working conditions (long working hours, unsatisfactory coverage for health and safety or occupational risks, little or no remuneration/compensation, unclear legal situation, extended duration, etc.).

The recommendation provides guidelines and tools to the member states, trainees, traineeship providers and all other stakeholders in order to ensure that traineeships become an efficient means of easing transitions from training or inactivity to employment.

The financial and economic crisis has had serious consequences for the job prospects of young Europeans. It is therefore important to push forward measures that will improve their future prospects for entering the labour market. A good-quality traineeship can have a decisive and positive impact on an individual's employability and transition into regular employment.

On the whole, traineeships have proven their usefulness as a way of entering or re-entering employment. Traineeships are currently used differently across the member states. Often they are part of studies and are needed to enter a profession. In several countries, trainees have a regular employment contract. However, where traineeships are not regulated, problems may arise, particularly because a traineeship is often a young person's first contact with the world of work.

European Semester 2014

The Council held a policy debate on the employment and social policy aspects of the 2014 European Semester exercise, with a view to contributing to the broader discussions that the European Council will have at its meeting on 20 and 21 March ([6585/1/14 REV 1](#)).

In the debate, the following consensual elements were highlighted:

- The economic downturn has put a strain on our common strategy and on Europe's social tissue. The social impact of the crisis, with massive unemployment and high levels of poverty, undermines the foundations of social cohesion and affects public confidence in the European project.
- However, the crisis has boosted member states' willingness to continue reforms. It has also reinforced the need for policy coherence aimed at economic recovery, rising employment and increased social cohesion.
- Strengthening the social dimension of the EMU is a constant concern of the EPSCO Council. In this context, work should be continued to make full use of the scoreboard of key employment and social indicators.

The Commission welcomed the adoption of the joint employment report, in particular the scoreboard of key employment and social indicators, and its analysis which is part of the European Semester for the first time this year. It underlined the continued severity of the crisis in Europe and pointed to the vast divergence amongst member states, especially in the youth employment rates, income inequalities and at-risk-of-poverty rates.

As for the 2014 **annual growth survey**, the EPSCO Council adopted conclusions ([6610/1/14 REV 1](#)), as well as the **joint employment report** ([7476/14](#)).

The joint employment report, as well the alert mechanism report, reflect that the employment and social situation has deteriorated in some member states in recent years, such that many member states register high or very high unemployment rates. This is leading to high costs, in both human and economic terms. The Commission has added a number of social indicators to the auxiliary indicators for the economic reading of the scoreboard of the macroeconomic imbalance procedure, in order to better consider the social impact of the imbalances and adjustments.

The Council took note of the **Social Protection Committee report** on the social situation in the EU ([6663/14](#)) and adopted relevant conclusions ([7655/14](#)).

It reached a general approach on the decision on **employment guidelines** ([6612/14](#)).

Europe 2020 Strategy: Stocktaking

The Council had an exchange of views concerning progress on the Europe 2020 strategy, guided by a Presidency note ([6773/14](#)) and after hearing the relevant Commission communication of 5 March on "Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" ([6713/14](#)).

The Presidency summarised the key messages of the political dialogue as follows: Reaching the Europe 2020 strategy's headline targets is challenging because of the current economic crisis; this concerns in particular the employment and poverty reduction targets. However, the ministerial dialogue revealed through a genuine exchange of views and experiences the specific added value of the Europe 2020 strategy and its political targets. The quantitative objectives of the joint strategy continue to have their value as vectors of political mobilisation both at the EU and member state levels. Further efforts are needed to improve the governance of the strategy and to ensure coordination among financial, economic and social priorities.

The Commission underlined the role of the strategy as a key element for socio-economic convergence in the EU and a long-term plan to exit from the economic crisis. It stressed progress made recently to strengthen European coordination of policies in both employment and social areas and the upcoming challenge of anchoring Europe 2020 in the economic governance process.

Nevertheless, the Commission expressed concern about the lack of progress made towards some of the targets due to the exceptional economic crisis. In particular the poverty-reduction target, which envisages at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to 2008, is not being achieved.

The communication launches the mid-term review on Europe 2020 which will soon be reaching its halfway point.

In the context of this review process, EPSCO ministers will have to ensure that the European Semester process better integrates the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, which represents a key tool for socio-economic convergence. Annual country-specific recommendations and policy advice touch upon a broad range of policy areas.

Tripartite social summit for growth and employment

The Council reached an agreement in principle on a decision on the tripartite social summit for growth and employment ([5820/14](#)).

This proposal aims to adapt the Council decision of 2003 setting up the tripartite social summit (TSS) to the institutional changes brought in by the treaty of Lisbon, reflecting the recent practical arrangements of the TSS.

The social summit has played a major role in facilitating exchanges of views on employment and social aspects with the European social partners at the highest level in the margins of the European Council.

Social dialogue remains essential within the framework of economic governance in the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, in particular in the annual European Semester cycle. This is particularly relevant when it comes to discussions on competitiveness, well-functioning labour markets, wage policies and social policy issues.

Any other business

– *Current legislative dossiers*

The presidency briefed the Council on the following legislative issues, which have been under the ordinary legislative procedure with the European Parliament:

- Posting of workers;
- Free movement of workers;
- Supplementary pension rights;
- Public employment services.

– *Implementation reports on:*

- The gender recast directive 2006/54;
- The two anti-discrimination directives 2000/43 and 2000/78.

The Council took note of the information provided by the Commission.

– *Tripartite social summit*

The presidency informed the Council of the state of preparations for the tripartite social summit to be held on 20 March 2014.

– *EMCO and SPC work programmes 2014*

The Chairs of the above committees briefed the Council on the committees' work programmes for 2014.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

SOCIAL POLICY

Fund for European aid to the most deprived (FEAD)

The Council adopted a regulation on the Fund for the most deprived ([PE-CONS 132/13](#)).

The Fund is aimed at helping the most deprived in all member states. The member states can choose whether to distribute food and/or other material assistance to the most deprived persons, or to address them by other means such as social inclusion activities. FEAD's financial resources of almost EUR 3.5 billion will be distributed to member states over seven years (2014-2020).

It is expected that the most important means of assistance to the most deprived will indeed be food assistance. As a new element, the member states may also use some of the funding to facilitate food donations from private sources e.g. from supermarkets.

EMPLOYMENT

Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Spain

The Council adopted a decision mobilising 840000 € under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) in order to provide support for 300 workers made redundant in the Spanish textiles industry. The redundancies were caused by major structural changes in world trade patterns due to globalisation which have led to a substantial increase of imports into the European Union and to a loss of the EU market share in world markets.

The EGF helps workers find new jobs and develop new skills when they have lost their jobs as a result of changing global trade patterns, e.g. when a large company shuts down or a factory is moved outside the EU. Assistance from the EGF consists of financing for measures such as job-search assistance, careers advice, tailor-made training and re-training, mentoring and promoting entrepreneurship. It also provides one-off, time-limited individual support, such as job-search allowances, mobility allowances for participating in lifelong learning and training activities.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Restrictive measures - Central African Republic

The Council amended the EU restrictive measures against the Central African Republic so as to implement the changes adopted at UN level, that is in UN Security Council resolution 2134 (2014).

EU Special Representative for the Sahel

The Council extended the mandate of the EU Special Representative for the Sahel, Michel Dominique Reveyrand-De Menthon, until 28 February 2015. At the same time, the Council allocated a budget of €1.35 million for the duration of the extended mandate. The EU Special Representative is tasked with contributing actively to regional and international efforts to achieve lasting peace, security and development in the Sahel, namely in Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

Support to independent non-proliferation think tanks

The Council extended for three more years the EU's support for the European network of independent non-proliferation think tanks, established in 2010. €3.6 million have been allocated for the project that is implemented by the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Agreement with Tanzania on the transfer of suspected pirates and seized property

The Council approved, on behalf of the EU, an agreement between the EU and the United Republic of Tanzania on the conditions of transfer of suspected pirates and associated seized property from the EU-led counter-piracy operation Atalanta to the United Republic of Tanzania. At the same time, it authorised the signature of the agreement on behalf of the EU.

EU military operation in the Central African Republic

The Council approved an agreement in the form of an exchange of letters between the EU and the Central African Republic on the status of the EU military operation in the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA).

ENVIRONMENT

2020 reduction of CO₂ emissions from new passenger cars

The Council adopted a regulation on the 2020 reduction of CO₂ emissions from new passenger cars ([PE-CONS 120/13](#), [6642/14 ADD 1 REV 1](#)).

The new regulation defines the terms and conditions for car manufacturers for reaching the 2020 target for CO₂ emissions (95g CO₂/km) from new passenger cars. A limited one-year phase-in period requires 95 % of new car sales to comply with the target in 2020 and 100 % by the end of 2020 onwards. The regulation also provides for the use of so-called "super-credits " from 2020 to 2022: this means incentives for car manufacturers to develop new technologies and manufacture cars with low emission levels (less than 50g CO₂/km), as these cars would count more towards meeting the fleet average than normal cars. The limit for the use of super-credits is set at 7.5g of CO₂/km for the three years 2020-2022.

For more details see press release [7453/14](#).

Biocides

The Council adopted a regulation amending biocides regulation 528/2012/EU ([PE-CONS 140/13](#)).

Biocides are chemicals used to suppress organisms that are harmful to human or animal health or that cause damage to natural or manufactured materials. Examples of biocidal products are insect repellents, disinfectants and industrial chemicals such as anti-fouling paints for ships and material preservatives.

The objective of the existing regulation is to improve the functioning of the internal market in biocidal products whilst ensuring a high level of environmental and human health protection. The new regulation aims at remedying problems related to provisions of the above-mentioned biocides regulation which has been in force since 1 September 2013. In particular, it removes unintended market barriers for suppliers of new articles treated with biocidal products and for a large number of suppliers of biocidal active substances.

Today's final adoption of the legislation by the Council follows an agreement reached at first reading with the European Parliament. The European Parliament voted at its plenary session of 25 February 2014.

AGRICULTURE

Council conclusions on a Court of auditors report - EU budget on rural development

The Council adopted conclusions on the special report No 12/2013 from the European Court of auditors entitled "Can the Commission and Member States show that the EU budget allocated to the rural development policy is well spent?" ([6987/14](#)).

The Court view is that an appropriate evaluation of the rural development policy is key to accountability. However the Council considers that it is only once the rural development programmes have been fully implemented, member states have carried out *ex post* evaluations (in 2015) and a synthesis of those *ex post* evaluations has been produced (in 2016) that it will be possible to fully assess whether the EU budget allocated to the rural development policy in the programming period 2007-2013 was well spent

The Council recalls that, for the 2014-2020 period, the Commission and the member states are elaborating a common monitoring and evaluation framework for the common agricultural policy (CAP) as a whole, including the monitoring and evaluation system for the rural development programmes. Regulation 1305/2013 sets targets at EU level (EU 2020) and provides that rural development programmes need to contain an *ex ante* evaluation, an analysis of the situation in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats ("SWOT"), and an identification of the needs that have to be addressed in the geographical area covered by the programme, as well as, for each focus area, quantified targets consistent with the targets at EU level (EU 2020).

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Convention on Nuclear Safety - 6th review meeting

The Council adopted a decision issuing directives to the Commission for the negotiation of amendments to the Convention on Nuclear Safety in the framework of the 6th Review Meeting of the Contracting Parties to that Convention ([6879/14](#)).

The 6th Review Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Nuclear Safety will take place from 24 March to 4 April 2014 in Vienna. The Convention has not been amended since its entry into force in 1996 and would need to be updated so as to bring it in line with the latest safety standards and to strengthen its effectiveness.

For more information see Convention [website](#).