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Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

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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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ITEMS DEBATED

Social governance

The Council held a policy debate on social governance in an inclusive Europe based on a Presidency note ([12082/15](#)) and on the five Presidents' report.

Ministers expressed their common will to reinforce and deepen the social dimension of the EU. They underlined the importance of aiming towards upward social convergence. The enhanced social dimension would create an inclusive space with a high degree of social and employment performance for its citizens, including the necessary modernisation and reform of social protection systems and labour market institutions.

Ministers stressed that a deepened social dimension of the EMU should be built upon the existing instruments within the European Semester process, including indicators such as the social and employment scoreboard. Efforts made by the member states in line with their national competencies need to be accompanied by the sharing of best practices and peer reviews. The use of benchmarks, as well as the possible definition of standards and indicators, was discussed.

Ministers broadly welcomed the revised and streamlined European Semester. They highlighted the importance of the role of the macroeconomic imbalances procedure and the need for it not to be diluted and to remain centred on macroeconomic aspects and structural reforms. The role of EPSCO as regards all employment and social related matters was emphasised.

The Council endorsed the **key messages** of the Social Protection Committee (SPC) report on the social policy reforms for growth and cohesion: contribution to the annual growth survey 2016 ([12079/15](#) + *ADD 1*). This report reviews the areas of social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care.

Integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market

The Council held a policy debate on the recommendation concerning the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market which the Commission had presented to it.

Ministers had the opportunity to discuss the major challenges, and to exchange national experience in combating long-term unemployment.

Overall ministers concurred that long-term unemployment is a serious problem concerning a category of people requiring particular attention across the EU, and thus a political priority to avoid long-term social problems. They broadly welcomed the Commission's proposal as a common framework to guide national efforts and called for a flexible approach on implementation.

The proposal for a recommendation, adopted by the Commission on 17 September 2015, is targeted towards a group that was hit especially hard by the economic crisis: long-term jobseekers ([12081/15 + ADD 1](#)).

Currently, 5% of the active population and half of the total number of unemployed are in long-term unemployment. However, long-term unemployment affects member states to different degrees depending on the impact of the crisis, the macroeconomic situation, the economic structure and the functioning of national labour markets.

It affects a wide range of people, generally characterised by low employability and often coping with multiple disadvantages. Workers with low skills or qualifications as well as third-country nationals are twice as likely to experience long-term unemployment.

Adequate incomes for pensioners

The Council endorsed the key messages of the report 'Adequate retirement incomes in the context of ageing societies' ([12085/15](#)) and adopted conclusions ([12352/15](#)).

The report highlights the issue of adequacy of income related to old age. Together with the sustainability perspective already examined by Ecofin, it gives a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced.

Its key messages can be summarised as follows:

- *Current pensioners' living standards have largely been maintained over the crisis, yet poverty problems persist in some countries and pension outcomes are generally marked by big gender differences.*
- *Pension reforms with a strong focus on sustainability have been stepped up over recent years.*
- *Overall, spending on public pensions is no longer expected to be higher in 2060 than presently.*
- *Strong policies for addressing future adequacy risks are therefore essential.*
- *EU cooperation to ensure adequate incomes in old age remains important.*

The report on ageing states that, despite the very sharp increase in people aged 65 years or more, the average expenditure on pensions for the EU of 28 should not be higher in 2060 than it was in 2013.

However, risks in terms of sustainability of public finances may result not only from the absence of reforms to reduce future expenditure but also from the converse situation, where reforms mean that an increasing number of older people do not receive an adequate income, i.e. an income which enables them to lead a decent life.

It is therefore of the utmost importance to ensure that pension adequacy is monitored both from the point of view of constraints on public finances and from that of social objectives.

Employment policies of the member states

The Council adopted a decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the member states ([11360/15](#)).

The set of integrated guidelines for 2015 reflect the new approach to economic policy-making, built on investment, structural reform and fiscal responsibility.

The four employment guidelines are as follows:

- Boosting demand for labour
- Enhancing labour supply, skills and competences
- Enhancing the functioning of labour markets
- Fostering social inclusion, combating poverty and promoting equal opportunities.

Agenda for health and safety at work

The Council adopted conclusions on the new agenda for health and safety at work to foster better working conditions ([11606/15](#)).

These conclusions are prospective in nature, highlighting the resultant changes e.g. in terms of technology and demographic change. All such changes must also be reflected in EU legislation on health and safety at work in order to ensure decent working conditions for workers.

Relaunching the social dialogue

The Council took note of the state of play of the work on relaunching the social dialogue at European level, on the basis of information provided by the Commission.

The Council was also informed about the tripartite social summit to be held in the margins of the European Council, on the morning of 15 October. The theme this year will be 'Fostering convergence, creating jobs and growth: strengthening the role of the social partners'.

Any other business

- The Presidency briefed the Council on the informal meeting of the labour, employment and social affairs ministers of the member states of the euro area held before the formal meeting of the EPSCO Council.
- The Commission informed the Council of facts, figures and issues concerning labour mobility.
- The Presidency briefed ministers on the conference 'Working conditions for tomorrow' held in Luxembourg on 10 and 11 September 2015.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

EMPLOYMENT

Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund - Belgium, Germany and Italy

The Council adopted the three following decisions mobilising €14.6 million under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF), providing support for workers made redundant in Belgium, Germany and Italy:

- €6.96 million are being paid out of the EGF following the dismissal of 2 881 workers in two German enterprises operating in the motor vehicle, trailer and semi-trailer manufacturing sector; the redundancies are the result of the continued global financial and economic crisis
- an amount of €6.27 million is being mobilised after the dismissal of 5 111 workers of 12 Belgian enterprises operating in the motor vehicle, trailer and semi-trailer manufacturing sector; the redundancies are the result of continued major structural changes in world trade patterns due to globalisation
- €1.41 million are being deployed following 1 249 redundancies in an Italian enterprise operating in the air transport sector, following important structural changes in world trade patterns caused by globalisation

The EGF helps workers to 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, or as a result of the global financial and economic crisis. The support offered by the EGF consists in co-financing 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 and allowances for participating in lifelong learning and training activities.

SOCIAL POLICY

Community statistics on income and living conditions

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of Commission regulation (EU) No .../. of XXX amending regulation (EC) No 1983/2003 implementing regulation (EC) No 1177/2003 concerning Community statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) as regards the list of target primary variables ([10948/1/15 REV 1](#)).

HEALTH

Medical devices and in vitro diagnostic medical devices

The Council endorsed its negotiating position on two draft regulations aimed at ensuring that medical devices and in vitro diagnostic medical devices are safe and of high quality. It herewith confirmed an agreement of the Council's Permanent Representatives Committee of 23 September 2015. The Council's decision allows the Luxembourg presidency to start talks with the European Parliament with a view to reaching an agreement as soon as possible.

[Press release of 23 September 2015](#)

FOREIGN POLICY

Restrictive measures directed against certain persons, entities and bodies in view of the situation in Ukraine

The Council extended the visa ban and the asset freeze applying to one person subject to restrictive measures in view of the situation in Ukraine for five months, until 6 March 2015. The Council also updated the statement of reasons for listing relating to this person. Details are published in the Official Journal of 6 October 2015.

Restrictive measures in view of the situation in Liberia

The Council amended the restrictive measures in view of the situation in Liberia to implement UN Security Council resolution 2237 (2015) of 2 September 2015. The travel and financial measures applying to all non-governmental entities and individuals operating in Liberia are terminated while the arms embargo is extended until 2 June 2016.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

EUCAP Sahel Niger: Council nearly doubles mission's annual budget

The Council increased the budget of the EU civilian mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger) from €9.8 million to €18.4 million for the period 16 July 2015-15 July 2016.

Press release [EUCAP Sahel Niger: Council nearly doubles mission's annual budget](#)

ENLARGEMENT

Stabilisation and Association Council with Bosnia and Herzegovina - Rules of procedure

The Council adopted the EU position to be taken within the Stabilisation and Association Council established between the European Union and Bosnia and Herzegovina on the rules of procedure of this Stabilisation and Association Council.

FISHERIES

Partnership agreement between EU and Cape Verde - Conclusion of the protocol

The Council adopted a decision on the conclusion of the protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for by the fisheries partnership agreement (FPA) between the EU and the Republic of Cape Verde ([15848/14](#)).

The FPA in the fisheries sector between the EU and Cape Verde was concluded in 2006 and is a tuna fishery agreement. Following the negotiations, a new protocol to the FPA was signed by the Council and Cape Verde on 23 December 2014. In order to allow EU vessels to carry out fishing activities, the new protocol had applied on a provisional basis since that date, pending the completion of the procedures for its formal conclusion. The new protocol is established for a period of four years. The European Parliament gave its consent on the conclusion of this protocol on 9 September 2015.

Partnership agreement between EU and Madagascar - Conclusion of the protocol

The Council adopted a decision on the conclusion of the protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for by the FPA between the EU and the Republic of Madagascar ([15225/14](#)).

The FPA in the fisheries sector between the EU and Madagascar was concluded in 2007 and is a tuna fishery agreement. Following the negotiations, a new protocol to the FPA was signed by the Council and Madagascar on 23 December 2014. In order to allow EU vessels to carry out fishing activities, the new protocol had applied on a provisional basis since 1 January 2015, pending the completion of the procedures for its formal conclusion. The new protocol is established for a period of four years. The European Parliament gave its consent on the conclusion of this protocol on 9 September 2015.

Partnership agreement between EU and Guinea Bissau - Conclusion of the protocol

The Council adopted a decision on the conclusion of the protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for by the FPA between the EU and the Republic of Guinea Bissau ([11667/12](#)).

The FPA in the fisheries sector between the EU and Guinea Bissau was concluded in 2007 and is a multi-species agreement. Following the negotiations, a new protocol to the FPA was signed by the Council and Guinea Bissau on 24 November 2014. In order to allow EU vessels to carry out fishing activities, the new protocol had applied on a provisional basis since that date, pending the completion of the procedures for its formal conclusion. The new protocol is established for a period of three years. The European Parliament gave its consent on the conclusion of this protocol on 9 September 2015.

TRANSPARENCY

Public access to documents

On 5 October 2015, the Council approved:

- the replies to confirmatory applications No 17/c/01/15 ([11232/15](#)), No 19/c/02/15 ([11686/15](#)) and No 20/c/03/15 ([11689/15](#)).