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Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

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14932/19

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CONTENTS¹**ITEMS DEBATED**

HEALTH.....	4
Economy of Wellbeing – next steps in investing in health as its key component - public debate	4
European pharmaceutical policy – strengthened cooperation and coordination with the aim of improving access to medicines - public debate.....	5
Any other business (09/12/2019).....	6
EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY	7
The future gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming in the EU - public debate	7
Gender-equal economies in the EU: the way forward, taking stock of 25 years of implementation of the Beijing platform for action - Council conclusions	8
A new EU strategic framework on health and safety at work: enhancing the implementation of occupational safety and health in the EU - Council conclusions.....	8
Future of the EU social acquis relating to employment and industrial relations - public debate	9
Inclusive labour markets: improving employment of people in a vulnerable position in the labour market - Council conclusions	10
Review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee - messages from the Employment Committee (EMCO)	10
Any other business (10/12/2019).....	11

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.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED*INTERNAL MARKET AND INDUSTRY*

- Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures as regards information relating to emergency health response* 12
- Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1126/2008 adopting certain international accounting standards in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1606/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards International Accounting Standard 39 and International Financial Reporting Standards 7 and 9 12

TRANSPARENCY

- Public access to documents 13

ENERGY

- EU position in the Energy Community 13

FISHERIES

- Opening of negotiations for a Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement and Protocol with Denmark and Greenland..... 13

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

- Corruption - special UNGASS session..... 14

ITEMS DEBATED**HEALTH****Economy of Wellbeing – next steps in investing in health as its key component - public debate**

On the basis of a presidency discussion paper (14303/19), ministers held a discussion entitled ‘Economy of Wellbeing – next steps in investing in health as its key component’. They shared their views on the following questions:

- When developing concrete measures to advance the Economy of Wellbeing approach, what actions are needed to ensure a strong health-policy input while fostering cross-sectoral dialogue at EU level?
 - More specifically, what critical elements should an EU mental health strategy include to best support the member states’ efforts?
 - In the context of demographic change, what kind of actions should be put in place to promote active and healthy ageing, and to encourage prevention and anticipation-based ageing policies?
- Looking at the years to come, how could the member states and the Commission work towards the creation of a European Health Data Space through current and new initiatives to enable better use of health data in care, public health and research to benefit the wellbeing of all?

The debate followed on from the exchange of views on 24 October when the EPSCO Council also adopted conclusions on the economy of wellbeing¹. Those conclusions address several topics, some of which are related to health policy.

The focus of the discussion was on mental health, healthy ageing and the digital transformation of health and social services. Ministers agreed that national policies in these areas had to be supported by measures and policies at EU level, including through various EU programmes and data sharing. The debate highlighted the importance of raising mental health awareness, ensuring prevention and early intervention and improving mental health literacy. Participants agreed on the need to develop and implement an EU mental health strategy as well as a European health data space. The debate also highlighted the need to make health care systems more adapted to the digital age and to invest in technology, because of rapid digitalisation. The crucial role of cross-sectoral approaches and of cooperation at all levels was also stressed.

¹ [Council conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing.](#)

European pharmaceutical policy – strengthened cooperation and coordination with the aim of improving access to medicines - public debate

Ministers held a debate on how to strengthen cooperation and coordination with the aim of improving access to medicines throughout the EU. The exchange of views was steered by a presidency discussion note ([14307/19](#)) setting out the following questions:

- What concrete measures could Member States and the Commission take to ensure access to both old and new medicines for national healthcare systems and patients, and to avoid problems caused by shortages?
- One of the reasons for shortages and supply disruptions is that the medicines' supply chain has become longer, more complex and fragmented as companies have located a large part of production of medicines outside the EU. In order to ensure a reliable supply, is there a need to call for EU legislative measures to require back-up manufacturing capacity, earlier notification of interruptions and stronger measures to ensure continuity of supply? In your view, would this help reduce the risk of supply disruptions and shortages?
- Strengthened cooperation between Member States and related coordination of activities, such as monitoring, could contribute to mitigating the problems related to shortages of medicines and the sustainability of budgets. How could such cooperation be further strengthened?

The aim of the debate was to discuss solutions to the recurrent problem of securing access to medicinal products in the EU. Many delegations supported the idea of developing and implementing an EU work agenda on pharmaceutical policy to avoid shortages of medicines across the Union. The debate highlighted several possible measures to ensure easier access to medicinal products:

- encouraging the relocation of medicines production back to the EU
- transferring medicines from one member state to another with some exemptions concerning the requirements on the information accompanying the products concerned
- exchanging information on stocks
- using early warning mechanisms
- intensifying market surveillance
- strengthening cooperation at EU level

Any other business (09/12/2019)

- The presidency informed ministers about the current work on the regulation on health technology assessment and amending Directive 2011/24/EU ([14619/19](#)).
- The Commission provided information about the state of health in the EU ([14714/19](#)).
- The Commission also provided information on the state of play of the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2017/745 on medical devices and of Regulation (EU) 2017/746 on in vitro diagnostic medical devices.
- Ministers were briefed on the outcomes of conferences organised by the Finnish presidency ([14738/19](#)).
- The incoming Croatian presidency presented its work programme in the area of health.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

The future gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming in the EU - public debate

Gender equality is among the top priorities of the Finnish presidency. In order to continue the efforts to promote high-level policy dialogue on gender equality issues, the presidency proposed holding a ministerial debate, based on a discussion paper ([14251/19](#)) and structured around the following questions:

- What should be the thematic priorities of EU gender equality policies in the next five years?
- Which actions and measures should the EU take to combat gender inequalities and strengthen gender equality policies in the next five years?
- How can we ensure that gender equality is more strongly integrated into key future EU strategies and policy processes, including economic and budgetary policies? What are the structures, means and forms of cooperation for doing this, including in the Council?

At the beginning of the debate, the director of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) presented the findings in the latest EIGE report on the main trends, current progress and major challenges in the field of gender equality in the EU¹.

Ministers discussed the priorities in the area of gender equality in the next five years and stressed the need for a new EU gender equality strategy. The debate highlighted the ambition of member states to increase the participation of women in decision-making processes, to achieve better work-life balance, to allow for more women on companies boards, to raise general awareness about gender equality and to strengthen women's economic independence. Ministers agreed that further steps needed to be taken to combat gender-based violence, cyber violence against women, and gender stereotypes. The debate also highlighted the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) and the crucial role AI will play in achieving gender equality.

¹ [EIGE Report.](#)

Gender-equal economies in the EU: the way forward, taking stock of 25 years of implementation of the Beijing platform for action - Council conclusions

Ministers adopted conclusions on gender-equal economies in the EU ([14254/19](#)). The adoption of these conclusions is in line with the established practice of reviewing the implementation of the UN agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment by the EU and its member states (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995).

The conclusions had been prepared in the light of a report by the EIGE, whose main findings were presented at the beginning of the debate preceding the adoption of the conclusions (see above). The conclusions call on member states and the Commission to further promote gender equality, both as a political priority and through concrete measures.

A new EU strategic framework on health and safety at work: enhancing the implementation of occupational safety and health in the EU - Council conclusions

Ministers adopted conclusions ([14630/19](#)) inviting the Commission to present a new EU strategic framework on health and safety at work for the period 2021-2027.

The conclusions call on the Commission, member states and social partners to intensify their efforts in the context of the changing world of work and to tackle the related psychological risks as well as material risks such as work-related accidents and diseases, including dangerous substances in the work place. Another area for action, identified in the conclusions, is the inclusion of disabled and older workers.

Future of the EU social acquis relating to employment and industrial relations - public debate

On the basis of a presidency steering note (14340/19), ministers held a public debate on the future of EU social legislation in the context of rapid changes in the labour markets. The discussion was structured around the following questions:

- In addition to the initiatives planned by the new Commission, how should the social acquis relating to employment and industrial relations be developed in the future?
- What are the main challenges in the implementation of the social acquis and how could its enforcement be improved?

The aim of the discussion was to explore possible avenues for further developing EU legislation in the area of social affairs, to identify difficulties in its implementation, to share ideas on how to fill the remaining legislative gaps, and to better enforce existing laws. The debate was prompted by the transformation of labour markets caused by digitalisation, climate change, globalisation and migration, among other factors.

The discussion highlighted the need to further harmonise the implementation of the EU's social legislation. Member states showed openness to the idea of further legislative initiatives, but also stressed the importance of better implementation of the existing legislative acts. The debate also highlighted that social rights should be enjoyed equally by everyone on the labour market, in particular the self-employed and platform workers. Strengthening the social dialogue and collective bargaining and ensuring that national authorities carried out better checks on the implementation of social legislation were also identified as serious challenges. The introduction of more flexible working hours, more possibilities for part-time work, and strengthening the right to disconnect were mentioned as possible concrete measures to adapt social legislation to new realities. Ministers also exchanged views on the European Commission's proposal for a future legal instrument ensuring a minimum wage in the EU.

Inclusive labour markets: improving employment of people in a vulnerable position in the labour market - Council conclusions

Ministers also adopted conclusions on inclusive labour markets ([14646/19](#)). The main aim of these conclusions is to highlight the economic value of providing better employment opportunities to people in a vulnerable position in the labour market. Among people in a vulnerable position, the conclusions identify persons with disabilities, older workers, low-skilled and long-term unemployed people, young people, especially including those not in employment, education or training (NEETs), people with caring responsibilities, people with a migrant background, etc. The persisting gender pay gap is also recognised as a serious challenge.

Review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee - messages from the Employment Committee (EMCO)

The Council endorsed the messages from the Employment Committee's review of the implementation of the **Youth Guarantee** ([14347/19](#)).

The review¹ shows that measures implemented at national level² in the framework of the Youth Guarantee are bringing results and that the labour-market situation of young people is improving. At the same time some serious challenges remain, in particular in relation to young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), people with low skills or no work experience, and people with a migrant background or with health or social issues.

¹ [EMCO Review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee - Summary results.](#)

² [EMCO Review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee - Country-specific conclusions.](#)

Any other business (10/12/2019)

The presidency informed ministers about the state of play regarding several legislative proposals:

- Decision amending Decision No 573/2014/EU on cooperation between Public Employment Services (PES)
- Revision of the regulations on the coordination of social security systems (Regulations 883/04 and 987/09)
- Regulation on the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF)
- Directive on equal treatment (Article 19)
- Directive on gender balance on company boards

The presidency also informed ministers about the state of play regarding the Council recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed ([13785/19](#)).

Ministers were briefed on the outcomes of conferences organised by the Finnish presidency ([14515/19](#)).

The Swedish delegation briefed ministers on a mutual learning seminar on preventing domestic violence with men and boys (Stockholm, 16-17 September 2019) ([14516/19](#)).

The chair of the Social Protection Committee provided information about the main messages contained in the Committee's recent report on tackling homelessness and housing exclusion ([14671/19](#)).

The incoming Croatian presidency presented its work programme in the area of Employment and Social Policy.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**INTERNAL MARKET AND INDUSTRY****Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures as regards information relating to emergency health response***

The Council decided not to object to a Commission regulation concerning the amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures as regards information relating to emergency health response.

The regulation amends the wording of certain requirements for the submission of information relating to emergency health response and for the inclusion of a ‘unique formula identifier’ in the supplementary information provided on the label of a hazardous mixture with a view to achieving a more streamlined interpretation of these requirements, improving internal coherence and mitigating some unintended consequences. It also defers the first compliance date from 1 January 2020 to 1 January 2021 in order to allow sufficient time to develop the necessary solutions and make any necessary changes to the new rules.

The regulation is a delegated act pursuant to article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. It can now enter into force, unless the European Parliament objects.

[13598/19](#) + [ADD 1](#)

Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1126/2008 adopting certain international accounting standards in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1606/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards International Accounting Standard 39 and International Financial Reporting Standards 7 and 9

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 1126/2008 by adopting certain international accounting standards, namely International Accounting Standard (IAS) 39 and International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) 7 and 9. The standards provide temporary exemptions to the hedge accounting requirements of International Accounting Standard (IAS) 39 ‘Financial Instruments: Recognition and Measurement’ and International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) 9 ‘Financial Instruments’, so that companies can continue to meet the requirements.

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

[13879/19](#) + [ADD 1](#)

TRANSPARENCY

Public access to documents

On 4 December 2019, the Council approved the reply to confirmatory application No 34/c/02/19 ([13555/19](#)).

On 4 December 2019, the Council approved the reply to confirmatory application No 36/c/01/19 ([13650/19](#)).

On 4 December 2019, the Council approved the reply to confirmatory application No 37/c/02/19 ([13656/19](#)).

ENERGY

EU position in the Energy Community

The Council decided on the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the Ministerial Council of the Energy Community and in the Permanent High Level Group of the Energy Community. The meetings will take place in Chisinau on 12 and 13 December 2019.

More information on the meetings can be found on the [website of the Energy Community](#).

FISHERIES

Opening of negotiations for a Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement and Protocol with Denmark and Greenland

The Council decided to adopt a decision authorising the opening of negotiations with the Government of Denmark and the Government of Greenland for a sustainable fisheries partnership agreement (SPFA) and a protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution.

The SPFA was originally signed in 2007 and then extended. The current protocol was signed in 2015 and will expire at the end of 2020.

Both the agreement and the protocol need to be renegotiated to cover certain provisions of Regulation 1380/2013 and establish fishing opportunities and the financial contribution applicable as of 1 January 2021.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Corruption - special UNGASS session

The Council approved its contributions to the preparations for the special UNGASS session against corruption to be convened in the first half of 2021. These include in particular the contribution to the outcome document and the key elements of the EU UNGASS statement.
