



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY & HEALTH



13.03.2009

EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Brussels, 9 March 2009

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

The Council held a **policy debate** on the current **financial and economic crisis** and adopted key **messages** in the fields of employment, social policy and equal opportunities, intended to be reflected in the Spring European Council Conclusions.

It adopted the **joint reports 2008/2009** on **employment**, as well as on **social inclusion** and reached a political agreement on a Council Recommendation on the 2009 up-date of the **broad guidelines for the economic policies** and a general approach on **guidelines for the employment policies** and a general approach on **guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States as part of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs**.

Furthermore, the Council adopted Conclusions on **New Skills for New Jobs: Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs** and on **professional and geographical mobility of the workforce and the free movement of workers within the European Union**.



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

More flexicurity and better skills

The EU member states should focus their employment policies on increasing flexibility and security (flexicurity) in the labour market and ensuring better skills matching.

This is one of the main messages to emerge from the Joint Employment Report 2008/2009, adopted by employment ministers meeting at the Council on 9 March. This annual document gives an update on the employment situation

...and on Leave Entitlement to pregnant or breastfeeding workers

There were mixed stands on the extension of leave from 14 to 18 weeks. A qualified majority is required for a Council decision; co-decision procedure

... Safety and health at work of pregnant workers

The Council held a policy debate on key questions of a Commission's proposal concerning the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding.

On the basis of questions suggested by the Presidency, a majority of Member States supported the extension of maternity leave entitlement from 14 to 18 weeks. However, some called for opening up the leave also for fathers and to take into account the outcome of the social partners' negotiations on other types of family leave.

A number of Member States wished to keep the right to decide within their national legislation whether a part of maternity leave should be taken before childbirth.

Some Member States expressed concern that a further extension of maternity leave might be at the expense of broader rights to parental leave and might adversely effect the situation of women on the labour market.



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

Furthermore, Member States agreed that further discussion would be needed concerning the dual legal basis of the proposal, namely Article 137(2) (on workers' health and safety) and 141(3) (on equal treatment between women and men) of the Treaty.

The aim of the Commission's proposal is to improve the protection offered to pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding by extending the minimum length of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks of which at least six weeks shall be taken after childbirth.

Other elements of the proposal include the principle of full pay during the 18 weeks, with a possibility for Member States to introduce a ceiling that must not be below sickness pay; the right for women coming back from maternity leave or already during maternity leave to ask their employer to adapt their working patterns and hours; the right to return to the same job or an equivalent post.

The proposal forms part of the Commission's work-life balance package which aims to contribute to a better conciliation of professional, private and family life. The other parts of the package are a proposal for a Directive on the equal treatment of the self-employed and their assisting spouses, a policy document explaining the background and context and a report on progress made by EU countries towards the so-called 'Barcelona targets' for children provision.

Legal basis proposed: Article 137(2) (on workers' health and safety) and 141(3) (on equal treatment between women and men) of the Treaty; qualified majority required for a Council decision; co-decision procedure with the European Parliament applicable whose first reading opinion is expected in early May 2009.

In general, the Maltese Government feels that certain elements of the Proposal are best dealt with at a national level in order to appropriately address the workforce realities in each Member State.

Update on the Working Time Directive...

The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting in Brussels on the 9 March 2009 decided not to approve all of the European Parliament's amendments and consequently to convene the Conciliation Committee in accordance with Article 251(3) of the EC Treaty.

We will update you with any further details in relation to this issue.



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

More from the Council...

Council calls on Member States which have not yet ended their temporary free movement of labour periods to do so.

At their meeting in Brussels on Monday 9 March, the Employment and Social Affairs ministers of the EU adopted conclusions on the professional and geographical mobility of labour and the free movement of workers within the European Union.

In its conclusions, the Council calls:

(1) on the Member States to:

- take account of elements related to mobility in all relevant decisions, to include mobility among the objectives of their national strategies or national reform programmes, and to promote measures which favour the professional and social mobility of the workforce, and equal treatment and non-discrimination towards migrant workers, in line with the Community acquis;
- contribute to the assessment of skills which will be required in the EU in the future;
- facilitate a safe transition between two jobs or between unemployment and employment;
- modernise the social protection systems in order to accompany and to facilitate these transitions;
- draft and implement integrated flexicurity strategies;
- step up their preparations for the introduction of new regulations on the coordination of the social security systems;

(2) on the Commission to:

- examine the reasons given by the member states which decide to continue to apply the temporary provisions during the third phase;
- closely follow the way in which these provisions are applied and their impact on the free movement of workers;



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

- take new initiatives to better inform the citizens and to make them aware of the rights they may claim when they move within the EU, and in so doing, help to remove one of the main obstacles to geographical professional mobility;
- reinforce current dialogue with all interested parties, the governments, the social partners and other players in the field of the free movement of workers;
- support the analysis carried out by the European social partners of all of the factors which may help to develop the various forms of work and mobility within the EU and the impact of these on the competitiveness of the Union;

(3) on the member states which continue to apply restrictions under the heading of the temporary provisions, in close cooperation with the social partners, using national practices, to:

- look into the possibility of continuing to apply restrictions during the second phase, with the objective of moving as quickly as possible to the full implementation of the acquis in the field of the free movement of workers;
- lift the restrictions during the third phase if it cannot be proved that their employment markets would suffer, or may suffer, serious distortions.



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

FROM THE PARLIAMENT *on HEALTH*

ON LIVER DISEASES

Brussels, 09/03/2009 - In the European Parliament on 2 March, the European Liver Patients Association (ELPA) presented a study highlighting the low levels of awareness of liver diseases among political decision-makers and the general public. At a conference hosted by Alojz Peterle (EPP-ED, Slovenia), ELPA said that currently 14 million people are estimated to be living with chronic hepatitis B in the WHO European region. 9 million people are infected with the hepatitis C virus and up to 90% of hepatitis patients are unaware of their infection. Hitherto, only France, Spain and the United Kingdom have conducted hepatitis awareness campaigns. France, the Netherlands, the UK and Sweden are the only countries to have developed comprehensive national plans to combat hepatitis.

ELPA is calling for the adoption of a Council recommendation on these, the two most widespread forms of hepatitis. The aims of the recommendation would be to: - support the establishment of screening programmes in member states; - to support the development of specific national and regional long-term plans for hepatitis B and C; - support awareness-raising campaigns; - reduce health inequalities; - promote research on prevention and cure of hepatitis B and C.

ON DEPRESSION

09/03/2009 - The European Brain Council has just launched a call for more targeted research and care to help those suffering from depression. 20 million people suffer from this illness, which affects one in four people over their life span. The total annual cost of depression



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

More from the Parliament...

March 11

EP calls for presentation of "European initiative for employment"

In its adoption, (548 votes in favour, 74 against and 31 abstentions), of a resolution on implementation guidelines for employment policies of the member states for the period 2008-2010, the EP states that it believes that, in the face of a severe worldwide recession and a forecast increase in unemployment, the central goals of employment policy for the Union and its member states must be:

- to preserve as many viable jobs as possible from the short-term failure of demand;
- to assist employment creation; and to support both the purchasing power of unemployed workers and their ability rapidly to re-gain employment;
- calls on the Commission to give a clear signal to member states that the Employment Guidelines should be implemented in this spirit, and to tackle employment as a priority issue by putting proposals to the March 19 spring summit for a European employment initiative, with coordinated action by member states to safeguard employment and create new jobs. It also recalls that coordinated investment by the member states in the five core Lisbon goals - research, education, active labour market policies, childcare and incentives for private investment - must be a key element in employment policy. When implementing the guidelines, the member states must, among other things, aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

EP wants green "New Deal" for Europe

In its adoption (579 votes in favour, 94 against and 21 abstentions) of a joint resolution by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE and UEN groups on the Lisbon strategy, the EP recommends that short-term measures be set in place to balance out the direct and immediate consequences of the crisis and to limit, as far as possible, its negative effects on the real economy, and that the re-launch plans are followed up by a coordinated action plan for the short and long-term, to help put the European economies on the road to stable growth and to protect them



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

from the similar crises in the future. It stresses that the financial crisis also constitutes an opportunity, in that it is now no longer possible to ignore the need for innovation, a driving force behind the economy. The EP takes the view that it is time to create the most efficient economy in terms of energy, which is capable of transforming the world and guaranteeing the prosperity and international competitiveness of Europe for decades to come. The MEPs plead in favour of the creation of "new financial architecture" (with regulations to serve the interests of the consumers, businesses and employees). They called for new legislative proposals and international agreements helping to fight against the excessive risk-taking, excessive use of indebtedness and short-term prospects which were behind this crisis.

The EP expects the European spring Council to adopt clear guidelines and concrete measures to safeguard employment and to create new jobs. Lastly, it stresses the need to "reinforce the social dimension of European and national re-launch plans" and recommends a green "New Deal" Europe, to attack the economic, environmental and social crisis.

Thursday 19 and Friday 20 March 2009

SPRING EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The Spring European Council will dedicate a significant part of its work to the economic situation. It will assess the implementation of the European Economic Recovery Plan and will, if necessary, consider additional measures to address the economic and financial crisis. It will pay particular attention to the employment situation, stressing the need to progress in implementing the Lisbon Strategy in all its pillars.

Furthermore, the European Council will also establish the Union's position with a view to the G-20 Summit to be held in London, on 2 April 2009.

A tripartite summit for growth and employment with the social partners will be held on Thursday morning.

The European Council is expected to establish concrete orientations on energy and climate issues, in the framework of the EU Energy Security and Solidarity Action Plan. It will also lay down guidelines for the Union's position with a view to the Copenhagen climate change conference in December.

Finally, the European Council is expected to approve the Eastern Partnership which will create closer ties with six countries in Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus. The partnership is due to be officially launched at a



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

FROM THE COMMISSION

Commission report: the world drugs problem, ten years on

Last Tuesday, the European Commission launched a report on the world's illicit drugs Markets since 1998. It shows that in the past decade drug policies across the world have developed, especially at national level, as efforts to help drug users have been stepped up and tougher policies adopted against drug traffickers. But what is the result of all this on the ground?

You can read the whole summary and link with the actual report from MEUSAC's website.

OPEN CONSULTATIONS

ON THE EUROPEAN WORKFORCE FOR HEALTH COM (2008) 725

CLOSING DATE – 31.03.2009

ON EU ACTION TO REDUCE HEALTH INEQUALITIES

CLOSING DATE – 01.04.2009

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/socio_economics
/documents/cons_paper_en .pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/socio_economics/documents/cons_paper_en.pdf)

YOU MAY SEND YOUR CONSULTATIONS TO:
SANCO-C4-HEALTH-INEQUALITIES@ec.europa.eu



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

COMMITTEE OF REGIONS (CoR)

Prague Summit launch for biggest ever consultation of regions and cities on boosting growth and jobs.



Europe's regions and cities will play their part in shaping the next generation of the EU's growth and jobs strategy following a major consultation launched by CoR President Luc Van den Brande and Czech regional development minister Cyril Svoboda in Prague on Friday, 6th March.

Launching the consultation at the European Summit of Regions and Cities in the Czech capital, President Van den Brande said that the size and scale of the consultation would help give greater impact to the CoR's suggestions on

the future direction of the Lisbon strategy.

"2010 will be the last year of the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs, launched in 2000 to increase Europe's competitiveness, and the 2010 Spring European Council will decide what comes next. It is extremely important that all regions and cities can voice their opinion now. It is only with regions and cities on board that the EU will be able to achieve its goals of boosting economic growth and creating more jobs, especially in these difficult times. I strongly believe that the European Commission, the Council Presidency and the 2010 Spring European Council will take into account all our contributions. This is a remarkable moment, when local and regional authorities can directly express their opinions to Brussels on a new Lisbon strategy," he said.

Minister Svoboda added: **"This major consultation of the level of government closest to citizens on the key issue of the growth and jobs strategy will be addressed directly to EU leaders next Spring. If anyone has any concerns about how democratic the EU really is, then this should help dispel them."**

The consultation, which will last until **20 April**, is open to all local and regional authorities, who are invited to submit their comments on the future of the Lisbon strategy by answering a [questionnaire](#) on the CoR's website. The questionnaire is available in all EU languages.

The **results** of the consultation will be presented and discussed in Brussels during the Open Days week (5-8 October 2009), and be incorporated into the new opinion on the Future of the Lisbon Strategy by CoR member Christine Chapman



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

(UK/PES). This will then constitute the political message that the CoR will address to the 2010 Spring European Council, where the final decision on the future of the Lisbon strategy will be made.



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

EUROSTAT... on european women

- ❖ There were just over a quarter of a billion women in the **EU27** in 2008. Around a quarter of them (27% or 68 million) were aged less than 25, more than half (54% or 137 million) were aged 25 to 64 and nearly a fifth (19% or 49 million) were aged 65 and over.
- ❖ Women earned 17.4% less than men on average in the **EU27** in 2007. Malta was classified the second with the least gender pay gap.
- ❖ Compared to the other member states, in 2006, Malta had a low proportion of women physicians, academic staff in tertiary education and in senior official positions.