

Brussels, 4 March 2011

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council, 7 March 2011, Brussels

The Council of EU Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Ministers will meet on 7 March in Brussels. The European Commission will be represented by Vice-President Viviane Reding, EU Justice Commissioner and László Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. This Council also prepares the Spring European Council later in March.

Main agenda items for employment and social inclusion:

- The contribution of the employment and social affairs Ministers to the preparation of the Spring European Council 24-25 March 2011, in particular the adoption of the Joint Employment Report and the endorsement of the main points of the Commission's Annual Growth Survey, as well as an agreement to maintain the employment guidelines from last year (2010-2014). The presentation of the summary of contributions to the Green Paper consultation on pensions.
- A discussion on the development of an electronic exchange system for administrative cooperation concerning the posting of workers
- A lunch discussion on active ageing.
- Council conclusions on the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020)
- Commission Report on equality between women and men 2011 where Ministers will review the annual report on progress on equality between women and men in 2010.

Preparation of the European Spring Council (24th to 25th March 2011)

Ministers are expected to adopt the annual Joint Employment Report that analyses the employment situation in Member States and their employment policies. The Hungarian Presidency also plans to adopt Council Conclusions on the report, endorsing the main points of the Commission's Annual Growth Survey which has kicked off the first ever European semester under Europe 2020. These will contain concrete political guidance on employment policies. Member States are expected to take into account these policies when preparing their National Reform Programmes to be presented in April. In the National Reform programmes, governments will outline the structural economic and labour market reforms they are taking on to reach the targets and objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy.

At Monday's meeting, Ministers are also expected to look at Guidelines for Member States' Employment Policies. It is expected they will agree to maintain the four employment guidelines newly formulated last year as part of the overall Europe 2020 integrated guidelines. The guidelines should remain in place until 2014 to allow Member States to implement them in a sound manner.

Other points relating to the preparation of the Spring European Council are the adoption of Council Conclusions to support the Europe 2020 flagship 'A European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion' (which the Commission presented in December last year); a report by the Social Protection Committee on the social dimension of Europe 2020 and an information note by the Hungarian Presidency on the forthcoming Tripartite Social Summit with the European Social Partners on 24 March, which precedes the Spring European Council.

Lunch debate on active ageing

The lunch break will provide Ministers an opportunity to discuss active ageing. In 2010 the employment rate for those aged 55 to 64 was 46%. The Annual Growth Survey and the 2011 Joint Employment Report both highlight the need to increase the labour market participation of people towards the end of their working careers. This is essential if we are to meet the Europe 2020 headline target of a 75% employment rate for both men and women. It will also be crucial for ensuring that our pension systems are adequate and sustainable and will thus help redress the fiscal situation in some Member States. 2012's European Year will be dedicated to active ageing.

Presentation of the summary of responses to the Green Paper consultation on pensions

Commissioner Andor will present, for the first time, the initial results of the consultation that was conducted at the end of last year and received 1700 contributions. As a follow-up to the Green Paper the Commission plans to adopt a White Paper on pensions in the autumn in which it will outline the concrete initiatives it intends to pursue in the field of pensions in the future. During the meeting, Ministers will discuss how the Employment and Social Affairs Council can support the work to deepen and complete the European framework for pensions. They will discuss ways that the EU can, within Europe 2020, help Member States raise effective retirement ages so as to improve both the adequacy and sustainability of their pension systems.

The development of an electronic exchange system for administrative cooperation concerning the posting of workers

Ministers are asked to support the development of an electronic information exchange system. This is part of EU efforts to facilitate and improve administrative cooperation between the national bodies responsible for implementing the Posting of Workers Directive, ensuring better protection of posted workers' rights.

Council conclusions on the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020)

The Gender Equality Pact reaffirms Member States' commitments to gender equality and stresses the link to the Europe 2020 Strategy. It underlines the important contribution of gender equality to "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth."

Commission Report on equality between women and men 2011

Ministers will review the annual report on progress on equality between women and men in 2010. The report covers developments in the Member States on the five themes of the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (2010-2015): (1) equal economic independence, (2) equal pay for equal work and work of equal value, (3) equality in decision-making, (4) dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence, (5) gender equality outside the EU. The report points out that while trends are positive overall, progress towards genuine gender equality in the EU remains slow.

Other points on the agenda

Finally, the Presidency will also report on the informal Meeting of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in January and the ongoing legislative activities. The Chairs of the Employment Committee and of the Social Protection Committee will have the opportunity to produce their committee's work programmes and France, that currently holds the chair of the G20, will give an overview of its activities for the preparation of the Meeting of G20 Ministers of Labour and Employment in September this year.