

Brussels, 7 July 2009

Informal Employment and Social Affairs Council, 8-9 July 2009, Jönköping (Sweden)

An informal meeting of the Council of Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs will take place in Jönköping (Sweden) on 8 and 9 July. It will be chaired by the Swedish Minister for Employment, Sven Otto Littorin. The European Commission will be represented by Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social affairs and Equal opportunities. The informal Council will focus mainly on the subject of labour market inclusion. Ministers will also discuss the working time directive over lunch on 8 July. The Council will be preceded by a meeting of the trio of Presidencies (Sweden, Spain and Belgium) with the social partners and the Platform of European Social NGOs.

1. Main theme: promoting employment through more inclusive labour markets and active social security policies

Ministers will consider first and foremost the subject of labour market inclusion, which is one of the main priorities of the Swedish Presidency. In order to boost employment and growth in the EU it is essential to increase the proportion of the active population actually in work, especially women, whose participation rate in the labour market is much lower than that of men. Ministers will address this long-term challenge in a bid to help the EU emerge stronger from the present crisis and thus make a better recovery. The discussion on labour market inclusion will provide an important contribution to the preparation of the Lisbon Strategy on Growth and Jobs post-2010. At the same time, short-term measures to limit the social impact of the crisis must be consolidated and combined with structural reform. Finally, apart from active employment policies, Ministers will have an exchange of views on the nature of social security policies which need to provide an effective complement to the fight against unemployment.

2. Meeting with the social partners and the Social Platform

On 8 July 2009, before the informal Council, the trio of Presidencies will meet the European social partners and then the Social Platform. The Commission will be represented by Commissioner Vladimír Špidla. The purpose of the meeting is to give participants an opportunity to exchange views informally on the general theme of the informal Council (labour market inclusion) so as to provide input to the ministerial discussions which follow.

3. Working lunch

Ministers will also discuss the question of working time over lunch on 8 July. After the failure in April of the conciliation procedure between Parliament and Council on the amendment of the current Directive, Ministers and the Commission will discuss the present situation and the follow-up required. The Commission is currently looking at the various options. Any legislative initiative would have to be preceded by a formal consultation of the social partners.