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**FORWARDING OF TEXT**

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from :            Presidency  
to :                European Council

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Subject :        **Barcelona European Council – Presidency Conclusions**

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1. The Barcelona European Council will be the second spring summit developing the mandates established at the European Councils of Lisbon, Feira, Nice, Stockholm, Göteborg and Laeken to fulfil the European Union's strategic goal for the coming years: "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".
2. The Barcelona European Council will also be charged with assessing progress in the application of the European Social Agenda approved at Nice.
3. The Employment and Social Policy Council on 7 March 2002 takes a very positive view of the achievements of the European Employment Strategy since it was launched in 1997, and the validity of that process has been confirmed both in times of economic expansion and in less favourable circumstances.

4. The Employment and Social Policy Council likewise views very positively the progress made in developing the open method of coordination for the purpose of ensuring the long-term sustainability of pension systems, with a view to final confirmation of the method by the Barcelona European Council.
5. The Presidency considers that the Council:
  - takes a very positive view of the Commission's Summary Report and confirms that it is necessary to strengthen the equilibrium, coherence, **coordination and synchronisation between the social and economic dimensions** in the Lisbon Strategy framework, through the instruments used in each of those dimensions, along the lines put forward by the Employment and Social Protection Committees in their Opinions.

This coordination should apply particularly in the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines process and the European Employment Strategy process, with a view to improving coherence between the two processes. To this end, it will be necessary to synchronise timetables, whilst maintaining the independence of each process, and for the spring European Council to direct each of these in a coherent and balanced manner. The European Council will therefore establish the political priorities that should be followed by the various Council configurations.

The Council is agreed that in the case of the European Employment Strategy it is not necessary to establish objectives other than those set out in a general way at Lisbon and that therefore the new European Employment Strategy will have to be implemented until 2010, with an intermediate assessment in 2006. The process needs simplification, but not watering down, and in particular it needs fewer employment guidelines. Taking account of the results of the current assessment, the new Strategy will incorporate all the positive aspects of the Luxembourg process which have made it possible for all Member States to progress in establishing joint policies and objectives, while taking account of their specific characteristics.

- Holds that **full employment** is the essential goal of economic and social policies, which requires the creation of more and better jobs. It is therefore necessary to continue paying particular attention to the reforms of employment and labour market policies. In this context, it is essential to eliminate barriers to entry into the labour market and to promote active employment policies, maintaining a preventive approach and individualised attention to the unemployed to prevent them from falling into long-term unemployment and to improve their employability.

Emphasises that to achieve the objectives set in Lisbon, the European Employment Strategy will have to pay special attention to the challenges facing the EU in the long term, especially the challenges of ageing. The European Employment Strategy should enable everybody to have an opportunity to take part in working life. At the same time, it will have to contribute to creating a dynamic and effective labour market in which motivated and trained workers can have high-quality and high-productivity jobs. Thus, the Strategy will have to give adequate consideration both to policies which improve both the supply and demand of work.

It is therefore necessary to make progress with the modernisation and reform of the labour market, to strengthen our social protection systems so that they both afford those in need with such protection and provide initiatives for participation in working life, to support lifelong learning in order to secure a knowledge-based society and to promote policies which stimulate, rather than impede, job creation by entrepreneurs.

- Stresses the importance of job **quality**. Quality, which must not create new red tape in the labour market, will make possible higher employment levels. The objective of creating better jobs thus complements and reinforces that of creating more jobs.

- Emphasises the need to strengthen the role of the **social partners** in modernising the organisation of work, improving its **quality**, vocational training and access to and durability of employment. The social partners share responsibility for finding a balance between flexibility and security in employment and making it possible for enterprises to be adaptable. They must above all play the principal role in anticipating and managing change and achieving the balance which will safeguard the way enterprises operate as well as the interests of workers. The setting up of the Social Summit constitutes an essential step forward in achieving this objective. The contributions made by the social partners in this forum will undoubtedly prove a highly valuable instrument for further exploring appropriate ways of strengthening their participation in the EES.

Reaffirms the need to strengthen social integration and the **fight against exclusion**, in line with the conclusions of the Nice European Council, since, notwithstanding the multidisciplinary nature of the phenomenon, the best instrument for inclusion is employment, so that it is essential that employment services and social services work together in such a way that both mechanisms improve the employability of the socially excluded. Employment is always preferable to unemployment, but it must meet certain minimum conditions and offer opportunities for progress in work.

Emphasises the importance of the Community Strategy for combating exclusion and of the adoption by the Member States of National Plans. Similarly urges the Employment and Social Protection Committees to continue working towards the adoption of specific objectives to reduce social exclusion, taking account of the indicators adopted at Laeken and the multi-faceted nature of the phenomenon of exclusion.

- Likewise confirms the importance of implementing the Social Protection strategy as regards the quality and viability of **pensions**, which supports the reform of pension systems, in the framework of the **open method of coordination**, with the aim of safeguarding the capacity of systems to fulfil their social objectives, ensuring financial sustainability, and adapting their capacity to meet the new needs of society. To fulfil these objectives, it considers the **common objectives** and the **working method** developed with a view to their confirmation by the **European Council in Barcelona** to be very valuable and useful.
  - It draws attention to the need to continue to work for **equality between men and women** by developing measures to make it easier for women to enter and remain in the labour market, and by avoiding discrimination. In this context, it is important to increase the number of measures directed at reconciling family life and working life, particularly through the creation of services caring for children and other dependents. It also supports the need to establish an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach in order to eradicate all forms of violence against women with the cooperation of all the policy sectors involved.
6. The Presidency notes that the Council welcomes the progress achieved in developing the **Social Policy Agenda**, and stresses the importance of the initiatives set up in the past twelve months.
7. The Presidency notes that the Council welcomes the content of the **Action Plan on Mobility and Skills** and is agreed on the importance of the three challenges of the Plan: (a) to improve job mobility; (b) to promote geographical mobility; and (c) to establish adequate channels of information on work and training opportunities in the EU. To this end, it stresses the need to develop and recognise qualifications and skills, including those acquired informally, invest in human resources, pursue efforts to ensure lifelong learning and modernise Public Employment Services, particularly the EURES network.

8. The Presidency shares the Council's interest in the importance of lifelong learning in helping people enter and remain in the labour market and progress in their working lives, in particular the role which training systems provided in a genuine working environment can play to that end.
  
9. The Presidency observes that the Council stresses the need to increase **participation in the labour market for all and to encourage older workers to stay active voluntarily** in response to the challenge of ageing. The social partners must play an essential role in determining the necessary policies. At the same time, it stresses that early retirement must cease to be the immediate response to the problems of restructuring enterprises. Opportunities must be given to older workers to keep their jobs, since flexible work organisation formulas (part time and teleworking among others) and the guarantee of lifelong learning are tools that can help make those opportunities a reality.

Likewise, it confirms that the Council is adopting the joint report by the Commission and the Council on "increasing labour-force participation and promoting active ageing".

10. As an essential complement to the above-mentioned employment measures, the Presidency stresses the importance of reforms to Member States' pension systems with a view to **creating a gradual and flexible approach to retirement**, encouraging a voluntary raising of the true retirement age in keeping with the reality of longer life expectancy, facilitating a gradual transition from full activity to retirement and promoting the active participation of older people in public, social and cultural life so as to achieve the objective of **active ageing**.

11. The Presidency emphasises the importance of the agreement achieved in the conciliation process in relation to the Decision on **incentive measures in the field of employment** for the future development of the European Employment Strategy in the Lisbon framework, and stresses the will of the institutions to make information on the Strategy's results more transparent and accessible to the citizens of Europe and to those groups most concerned, with particular attention to its regional and local dimensions.
  
12. The Presidency notes that the Council endorses the joint Report by the Social Protection Committee and the Economic Policy Committee on the principles on health care and care for the elderly, so that everyone can be guaranteed access to quality health care, the transparency and quality of health care systems is improved, and the reform process that has begun continues, with the aim of making the rate of cost increases compatible with improvement in the quality of public finance, thus making it possible to ensure that health care is adequately funded, with the necessary cooperation and participation of all actors involved.

To this end, the Council is agreed on the need to initiate and to develop cooperation between the Member States over 2002 and 2003, on areas in which to exchange best practices and information, once they are identified, and to discuss common challenges at European level, which could lead to the creation of added value in achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy.

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