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REPORT

from : Committee of Permanent Representatives (Part I)
to : Council (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs)

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**Subject : Decent work
- Adoption of Council conclusions
(Public debate)**

In May 2006, the Commission submitted to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions a communication "Promoting decent work for all - the EU contribution to the implementation of the decent work agenda in the world" (doc. 9988/06)

Delegations will find attached the text of the draft Council conclusions on decent work, as broadly agreed during the discussions of the Committee of Permanent Representatives on 17 November 2006. However, all delegations, except BE, entered scrutiny reservations on the introduction of the words "fair trade" in paragraph 4 on page 7.

The Council is invited to consider this point with a view to the adoption of the Council conclusions during the Council (EPSCO) session of 30 November/1 December 2006.

Draft Council conclusions on Decent Work for All

Having regard to the Communication of the Commission "Promoting decent work for all - the EU contribution to the implementation of the decent work agenda in the world" published in May 2006¹;

WHEREAS

1. The values of social justice and equal opportunities and the respect of human rights are integral parts of Community law and important components of the European Union's internal and external policies;
2. The international community is committed to promoting Decent Work for All, as laid down in the 2005 United Nations World Summit Outcome and in the Ministerial Declaration of the United Nations Economic and Social Council High Level Segment 2006;
3. On 16-17 December 2004 and on 16-17 June 2005, the European Council underlined the importance of strengthening the social dimension of globalisation and of taking it into account in various internal and external policies and in international cooperation;
4. On 22-23 March 2005, the European Council, in the revised Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the European Strategy on Sustainable Development, stressed the importance of developing working life in a socially sustainable way;

¹ COM(2006) 249 final, accompanied by SEC(2006) 643

5. The Council, on 21 July 2003, expressed its support for promoting core labour standards and improving social governance in the context of globalisation² and highlighted, on 3 March 2005, that promoting decent work for all is a necessary part of strengthening the social dimension of globalisation³;

THE COUNCIL

1. RECALLS that the promotion of employment, social cohesion and decent work for all is part of the European Social Policy Agenda and of the European Consensus on European Union Development Policy⁴ and that the European Social Policy Agenda includes also the external dimension of employment, social policy and equal opportunities;
2. NOTES with satisfaction that the International Labour Organisation's Decent Work Agenda is based on an integrated approach covering productive and freely chosen employment and full respect for rights at work, and encompassing core labour standards, social dialogue, social protection (including health and safety at work), and gender equality;
3. EMPHASISES that the Decent Work Agenda is in line with the Union's values and principles as well as with its goal of achieving both economic competitiveness and social justice;
4. RECALLS the commitment to conduct the EU's internal and external policies in a consistent way, thus contributing to maximising the benefits and minimising the costs of globalisation for all groups and countries, both inside and outside of the EU, as emphasised by the Council conclusions of 3 March 2005 (paragraph 4);

² Doc. 11555/03

³ Doc. 6286/05

⁴ Joint Statement by the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission on European Union Development Policy, 20 December 2005, OJ, 2006, C46/1-19.

5. EMPHASISES that promoting decent work aims at the overall improvement of living and working conditions for all, and includes to this end support for the integration of the informal sector into the mainstream economy;
6. AGREES that promoting decent work also includes better management of economic migration;
7. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of strong involvement of the social partners, the business community and of wider civil society in initiatives related to decent work, and CALLS on business and all other relevant stakeholders to promote decent work by actions in the field of corporate social responsibility which complement legislation and collective bargaining and take into account internationally agreed standards;
8. RECALLS its support for stronger dialogue and cooperation between the relevant international organisations, including the UN and notably the ILO, the Bretton Woods Institutions and the World Trade Organisation in promoting Decent Work for All and recalls the need for increased efforts by the EU together with other partners to ensure effective policy coherence between these international institutions⁵;
9. Welcomes the increased interest for decent work in partner countries and regions and the taking up of the Decent Work Agenda in various international and regional fora (Africa, Asia and the Americas);

⁵ Council conclusions 3 March 2005, paragraphs 15 and 16;
Council conclusions 21 July 2003, paragraph 3.

Decent work in EU

1. EMPHASISES that, in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the EU in a socially sustainable way, it is important to improve productivity by promoting decent work and the quality of working life, including health and safety at work, combining flexibility and security, life-long learning, good working relations as well as better reconciliation of work and private life; HIGHLIGHTS that combating gender discrimination and all other forms of discrimination in the light of Article 13 (TEC), as well as promoting the social integration of vulnerable groups, are integral parts of the efforts towards decent work;
2. UNDERLINES the EU's commitment to Decent Work and RECALLS that its Member States have ratified a large number of ILO Conventions, including the Conventions on core labour standards; HIGHLIGHTS the relevance of the Decent Work Agenda for EU candidate countries and the complementarity of certain ILO Conventions and strategies with the Community *acquis*;
3. WELCOMES the Commission's commitment in its Communication on decent work to encouraging and facilitating the ratification and application of the ILO Conventions on core labour standards, and other ILO Conventions that have been classified by the ILO as up to date;

Decent work and bilateral and regional relations

1. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of promoting employment, social cohesion and decent work for all in EU external policies, bilateral and regional relations and dialogues, including EU neighbourhood policy and cooperation programmes with third countries and regions, the ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers cooperation initiated in Potsdam 2006 and the follow-up to the EU- Latin America and Caribbean Summit in Vienna 2006 in relation to social cohesion;

Decent work and development cooperation

1. EMPHASISES the promotion of decent work for all across the world in line with the 2005 World Summit Outcome including the emphasis on implementing the MDGs, the ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration 2006 and the ILO Decent Work Country Programmes as one of the key means of fostering development, poverty eradication and social cohesion;
2. RECALLS that the European Consensus on Development calls on the Community and the Member States to contribute to the strengthening of the social dimension of globalisation, the promotion of employment and decent work for all, and EMPHASISES the importance of supporting the integration of employment and decent work into national and regional poverty reduction strategies and other development strategies as well as into other plans and actions of developing countries; in this context, HIGHLIGHTS the importance of consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including the organised employers, workers as well as the broader civil society and the private sector;
3. ENCOURAGES governments in partner countries to increase their efforts in cooperation with stakeholders to create an enabling environment for private sector development and investment, the benefits of which include increased investments and employment for the population;

4. EMPHASISES that decent work is both an employment and social protection issue as well as a governance issue; RECOGNISES in particular the need to promote country-led Decent Work Country Programmes through development cooperation – including policy dialogue on employment impacts of economic policies and governance, budget support measures and capacity building, in particular institutional capacity building - which is well-coordinated and harmonised⁶ between the European Commission, the Member States and other international development partners and relevant actors, including the ILO⁷ and other UN agencies as well as the international financial institutions; EMPHASISES the importance of integrating the different components of decent work into country-led development and poverty reduction strategies, including microcredits, fair trade⁸, social protection and better management of migration and its development potential;
5. SUPPORTS the principle that all those submitting tenders for EC external assistance-funded contracts should respect core labour standards. The Regulation (EC) No 2110/2005⁹ currently imposes such an obligation on contracts financed by Community assistance; SUPPORTS efforts to extend this obligation to contracts financed in the framework of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement; and ENCOURAGES the Member States and other donors to adopt a similar approach;

⁶ Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

⁷ For example, the themes proposed by the ILO Committee on Employment and Social Policy for the Decent Work Country Programmes in 2006-2007 are: 1) employment as central to economic and social policies; 2) youth employment; 3) informal economy and 4) meeting the special needs of Africa.

⁸ All delegations, except BE: scrutiny reservations on the introduction of the words "fair trade".

⁹ Regulation on the access to Community external assistance (EUOJ L 344, 27.12.2005, p.1 + corrigendum L 33, 4.2.2006, p.86). This Regulation shall be repealed by the Regulation establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation (DCI).

6. CALLS for increased promotion of decent work through Community and Member states development cooperation policies and programming; NOTES the current work in progress to develop a strategy on promoting employment and social protection through Community development policy and, in this context, WELCOMES the initiative by the Commission to consult with Member States and ENCOURAGES Member States, based on their experience, to make available to the Commission and to other Member States information about how best to promote decent work issues through development policies and programmes;
7. SUPPORTS the development of training and information on decent work for those involved in the programming and implementation of external assistance, including in third countries;

Decent work and trade related issues

1. EMPHASISES that trade liberalisation plays an important role in helping to achieve sustainable growth, full employment, poverty reduction and the promotion of decent work;
2. UNDERLINES the need for an integrated and coherent approach to trade policy and social development, and welcomes the initiative of the Commission to further promote social standards and decent work;
3. HIGHLIGHTS the key role of the EU Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) in the promotion of international conventions on core labour standards and human rights and welcomes the new GSP with its special incentive for sustainable development and good governance, and SUPPORTS the improvement of the link between GSP and EC external assistance;
4. UNDERLINES the need for the further development of methodologies assessing the effects of trade and trade agreements on decent work, including in global supply chains and export processing zones; as well as of the timing and strengthening of the Trade Sustainability Impact Assessments;

5. SUPPORTS the use of EU trade-related assistance to promote decent work;
6. RECALLS that the endorsement of social objectives should not be used for protectionist purposes; the objective is to achieve social progress across the board and to ensure that it is spread fairly for the benefit of all;

Cooperation with UN and ILO and other relevant actors

1. WELCOMES the Union's increased cooperation with the UN, with the ILO, and with other relevant actors, with a view to promoting decent work for all;
2. SUPPORTS the ILO initiative on Decent Work Country Programmes or equivalent employment and social policy action plans/agendas, as these contribute to strengthened ownership by partner countries by reflecting national needs and priorities and by ensuring the involvement of employers' and workers' organisations and of relevant parts of civil society;
3. UNDERLINES that the EU should encourage and support the worldwide ratification and implementation of the ILO Conventions, on core labour standards and other Conventions that have been classified by the ILO as up to date, through technical cooperation and through support for the strengthening of the ILO supervisory mechanism, including better publicity, more effective follow-up and more widespread use of the findings of the supervisory mechanism; UNDERLINES also that the EU should take the findings of the ILO supervisory mechanism into account more systematically in its own international relations;
4. ENCOURAGES the EU Member States to continue their efforts to ratify and implement such ILO Conventions as a concrete contribution to the ongoing efforts by the ILO and its constituents to improve their worldwide ratification and application;

5. ENCOURAGES the Commission and the Member States to cooperate with the ILO and relevant organisations with a view to elaborating and applying appropriate indicators in order to measure and assess the implementation of the Decent Work Agenda;
6. ENCOURAGES ILO's efforts to promote its Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy as well as OECD's initiatives to promote wider adherence to OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, including their recommendations on Employment and Industrial Relations;
7. WELCOMES the contribution to decent work made by UN organisations such as the initiative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for a complementary report about human rights in transnational corporations (TNCs);

Follow-up

1. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of strengthening the effective implementation and follow-up of the objective of Decent Work for All in line with the 2005 World Summit Outcome and the Ministerial Declaration of the UN ECOSOC 2006 High Level Segment;
2. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of an effective and regular follow-up and coordination of the initiatives and actions to promote decent work for all;
3. WELCOMES the Commission's intention to produce a follow-up report to its Communication on decent work by the summer of 2008.