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Information on the Conference concerning the Future of Lisbon Strategy post-2010 - May 25, 2009 – Budapest

The conference on the future of the Lisbon Strategy after 2010 was an important initial step of the preparatory works for the 2011 Hungarian Presidency. The speakers and the participants of the conference were mainly from European and Hungarian research institutes and think-tanks, together with the representatives of the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Hungarian Government and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The Embassies of the EU Member States were invited as well. The aim of the conference was to start common thinking on and formulate answers to the most urgent questions of the Lisbon process: What should be the main priorities and targets of the new Strategy? How could we make the Strategy more effective and productive? How should we improve the governance of the process?
The conference was opened by Mr. Péter Balázs, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who underlined the importance of a long-term EU competitiveness strategy, especially in the time of a global economic and financial crisis. The next trio-presidency (Spain-Belgium-Hungary) will by all means pay special attention to the launch of the new strategy. It was emphasised that neither the date, nor the place or the name of re-launching the process, what is important, only the aim that the new European Strategy should contribute effectively to sustainable growth and employment.

The main topics of the conference were the following: lessons learned from the current Lisbon Strategy, post-2010 Lisbon Strategy and new challenges (energy, climate change, ageing, economic crisis, fiscal sustainability, etc.) and road towards a successful Post-2010 Lisbon Strategy (targets, measures, benchmarks, governance, EU budget, etc.).

The first panel focused on the major experiences and lessons learned from the implementation of the current strategy. It was a general view that the Lisbon Strategy contributed significantly to the structural reforms of the Member States, served as an agreed background for the national and community measures and promoted the exchange of good practice. But as the overall result concerns the picture is rather mixed: the progresses made by the Member States varied widely, some targets are fare to reach and some lack of ownership and commitment could be observed.

As for the new challenges and the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy concerns, the panel put emphasis on the crucial role of the political ownership of the new strategy. The added value of the Post-Lisbon Strategy must be clear, otherwise the political ownership will not be enhanced. The communication of the strategy must be improved, the awareness of the European citizens should be raised and their sense of ownership for the process should be strengthened. From the policy content point of view our interest is now to have a short term exit strategy from the economic crisis on the one hand and a long term sustainable strategy for growth and jobs on the other hand.

The discussion pointed at the possible short term contradictions between the low carbon economy and external competitiveness, and stressed that the cutting back of the job intensive sector and the building up of the knowledge based economy should be realized simultaneously, otherwise the transition can have hard social consequences through the emerging unemployment.
Concerning the road towards a successful Post-2010 Lisbon Strategy, the role of governance was underlined as a crucial point. The Post-Lisbon Strategy is a cornerstone of the Spanish, Belgian, Hungarian trio presidency programme. Concerning the timing, some concerns were articulated regarding the possible risks of the planned timetable for the relaunch of the strategy. A premature political launch of the process can adversely affect the contribution of the political and social consultations, because of the lack of time, and therefore the ownership would further weaken. The consequences of the economic crisis are still unclear, therefore it may be worth to wait and not to run, in order to establish a strategic framework that can remain valid for a longer term.

The Post-Lisbon Strategy must be a part of a global framework, in that different models are competing. The future can be the fragmentation or a coordinated answer, but a patch-work scenario is also realistic. The strategy must identify the strong points and handle the weak ones. The political leadership is crucial, because the national politics are not enough to improve the position of the EU. We need a few clear priorities, namely „greening” economy, innovation, modernization of public services, reform of financial services. The participant share the view that it would be very useful to continue the process started with this conference, and assemble in similar formation in the future if we arrive at cornerstones of the Post-Lisbon Strategy.