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NOTE

from: The Presidency
to: COUNCIL (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs)
Subject: External dimension of EU Employment and Social Policies
- Presidency conclusions
(Any other business item)

Delegations will find attached a set of Presidency conclusions with a view to the meeting of the EPSCO Council on 6 December 2010.

The Presidency Conclusions take stock of the discussions at the "International Forum on Decent Work" held in Brussels on 11-12 October 2010, the discussions in the Social Questions Working Party on 26 October and 18 November 2010 and of various European and international policy papers and debates during the last months, and propose further steps.

Presidency Conclusions
on the external dimension of EU employment and social policies

Maintain the momentum for the promotion of decent work and the social dimension of globalisation

There exist well established sets of international labour standards and numerous commitments to promote decent work in bilateral and regional relations, in development cooperation and in trade-related areas, with the cooperation of the UN, including the ILO and other relevant actors. The Council adopted conclusions on "Decent Work for All" on 30 November-1 December 2006¹. All EU Member States have ratified the eight fundamental labour conventions of the ILO. Within this context, the role of the ILO as the key universal standard-setting body in the area of employment and social protection and its essential role for promoting decent work worldwide are crucial for shaping multilateral efforts to enhance fairness in globalisation.

The global financial, economic and employment crisis has led to an intensification of international activity to address the consequences of the crisis in several policy areas, including employment and social policy. This includes enhancing policy dialogues on employment issues within and between the ILO, UN, OECD, IMF and the G20 as well as in regional and bilateral fora. The ILO *Global Jobs Pact* is considered a central element of the global consensus on the role of employment and social policies in mitigating the impact of the crisis and as central for sustainable recovery and growth. Employment and poverty reduction must remain at the heart of economic strategies, contributing to strong and sustainable growth.

At the same time, given current fiscal constraints, the focus should be on cost-effective labour and social policies. This underlines the urgent need for coherence between all macroeconomic policies (including employment policies and recognition of their role in achieving sustainable economic growth) at all levels of governance.

¹ Doc. 15487/06.

These needs were acknowledged at the G20 leaders meeting in Pittsburgh, which launched a framework for strong, sustainable and balanced growth and called for recovery plans that support decent work, prioritise job growth and put quality of jobs at the heart of recovery. They called a meeting of G20 labour and employment ministers, the first ever, to ensure a continued focus on employment and social policies during recovery. G20 labour and employment ministers, who met in Washington in April 2010, reviewed policies and measures put in place in response to the crisis and discussed how the quantity and quality of jobs could be improved and how to prepare the workforce for the post-crisis economy. The meeting gave them the opportunity to learn from each other's experience and laid foundations for possible future cooperation. Ministers agreed on a clear set of recommendations calling for putting employment and poverty alleviation at the centre of national and global economic strategies. These recommendations were subsequently welcomed by the G20 leaders in Toronto, who recognised the importance of achieving strong job growth, with quality jobs and the development of a social protection floor.

At EU level, the European Council Conclusions of 28-29 March 2010² underlined the need for a strong external dimension in the Europe 2020 Strategy, to ensure that EU instruments and policies are deployed to promote the European Union's interests and positions on the global scene through participation in open and fair markets worldwide.

Actions to be taken

Stronger socio-economic governance is needed to tackle the challenges of increased globalisation and of the economic crisis. EU employment and social policies should therefore be harnessed by a strong external dimension. In addition, the EU economy faces tough competition. Advancing the Decent Work Agenda worldwide will not only contribute to improve wellbeing in partner countries, but will also create conditions vital for a sustainable economy, employment and social cohesion within the European Union, by gradually contributing to a level playing-field in international trade, notably through higher labour standards and the creation of social safety nets.

² Doc. EUCO 7/10.

Therefore, taking into account the discussion in the Council preparatory bodies, the Presidency considers that the Council should renew its strong commitment to the Decent Work Agenda, alongside the following actions of the Council, the Commission and/or the Member States:

- Promote international labour standards, notably as regards the ratification and implementation of fundamental labour rights and other ILO conventions;
- Promote the development of a social protection floor for all and employment policies, in particular with a view to the 2011 International Labour Conference;
- Ensure that trade contributes to improvements in employment and social inclusion both at global and at EU level, hence reinforce the role of EU trade policy and instruments as a key driver to promote decent work and labour standards through the integration of labour provisions in bilateral and regional trade agreements;
- Further advance cooperation with the ILO and in the relevant international fora, with a view to strengthening the social dimension of globalisation and improving policy coherence; enhance regional policy dialogues such as the UfM Euro-Mediterranean Employment and Labour Ministers Conference, the ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers Conference, as well as bilateral labour, employment and social policy dialogues between the Commission and many of the EU's partners, which have developed strongly over recent years;
- In particular, engage in debates with global partners on the employment and social impact of crisis and recovery, geared at placing employment, a job-rich recovery and poverty alleviation at the centre of national and global economic strategies; and develop exchanges of best practices on key employment policy issues, such as tackling high youth unemployment, better matching skills and labour market needs, tapping the employment potential of the transition towards a low-carbon economy, enhancing the role of social dialogue, developing Corporate Social responsibility, and ensuring the effectiveness of employment policies and the efficiency of labour market institutions;

- While respecting the competences of G20 presidencies, call for regular meetings of labour and employment ministers of the G20 in the run-up to G20 summits, to provide G20 leaders with strong and coherent messages on labour, employment and social matters and to ensure adequate follow-up.

To deliver on those commitments, the Presidency considers that the Council (EPSCO) should hold regular debates on the external dimension of EU employment and social policies, as well as on labour, employment and social aspects of other EU policies, especially trade and investment, development and migration. The Council should ensure that those debates are efficiently prepared at technical level by better coordinating the relevant working groups or, if appropriate, considering setting up an expert group on the external dimension of employment and social policies.

In line with the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Presidency invites the Commission to update in 2011 its report on the EU's promotion of decent work and to consider proposing a Communication on how to enhance the external dimension of EU employment and social policies taking into account the global momentum for developing the social dimension of globalisation.
