

Press release

Meeting of the ministers of the Troika with the European social partners and Social Partners

Brussels, July 7th, 2010:

On the eve of the informal meeting of the European ministers for Employment and Social Affairs, the ministers of the Troika (Belgium, Hungary, Poland), together with the European Commissioner responsible for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, László Andor, have met the European social partners and Social Platform.

For the Belgian Presidency, Deputy Prime minister and minister for Employment, Joëlle Milquet, led the discussion on employment, while Laurette Onkelinx was replaced by State secretary in charge of Social Affairs, Jean-Marc Delizée, for the social aspects of the Presidency's programme,

A. Meeting with the social partners

1. Joëlle Milquet, who chaired the meeting with the European social partners has declared in her introduction that « this is a key moment for the choices that have to be made on European level, both regarding the Europe 2020 Strategy and the future economic governance. For the Belgian Presidency it is essential to place employment at the centre of these two priorities and to take immediately targeted and ambitious measures, which cannot be restrained by blind and austerity measures that would be contrary to the deployment of the EU2020 Strategy ».
 - a. It is first of all necessary to prepare a policy of growth generating durable jobs by doping demand (training, work participation) as well as supply (cost of labour, job creation in new sectors, support to entrepreneurship).
 - b. It is necessary to place the employment policies, key factors of competitiveness, at the heart of the new rules of economic governance and of the macroeconomic surveillance by giving an essential role to the Epsco Council, in the context of drafting recommendations at the same time as those of the ECOFIN Council, before the future European Summits of the spring and in June, which will decide upon the future recommendations addressed to Member States.

The Belgian Presidency will launch the future strategies for the labour markets by tackling two major challenges which require new, strong, employment policies: green jobs and ageing. The Presidency has pleaded for a prudent and fased « exit strategy » regarding the crisis measures for employment.

The discussions with the European social partners have led to several conclusions:

- The European Union stands at a crucial point and the economic situation requires strong and urgent measures. A return to confidence and the creation of tools are essential to restore growth, generating decent and durable jobs. At the same time it is important to guarantee the sustainability of public finances through budgetary prudence, but without undermining the policies supporting growth, human capital, employment, and without precipitously withdrawing the crisis measures.
- Employment must be at the heart of policies and economic governance. Ambitious employment policies are needed, with a balance between supply (qualification and guidance) and demand (follow-up of the small business act, support to small and medium enterprises and creation of jobs in new growth sectors), taking into account the important challenges, such as education, training en mobility.
Also the role of Epsco has to be reinforced regarding the economic governance as well as the ownership of the social partners by strengthening the social dialogue as part of the future strategy.
- Flexicurity and the situation of the younger generation have to be emphasized: they can not be sacrificed and a set of adequate measures is required.
- With regard to the demographic challenge, everyone agrees that it is key issue, even if different solutions were raised.
- With respect to the climate challenge, the importance of green jobs has been highlighted.

B. Meeting with Social Platform

Jean-Marc Delizée who chaired the discussion with Social Platform added that “the main objective for social affairs will be to use all means available to improve the living conditions of all European citizens.”

For the State secretary “one of the biggest works of the Presidency will be the implementation of the EU2020 Strategy. The social aspects will have to play an essential role in that strategy, in order to answer today’s crises as well as tomorrow’s challenges. In June the Council has approved the target regarding poverty reduction. It also politically agreed with the employment guidelines, one of which (number 10) is devoted to purely social aspects. The European Commission will present its key initiative for combating poverty in October. There awaits yet still a challenge: this initiative should indeed act as a roadmap for the implementation of the social aspects of the Strategy.

We’ll also have to strive for a reinforcement of our social protection systems, and more precisely of our pensions, the latter being a key factor for maintaining social cohesion and stability. By the end of the year 2010 – European year for combating poverty – we will finally need full support of the social partners, in order to achieve a strong final declaration.

The representatives of Social Platform have pointed out following elements:

- the importance of article 9 and of using all potentials, a.o. in the budgetary context;

- the importance of taking into account the social consequences in the context of budgetary policies ;

- to ensure a conciliation between the economic targets and social cohesion, progress has to be made on the issue of the Social Services of general Interest ;

- the request of a regular follow-up on the new guideline 10 and on the ambitious policies to achieve the objective ;

- attention for the working poor, the dimension of increasing discriminations in a context of economic crisis, the need to increase the quality of employment in the sector providing services to people ;

- a special attention for the younger generation, the most vulnerable and non actives, such as the disabled and the elderly.