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Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

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NOTICE TO MEMBERS

(4/2009)

Subject: **EMPL - Delegation meeting with the upcoming Swedish Presidency
Stockholm - 5 and 6 March 2009**

Summary report

On 5 and 6 March 2009 an Employment and Social Affairs Committee delegation travelled to Stockholm to build up contacts with the upcoming Swedish Presidency. The visit started with a short briefing by the EP office in Stockholm and included meetings with the Ms Cristina Husmark Pehrsson, Minister of Social Security, Ms Eva Uddén-Sonnergård, State Secretary for Employment, Ms Maria Larsson, Minister for Elderly Care and Public Health, members of the Committees on Labour Market, Social Insurance and Health and Welfare of the Swedish Riksdag and representatives of the Swedish social partners.

Meetings with members of the Swedish government

The ministers stressed the particular environment of their upcoming Presidency. A financial and economic crisis which is volatile, the beginning of a new legislature following the elections of the European Parliament, the appointment of a new Commission and the uncertainties surrounding the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

The Swedish Presidency will concentrate on five overarching priorities, namely climate change, employment, competitiveness, the Baltic sea, European Neighbourhood.

In the context of employment and social affairs, the Swedish Presidency's motto will be "Social inclusion starts with a job". This motto expresses the determination of the Swedish Presidency to address the issue of increasing unemployment in a time of economic crisis. The

ministers stressed the importance of a competitive and open Europe, energy security and addressing climate change. The preparation of the post-Lisbon strategy is also high on the agenda of the Presidency, as it will have to address the added value of the strategy and ways to improve it.

The meetings with the members of the Swedish government in charge for relevant policy areas allowed the EMPL delegation to explore opportunities to cooperate with the incoming Presidency. MEPs shall be invited to participate to conferences organised by the Presidency, such as the "round table on combating poverty and social exclusion" which will take place in autumn.

The members referred to progress on ongoing dossiers, such as the working time, the employment guidelines, the revision of advance payments from the ESF and of the regulation for the EGF. The Ministers stressed the importance of social dialogue and the role of social partners in the context of labour relations and indicated that a consultation is taking place in Sweden following the ECJ rulings on Laval and similar cases elsewhere in the EU. This national process is expected to be concluded before the summer and on that basis the Government would consider what changes, if appropriate, need to be implemented.

The challenges of an ageing society and of healthy ageing shall be a focal point of a conference to be held in Stockholm in September 2009. The minister responsible for elderly care and public health stressed the implications of ageing for the national healthcare systems and the importance of securing "healthy and dignified ageing" for all citizens. She underlined the paradox of decreasing staff in elderly care while the population of elderly citizens is increasing. In this context, the Swedish Presidency aims to put elderly care more prominently in the EU agenda by having the EPSCO Council adopting conclusions in this area. The minister referred to the proposal securing patient mobility in the EU and indicated that she would welcome a speedy adoption leading to a possible first reading agreement.

The chair and the members stressed the broad consensus reached on this latter dossier and highlighted the importance of both increased mobility and transparency through a system of prior authorisation, which is already in use on the basis of the regulation 1408/71. However, the members also stressed that special treatment should be a matter for the individual member states to decide. They also referred to the need to pay special attention to the use of best practice, through the OMC, for combating poverty and to the use of all policy instruments to that effect.

Meetings with Members of the Swedish Riksdag

The meeting with members of the Committees on Labour Market, Social Insurance and Health and Welfare of the Swedish Riksdag, provided the EMPL delegation with an opportunity to be informed on the state-of-play of political debate in the employment and social affairs area in Sweden. The Swedish members addressed a number of issues, ranging from the revision of the Lisbon strategy to Roma exclusion. The focus of the discussion was on matters affecting labour and social policies, such as active inclusion, employment strategies, the posting of workers, measures to support families and children.

The EMPL Chairman also provided an overview of the employment and social affairs

dossiers currently dealt with at the European Parliament and introduced the Members responsible for some of them. An exchange of views followed covering the whole range of issues currently on the agenda of the EMPL Committee, including the directive on working time and proposals forming part of the recovery package (ESF and EGF). The meeting was very well attended by the members of the Swedish Riksdag who were very actively involved in the exchange of views.

Meetings with the Swedish Social Partners

The EMPL delegation also held separate meetings with representatives of the Czech workers' and employers' organisations.

The meeting with representatives of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprises and the Swedish Agency for Government Employers (SAGE), focused on the measures proposed in the context of the recovery package. The role of the structural funds and the recently established EGF was discussed. The follow-up to the post-Lisbon strategy is an opportunity to re-define the priorities and to look at both the content and the process. The exchange of views also touched upon the implementation of the EU legislation on the posting of workers and the consequences of the recent rulings of the ECJ in the relevant cases. The state of play of the negotiations on the WTD was discussed with particular interest on the topics of reference periods, the conditions for the opt-out, the on-call and the revision clause.

The meeting with the Swedish Trader Union Confederation and the Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees (TCO) provided the opportunity to hear their views on the important dossiers currently discussed at the EMPL Committee. The representatives of the Swedish trade unions insisted on the need for a balanced approach between the right for industrial action and free movement of services. They expressed doubts as to the possibility to keep the current system of collective agreements without a modification in the national law. In particular they pointed to a contradiction between the rules for public procurement, posting and the directive on TWA. Social partners expressed support for the position of the EP on the WTD although they criticised the too detailed nature of the directive itself.