



15.7.2010

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

(7/2010)

Subject: EMPL Committee delegation to Brussels on 22 June 2010

Summary report

On 22 June 2010, a delegation from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs visited the Palais d'Egmont in Brussels to build up contacts with the forthcoming Belgian Presidency of the Council. The delegation met Ms Laurette Onkelinx, Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health, and Ms Joëlle Milquet, Minister for Employment and Equal Opportunities. The Ministers outlined the Belgian Presidency's work programme in areas falling within the delegation's remit.

Meeting with Ms Onkelinx

Ms Berès pointed out that the Belgian Presidency would coincide with a very important period in the committee's activities, with the preparation of the guidelines on employment, which would need to establish concrete objectives, including specific figures, to be inserted in the 2020 strategy.

The preparation and content of the 2020 strategy, and in particular its social implications, were the main subject of discussions with the Minister. Ms Onkelinx said that she was not happy with the results of the European Council of 17 June in this area because they were not ambitious enough. She welcomed the objectives relating to combating poverty at EU level within the strategy, but believed that social inclusion objectives would need to be added.

She considered that a set of indicators should be prepared as a basis for the guideline for

achieving the headline target. She asked for the EMPL Committee's cooperation in this. The reports by Mr Öry on the guidelines and Ms Figueiredo on the minimum salary could contribute to achieving this objective.

In this connection, the Members mentioned the possibility of adding measures against child poverty as a new objective, as well as problems relating to interpretation of the criteria to be used and the lack of harmonisation of national statistics.

Ms Onkelinx was prepared to give a boost to the overarching social clause in Article 9 of the TFEU to ensure that it was genuinely incorporated into all new legislative proposals.

The Minister announced that a series of meetings, conferences and fora would be held during the Belgian Presidency on subjects such as child poverty, homelessness, social services of general interest and the open coordination method.

Ms Onkelinx answered questions on the stage reached by the anti-discrimination directive in the Council, measures to combat the energy shortages faced by the most vulnerable sections of society and the relationship between the directive on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare and social security regulations. On the latter issue, the Minister pointed out that there was no harmonised system of social security at EU level and that the implementation of the directive should never jeopardise the financial balance of Member States' social security systems. She added that genuine freedom of movement for patients at EU level was not possible without a prior convergence of national social security systems.

Meeting with Ms Milquet

The Minister said that employment would be one of the Belgian Presidency's priority issues and that the 2011 budget should include objectives in this area. The achievement of this objective would require measures to boost competitiveness and to promote education, vocational training and entrepreneurship.

Ms Milquet outlined the Belgian Presidency's short-term priorities, in particular measures to tackle the crisis aimed at stimulating job creation, assessing the impact of the existing measures to tackle the crisis and deciding how to gradually remove such measures once the economic and labour market situation so permitted. On the subject of long-term priorities, she mentioned the green economy and the creation of new types of jobs; ensuring longer working lives while guaranteeing good health conditions for elderly workers and catering for their needs; anticipating and guiding company restructuring measures and the transition towards low CO₂ economies; anticipation of new requirements as regards skills on the labour market and transitions *towards* employment and *in* employment; measures to combat discrimination, with special consideration for discrimination on the labour market. Seminars, meetings and fora would take place during the Belgian Presidency on some of these issues. Ms Milquet hoped that Parliament would be actively involved in all these areas.

The Minister expressed her wish to strike a new balance between the ECOFIN and EPSCO branches, at least as regards working methods. She agreed on the need to include a reference to green jobs in the guidelines and on measures to gear education towards labour market requirements. In this connection, Ms Berès stressed the need for consultation with the Council in order to ensure that Parliament's position in Mr Öry's report on the guidelines was taken

into consideration by the Council.

On the subject of legislative proposals to be discussed during the Belgian Presidency, the Minister mentioned the directive on pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, the directive on protection of workers against the risks arising from electromagnetic fields, the regulation on the application of social security regulations to third country nationals, the single permit directive and the directive on seasonal workers. Ms Milquet also undertook to seek to clarify the content of the directive on posted workers.

On the Globalisation Adjustment Fund, the Minister felt that steps should be taken to make the relevant criteria more flexible, to facilitate SME access and to guarantee the fund's long-term future.

Ms Berès thanked the two Ministers for giving of their time and for the information they had provided. She hoped that relations would continue to be fruitful throughout the Belgian Presidency of the EU and looked forward to their presence on 14 July at the EMPL Committee meeting to outline the Belgian Presidency's priorities in areas falling within the committee's remit.