

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA  
JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

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**REPORT**

on

**THE OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION AND THE EEA**

Co-rapporteurs: Mr Henrik CADUFF (Patriotic Union, Liechtenstein)  
Mr Jens-Peter BONDE (IND/DEM, Denmark)

*The deadline for tabling amendments to the draft  
resolution has been set for*

***Monday 12 November 2007, at 12.00***

*Amendments shall be tabled in English only and sent  
to the EEA JPC secretariat:*

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## 1. Introduction

1. The basic idea of the open method of coordination (OMC) is not to impose regulations, but to agree on common targets which the member-states are supposed to fulfil through their own means and through mutual learning and dissemination of best practice. The EEA EFTA States, the national parliaments and also the European Parliament risk to be excluded from policy-learning and –making under OMC if there is no special effort to integrate them and consult all parliaments. This is in contrast to the regulatory process, where the EEA EFTA States are secured certain participation.

2. The open method of coordination is an integral part of the Lisbon Strategy, covering a whole range of policies (social, employment, environment, education, research and others). The method entails a supplement to and a first explorative step of traditional regulations, directives and decisions which, given their EEA relevance, may also be incorporated into the EEA Agreement. With the open method of coordination extensive use of guidelines, quantitative and qualitative indicators, benchmarks and fixed timetables is made to achieve political goals. As members of the EEA, the EFTA States have long been involved in a number of initiatives. However, a large part of the Lisbon agenda is carried out through new inter-governmental mechanisms where the EFTA States have less access and where national parliaments and the European Parliament have no role. This process can also be seen as a major shift from the legislative to the executive function seeing as many steps in European integration are not followed by a legislative role for the European Parliament in the substance fields where national parliaments are losing powers.

3. The OMC is part of what has become known as ‘soft law’, which includes various types of policy instruments that share the characteristic of being not legally binding, and includes recommendations, communications (green and white papers), strategies, action plans, guidelines, codes of conduct, targets, benchmarks, co-regulation and self-regulation. As such the OMC is part of the Better Regulation agenda and while the co-rapporteurs welcome the overall aims of the Lisbon Strategy they draw attention to the fact that Soft law instruments are very controversial and constitute challenges for both the European Parliament and the EEA EFTA States. As regards the European Parliament, Soft law constitutes a shift from the unique Community model to that of a traditional organisation<sup>1</sup> thereby derailing the legal order in the EU and shifting the balance among the EU institutions, whereby the European Parliament sees its powers reduced. At the same time, the Soft law instruments, including the OMC, constitute a shift from the traditional regulations, directives and decisions which would be incorporated in the EEA Agreement. And as such, the EEA does not provide the EEA EFTA States with the necessary mechanisms for full participation in the important policy processes carried out under the OMC.

4. With this report and resolution, the co-rapporteurs wish to draw attention to these challenges and the underlying premises of the Open Method of Coordination; its

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<sup>1</sup> Report on institutional and legal implications of the use of ‘soft law’ instruments. Committee on Legal Affairs, Rapporteur: Manuel Medina Ortega, adopted on 28 June 2007.

application to specific policy sectors; the views of the European Parliament; and last but not least, the implications on the European Economic Area. At the latest EEA JPC meeting in Vaduz in June 2007, the Committee debated a working paper on Soft law which gave a valuable insight into the expansion of Soft law instruments and its implications. The European Parliament has followed up on the EEA JPC's working paper on Soft law and almost unanimously adopted the Legal Affairs Committee's report on 'institutional and legal implications of the use of soft law instruments', requiring the European Parliament to be consulted before the use of soft law instruments. Hence, the EEA JPC decided to focus its attention to one aspect of the Soft law debate – the Open Method of Coordination – which has a direct bearing on the good functioning of the EEA. The co-rapporteurs wish that the contents of the report will stimulate a debate on the current practice of Soft law in the EEA, especially the Open Method of Coordination, and hope that these issues can be further elaborated in the Committee's future work.

## **2. Background**

5. Through the Lisbon Strategy on Growth and Jobs, the OMC process has become an increasingly common tool to reach goals set by the Member States in the EU. Up until now, the OMC has mainly been applied to coordinate national policies. However, the new generation of EU programmes 2007-2013 are more closely linked to the OMC. From 2007, the new programmes are more complementary and interrelated with the OMC. This is particularly important for the EEA EFTA States, as they participate fully in 17 new EU programmes 2007 -2013, in areas such as research, lifelong learning, competitiveness and innovation, health, youth, culture, media, statistics, social solidarity, employment and consumer affairs.

6. The structural indicators used by the Commission to monitor and assess the progress for the European Council spring (or "Lisbon") summit shows the development both between the EU countries, but also compared with the US and Japan. There is a clear focus on EU Member States' performances. On some indicators, the US and the EFTA States perform better than most EU member states. The Commission could therefore benefit from looking at the functioning of framework conditions also in other areas. Third-country trading partners may have comparable benchmarks and valuable best practices from which to learn.

7. According to the World Competitiveness Scoreboard 2007 Luxembourg, Denmark and Sweden are among the most competitive countries in the world next to USA, Singapore, and Hongkong, with the EFTA members Norway, Switzerland and Iceland in between. The other EU countries rank between no. 11 (Austria) and 52 (Poland). Most new member states now rank higher than the least competitive old member states. However, the Lisbon goal for 2010 will still be a challenge for them. The average productivity per hour worked is almost the same in most of the old EU-15 as in the USA. At the same time the potential to catch up is much greater in the new member states, so productivity growth might not be a problem, if economic growth kicks off.

### 3. Social policy - a classic case of OMC

8. In addition to the economic policy goals of the Lisbon process the OMC was also developed in the fields of social protection and social inclusion. The Lisbon strategic goal included the aim of creating "greater social cohesion" and the implications of this were made more explicit in the Council's conclusions, which called for concerted EU level work (a) "to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty" and (b) on the future adequacy and sustainability of pension systems. Separate OMC-based processes were established in the two areas – known respectively as the EU Social Inclusion Process and the OMC on Adequate and Sustainable Pensions. They were based on separate sets of commonly-agreed objectives and separate timetables for reporting on and assessing progress. Work on each has progressed and developed at its own pace since then. The European Council subsequently sought to extend work via the OMC to a third area, to address issues related to the future of healthcare and long-term care.

9. Under the Open Method of Coordination as applied to social inclusion and pensions, OMC has involved: agreeing common objectives which set out high-level, shared goals to underpin the entire process; preparation of National Action Plans (NAPs) for inclusion and National Strategy Reports (NSRs) for pensions, in which Member States set out how they will plan policies over an agreed period to meet the common objectives; evaluation of these plans/strategies in Joint Commission/Council Reports; joint work on indicators to facilitate mutual understanding and measurement of progress and, where appropriate, target setting. The OMC has further provided a framework for exchanges of information and mutual learning. It has inspired conferences, academic studies and networking projects which use the common objectives as a basis to address policy questions. And, finally, it has promoted openness, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders, at European and national levels, as a means to better policy making.

10. Under the *PROGRESS programme*, the implementation of the OMC in the field of social protection and inclusion is being strengthened by the increased use of analysis and studies, the development of statistics and common indicators, and the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the OMC in this field both at national and Community level. The EEA EFTA States are participating fully in this OMC. The interaction between the OMC in this field and other policy areas is also evaluated through the organisation of policy exchange, good practice and innovative approaches, and promoting mutual learning in the context of the social protection and inclusion strategy. Awareness-raising, dissemination of information and promotion of a debate on key challenges and policy issues raised in the context of the OMC in the field of social protection and inclusion will include the social partners, regional and local actors, NGOs and other stakeholders. The aim is to develop the capacity of key European level networks to support and further develop Community policy goals and strategies on social protection and inclusion. The activities and implementation of the PROGRESS Programme will be coordinated with the Employment Committee (EMCO), the Social Protection Committee (SPC) and the High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming which are all part of the OMC framework in the employment and social affairs field.

#### **4. Environmental protection - OMC in the making**

11. Under the so-called Cardiff Process, various sectoral Council formations are required to integrate environmental considerations into their activities. The Council formations of agriculture, transport and energy; industry, development and internal market; economic and financial affairs; general affairs (foreign affairs and trade); and fisheries have developed Environmental Policy Integration (EPI) strategies. Although the Cardiff Process is not officially an OMC, some EPI strategies have certain characteristics which are similar to the OMC. However, the quality of the strategies and their implementation vary considerably among the sectors. This reflects the lack of institutionalisation of the Cardiff Process as well as the need to encourage structural reforms.

12. The fact that advanced Cardiff EPI strategies tend to lead to the ‘spontaneous’ development of OMC-type mechanisms as well as the recently introduced annual review of the Cardiff EPI Process would support an institutional recasting of the Cardiff Process as an OMC. In addition, EPI is becoming more and more advanced and the availability of methods and data for measuring goal attainment, comparing performances, benchmarking, assessments and peer reviews are improving. The energy and transport sectors are perhaps most similar to advanced OMCs. As illustrated in more detail below, for energy and other climate-related policy fields, the European Climate Change Programme (ECCP) has been developed as a formal mechanism for policy co-ordination across the different geographical levels of government and relevant sectors. In relation to transport, the Transport and Environment Reporting Mechanism (TERM), driven by the European Environment Agency, is a good example of indicator development, coupled with monitoring and reporting procedures.

13. Finally, the General Affairs and External Relations Council has established the Green Diplomacy Network, which aims to promote the integration of environment into external relations through the creation of an informal network of environment experts within foreign ministries, and through the use of the EU’s extensive diplomatic resources. According to the Commission, OMC-type mechanisms – sector-specific objectives, indicators and updating and review mechanisms - need to be further developed to promote EPI.

#### **5. Research and Education– a case of full EEA EFTA participation in the OMC**

14. One of the fields where the EEA EFTA States have taken active part in the OMC is the area of research and education, key to the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy.

15. The Lifelong Learning Programme<sup>2</sup> is linked to the Education and Training 2010 OMC, where the use and development of indicators has become an important component of European cooperation in the education area. Parts of the new Lifelong Learning Programme have been developed through benchmarking on these indicators, and it has

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<sup>2</sup> Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning

been claimed that the move from education to a lifelong learning concept was supported through an OMC process. The EEA EFTA States have participated actively in the OMC education cycles up until now, and have stated that they will continue to do so in the new programme. Norway has even chaired an OMC working group.

16. Within the Lifelong Learning Programme, several action lines support OMC education (Leonardo and the transversal programme). The Lifelong Learning Programme is more visibly linked to the political goals of the EU for education, and in particular the Lisbon strategy, than the preceding programmes. This is partly due to the idea of using the programme activities as a means to reach and develop these goals, in which the OMC plays a central role. The more visible link to the political goals is however also partly due to the internal simplification policy of the EU, as well as the re-adjustment of the budget to meet the demands of more transparency within the EU system. Together these processes have contributed to pull the development in the same direction. It's also important to note that 80 % of the programme budget is distributed at the national level to activities at a lower level, such as mobility and small projects.

17. The Seventh Framework programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7)<sup>3</sup> is based on the ambition of developing a European Research area (ERA) where the OMC plays a crucial part. FP7 includes calls supporting the OMC (ERA Net Plus, OMC Net). The OMC within the research area is in its 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle. The starting point is the use of the OMC in order to contribute to reaching the goal of spending 3 % of the GDP of the EU on R&D investments before 2010.

18. The first two cycles of the OMC dealt with relatively similar subjects, such as the cooperation between academia and industry; research and SMEs; Intellectual Property Rights, etc. The third cycle, however, involves new topics, such as links between research in FP7 and research in the Structural Funds, and internationalisation of R&D. A fourth cycle of OMC will be discussed this summer and early autumn.

19. The use of OMC within the research area is delegated to the Scientific and Technical Research Committee of the Council (CREST), in which all four EFTA States participate. Within the framework of this task working groups have been established. These groups produce reports on the results of the process, as well as recommendations and guidelines on policy initiatives both at the national and EU level. The EEA EFTA countries have participated in OMC from the beginning and at the same level as the Member States of the EU, through their participation in CREST. Norway has taken part in all but one of the working groups, and has also taken the lead in the working group on tax incentives for the R&D of the industry.

20. The Commission has initiated some activities to support the OMC work, using funds from the FP (OMC-Net). Within the OMC-Net EFTA actors have the same opportunity to present project proposals and apply for funding as actors from the EU

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<sup>3</sup> Decision No 1982/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 concerning the 7th framework programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013)

Member States. A challenge is the correlation between the FP initiatives and the task of the working groups under CREST. The Commission has suggested that the FP projects shall complement the working groups of CREST. Indeed, the objective of the FP7 action to support the coherent development of research policies (under the Capacities theme) is to “strengthen, on a voluntary basis, the coordination of research policies ... through actions supporting the implementation of the open method of co-ordination (OMC)”

## **6. An intermediate assessment of the OMC in the EU**

21. In principle, by focusing on policy outputs more than on inputs, the OMC aims to induce member states and EEA EFTA States to align their policies along the general political ambitions for EU and EEA development, rather than establish the precise mechanisms for achieving ‘closed’ goals. This output focus liberates the EU-EEA level from the typical skirmishes when deciding the nitty-gritty of policy-making. The aim of the EU indicators is to measure political outcomes, not the means by which they are achieved. The relatively large latitude at the national level in defining the precise management goals and instruments pursuing the goals is particularly interesting for welfare-related areas, where the large diversity of welfare state models (see example 1 above) has for long rendered the input focus of the classic Community method through binding law almost intractable.

22. When assessing progress towards meeting the Lisbon objectives, one should look at two different dimensions: countries’ progress since the strategy was launched and progress on a year on year basis. Regarding the first dimension, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden and the UK are the ones that achieved a better overall performance while Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal the ones that scored most poorly. However, this partly reflects the fact that the policies pursued in countries such as Denmark and Sweden largely inspired the Lisbon strategy. When assessing progress since 1999, one notes that Belgium, France and Greece score well, whereas Germany, Luxembourg, Austria and Portugal have been disappointing. A clear example is the rate of transposition of the Lisbon directives, an essential aspect of the Lisbon strategy. Again, according to the last report prepared by the European Commission in preparation to the Spring European Council, only 58.3% of the 40 directives that had to be transposed by the end of 2004 were actually transposed to national legislation by Member States, and only 7 out of 40 were correctly implemented by all Member States. The worst performers were France, Germany and Greece, which had rates varying from 42% to 35%.

23. Secondly, progress has not been uniform across all policy areas. Whilst there have been successes such as the single European sky, the deregulation of telecommunications to mention just a few, progress has been slow in other areas such as employment, capital markets, social protection and the environment. Progress seems to have been faster in policy areas where Member States have similar approaches but slower in areas where national preferences differ. While this may be inevitable, it suggests that the peer pressure system, created precisely to reduce these differences, has not had the expected

impact. This raises questions as to the suitability of the open method of co-ordination in areas characterized by strong negative externalities.

24. OMC is not really new in that the processes used – e.g. comparisons of Member state practice, benchmarking, setting indicative targets, guidance, reporting and review – are already an inherent part of the Community Method, in the environment field as elsewhere. OMC can in this sense be a valuable bridge to the Community Method, helping for example to clarify what legislation could contain. Furthermore, OMC can help to implement regulatory measures.

## **7. Principal questions raised by the application of the OMC over the past few years**

25. As indicated in the previous section, the Commission regularly endeavours to examine the contribution the OMC makes in achieving policy goals. The following set of questions could also guide the European Parliament in its assessments.

- How and to what extent has the OMC influenced or helped to advance the national policy agenda?
- Have recent reforms and policy initiatives benefited from experience in other countries?
- Is a reflection on the experiences of other EU-countries normally carried out in the process leading to the adoption of a new policy measure or important reform?
- Has the OMC been an efficient and effective method in view of achieving the common objectives that were established for it?
- To what extent has the OMC contributed to develop a common understanding of the challenges to the policies it is applied to in the EU?
- Has it also contributed to a greater convergence of policy responses?

26. The general impression today is that the OMC has made a useful contribution in many Member States both to mobilising stakeholders and to developing increased coordination across government ministries and between the national, regional and local levels of government. However, perceptions of the extent of this impact vary significantly between stakeholders and from country to country. Furthermore, it is often stressed that the progress that has been made is only a start and that much remains to be done. The impact tends to be stronger in those countries where certain policies such as environmental protection or social inclusion and protection were previously less coordinated and the mobilisation of actors (i.e. social partners and NGOs) was previously less developed. This applies especially to several of the new Member States.

27. Even in those countries where the process has had a significant impact there is a fairly widespread feeling that it remains largely hidden from public perception. Most Member States set up committees involving relevant ministries and agencies to coordinate the preparation of national action plans. The involvement of national parliaments seems to have been quite limited: a minority of Member States submitted the

plans to their respective parliaments. Most plans were formally approved by the government only.

## **8. The European Parliament and OMC**

28. In view of the above, in discussions on the legitimacy of the Lisbon strategy, much attention has been paid to the OMC, which appears particularly problematic given its bureaucratic character. In this respect, a greater role for the European Parliament is repeatedly advocated. However, no formal powers have been given to the Parliament in OMC. National authorities claim a leading role in the OMC. Given its decentralized character, it is at their level that “hard” decisions are taken, that financial resources are allocated, and that one decides whether or not to follow the path indicated by the Lisbon strategy. In the European Parliament’s Legal Affairs Committee report on soft law, adopted at the June Plenary, the rapporteur points to the inherent democratic deficit in the OMC and that the method should not be misused to replace the Community’s lack of legislative competence and in this way to impose de facto obligations on the Member States that are tantamount to legislation but arise outside the legislative procedures laid down in the Treaty. Moreover, the European Parliament’s report points out that in the context of the Community, soft law all too often constitutes an ambiguous and ineffective instrument which is liable to have a detrimental effect on Community legislation and institutional balance and should be used with caution. It is clear to the co-rapporteurs that policy aspects with strong externalities should be debated and decided at the European level, with strong involvement of the European Parliament. It is furthermore important that the European Commission makes a particular effort to guarantee transparency, visibility and public accountability in the process of adopting non-binding Community acts, as well as to increase the use of impact assessment in the decision-making process.

29. Steps should also be taken in order to reinforce the “open” character of the OMC. The active involvement of stakeholders and the EEA EFTA members is necessary to its success. Social partners and regional authorities should be directly involved in the definition of national strategies aiming at teaching the Lisbon targets. They should also be invited to contribute to the implementation of national strategies in the areas in which they are most directly concerned.

30. The OMC could function in certain cases as a precursor to EU legislation and hence involve the Parliament directly. This could happen in at least two ways: First, the OMC may help to define common objectives and a shared frame of reference among EU Member States in areas which were previously characterised by divergent interpretations and strategies. Aspects of the Lisbon Strategy may exemplify such as process. Second, the OMC could help to legitimise a (limited) shift of policymaking towards the European level by enabling politically influential domestic actors to participate. Efforts to engage the Social Partners in the European Employment Strategy (EES) process point in this direction. In both cases, the OMC offers a significant potential for improving contextual conditions - in terms of facilitating common understanding as well as democratic legitimacy - for the adoption of EU legislation.

## **9. EEA, the EFTA States and the OMC**

31. As shown above, the EEA EFTA States have participated actively in many OMCs. In particular, the OMC is a main tool in the new generation of EU programmes 2007-2013 in which the EEA EFTA States participate in. This constitutes opportunities and challenges for the EEA EFTA States, as these processes are not obviously EEA relevant.

32. The OMC processes in the EU programme areas are increasingly linked to the national reform programmes (NRP's) and subsequent reporting on the implementation of the NRP's and the drawing up of guidelines (for example in the areas of research, employment and innovation). The EEA EFTA States do not take part in the NRP's which the programme OMC's feed into. This constitutes an important challenge for the EEA EFTA States in their exploitation of the OMC processes.

33. The EEA EFTA States were previously denied access to certain OMC processes, for example in the youth area. Many of these OMC processes are now legally based in the new programme decisions and could therefore improve the legal basis for EEA EFTA participation, and strengthen their input.

34. Increasingly, the OMC processes are applied at national level in the EU Member States to monitor and evaluate main reform measures against indicators and further improve participation in the OMC processes at EU level. Awareness of the decision shaping potential of OMC could therefore be further improved on the EEA EFTA side by enhancing the publicity and information about the EU Lisbon strategy and the OMC.

## **10. Conclusion**

35. Cross-border comparisons of national practices such as those carried out in the OMC framework are not new. But such comparisons go further within the EU and EEA context than in other institutions such as the OECD because the EU and the EEA offer a political framework that is lacking in other international arenas. In that sense, the unique system of the EU – with its formalised cooperation and multilevel exchange of information and ideas – can turn out to be a competitive advantage, even without the existence of formal constraints. All EEA members should be aware of these possibilities.

36. So far, the history of open coordination has been short, and the experience of a few years has probably revealed as many weaknesses as positive results. In light of this, open coordination certainly does not represent a policy-making panacea. However, this does not mean that its inherent potential cannot be further developed and realised.

37. Lisbon was initiated in 2000 as an umbrella strategy grouping existing priorities and policies in order to establish greater coherence from the top. The launch of the first OMC generation was characterised by a significant amount of randomness. From a bottom-up perspective, much progress remains to be made in making open coordination an effective instrument of governance, both within the EU and with respect to EU-EEA

relations. In that sense, open coordination will remain a 'work in progress' and a 'laboratory of integration and association' during the upcoming years.

# **EEA JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE**

## **DRAFT RESOLUTION**

**on**

### **The Open Method of Coordination and the EEA**

The EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee of the European Economic Area:

- A. Recognising that the EEA EFTA States can bring valuable contribution to the exchange of information and best practices in areas of common interest under the Lisbon Strategy, while not formally part of the Strategy the EEA EFTA States share similar challenges to the EU in the face of globalisation and fully participate in core elements of the Strategy such as the Internal Market and EEA relevant EU programmes,
- B. Recognising that the use of ‘soft law’ in general and the open method of coordination in particular, constitute challenges both for the European Parliament and the EEA EFTA States,
- C. Having regard to the European Parliament’s Legal Affairs Committee report on institutional and legal implications of the use of ‘soft law’ instruments, adopted on 28 June 2007,
  1. requests that all use of the open method of coordination and other soft law instruments is approved by a majority of EEA national parliaments and the European Parliament;
  2. underlines that the use of soft law has become a recognised practice and is, under special, clearly defined circumstances, an appropriate instrument; believes that, in some cases, soft law makes it possible to respond swiftly to developments; considers, however, that, when soft law arrangements are drawn up, steps should be taken to ensure that they are flexible, afford the parties concerned the utmost freedom as regards enforcement, and serve to avert overregulation and red tape;
  3. expresses its concern that the open method of coordination constitutes a shift from the traditional regulations, directives and decisions which would be incorporated into the EEA Agreement and that the EEA does not provide the EEA EFTA States with the necessary mechanisms for full participation in the important policy processes carried out under the method unless there is a special effort to integrate them;

4. welcomes the fact that the EEA EFTA States participate fully in 17 new EU programmes 2007-2013 in areas such as research, lifelong learning, competitiveness and innovation, health, youth, culture, media, statistics, social solidarity, employment and consumer affairs;
5. underlines the importance for the EEA EFTA States to implement the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda;
6. expresses its concern that the open method of coordination has the potential to derail the legal order in the EU and shifting the balance among EU institutions, whereby the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice see their powers reduced;
7. regrets that progress under the open method of coordination, has been slow in areas where national preferences differ which suggests that the peer pressure system, created to reduce these differences, has not had the expected impact; and questions the suitability of the open method of coordination in areas characterised by strong negative externalities;
8. regrets that the positive impact of the open method of coordination remains largely hidden from public perception and that the involvement of national parliaments has been quite limited with only a minority of EU Member States submitting national action plans to their respective parliaments;
9. recommends steps to be taken to reinforce the 'open' character of OMC and underlines the importance of active involvement of stakeholders and the EEA EFTA States for the OMC to become a success;
10. regrets that the EEA EFTA States do not take part in the national reform programmes under the Lisbon Strategy which the OMC feeds into and which constitutes an important challenge for the EEA EFTA States in their exploitation of the OMC process;
11. welcomes that some OMC processes are now legally based in the new programme decisions and have therefore the potential to improve the legal basis for EEA EFTA participation and strengthen the EEA EFTA States' input;
12. encourages the EEA EFTA States to raise awareness of the decision-shaping potential of OMC by enhancing the publicity and information about the EU Lisbon Strategy and the OMC in particular;
13. underlines that the unique system of the EU, with its formalised cooperation and multilevel exchange of information and ideas, constitutes a competitive advantage and encourages all EEA members to be aware of these possibilities.