

# Renewed social agenda

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On the basis of a Presidency questionnaire, the Council held a public **exchange of views** on the social impact of the crisis, the employment situation and monitoring of the implementation of the Social Agenda.

All the delegations welcomed the Commission communication entitled "A European Economic Recovery Plan" and stressed the added value of an approach coordinated at European level. To prevent the economic crisis from becoming a social crisis, the delegations advocated employment support measures, taking care not to neglect social protection and to protect the most vulnerable in particular. In that context, several delegations stressed the advantages of the flexicurity approach for which the Council defined common principles (see *Council doc. 15497/07*) at its meeting on 5 and 6 December 2007.

The ministers also argued in favour of measures to reinforce **social cohesion**. The majority of delegations also supported reinforcing the open method of coordination for social protection and social inclusion. Several delegations considered that short- and long-term measures should be combined and stressed the importance of having the Member States continue with the reform of their social systems.

The majority of delegations supported the idea of facilitating payments by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund. Some delegations wanted a monitoring system to be set up to monitor labour market developments in the EU.

Many Member States outlined the measures taken at national level to deal with the economic crisis and advocated maintaining a balance between the European initiative and those national measures.

The presidency trio comprising Spain, Belgium and Hungary (the countries holding the EU presidency from the beginning of 2010 to mid-2011) requested the ESPCO Council to adopt conclusions at its next meeting on 9 March 2009 relating to the employment section of the European Economic Recovery Plan and wanted the **plan extended to include considerations on social protection and inclusion**.

In European Economic Recovery Plan, the Commission proposed to simplify the criteria for ESF support and to revise the rules of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund so that it can intervene more rapidly in key sectors, either to co-finance training and job placements for those who are made redundant or to keep in the labour market skilled workers who will be needed once the economy starts to recover. The Commission also asked Member States to consider reducing employers' social charges on lower incomes to promote the employability of lower skilled workers.