Report on a European Economic Recovery Plan

2008/2334(INI) - 16/12/2008

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 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.

The ministers' public debate followed on from the discussion on the effects of the crisis which took place with the European social partners at the Tripartite Social Summit on 15 October 2008.

The Council also approved the following opinions:

- the Employment Committee opinion on the "European Economic Recovery Plan" and the impact of the financial crisis on EU labour markets;
- the Joint Social Protection Committee-Employment Committee opinion on the Renewed Social Agenda;
- the Social Protection Committee opinion on the Commission communication: A renewed commitment to Social Europe: reinforcing the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (see COM(2008)0418).

The Council also approved the conclusions of the Social Protection Committee on the application of Community rules to social services of general interest. Moreover, it took note of the report by the "flexicurity" mission and several Commission initiatives:

- the Commission communication: a European Economic Recovery Plan;
- the document on new skills for new jobs: Anticipating and responding to the skills requirements of the labour market, which is to be adopted on 16 December 2008 by the College of Commissioners;
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the proposal amending Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 on the European Social Fund (ESF) to extend the types of costs eligible for a contribution from the ESF.