Social policy agenda: following the European Councils of Lisbon and Feira, Council of Nice, December 2000

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PURPOSE: To provide a Communication on the Social Policy Agenda. CONTENT: The Lisbon European Council identified a fresh set of challenges which must be met so that Europe can become 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'. This Social Policy Agenda forms part of the integrated European approach towards achieving the economic and social renewal outlined in Lisbon. Specifically, it seeks to ensure the positive and dynamic interaction of economic, employment and social policy, and to forge a political agreement which mobilises all key actors to work jointly towards the new strategic goal. At the heart of the Agenda is the modernisation of the European social model and the conversion of the political commitments made at Lisbon into concrete action. A wide range of actions are outlined in the Agenda: -some are targeted at realising Europe's full employment potential by creating more and better jobs, anticipating and managing change and adapting to the new working environment, exploiting the potential of the knowledge-based economy and promoting mobility; -others will centre on modernising and improving social protection, promoting social inclusion, strengthening gender equality and reinforcing fundamental rights and combating discrimination; -there are also initiatives devoted to preparing for enlargement and promoting international co-operation and making the social dialogue contribute to meeting the various challenges. While not all the actions are new, those which are on going have been refocused in accordance with the political directions give at Lisbon. A further innovation is that the open method of co-ordination, hitherto confined to the employment area, can now be applied to other social policies. This will ensure a more qualitative, and where appropriate, quantitative follow-up to agreed objectives and targets. The Agenda will provide key inputs for the annual synthesis report requested by the Lisbon Council.