Employment. Joint report 1999

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PURPOSE : presentation of a new report on employment measures in 1999. CONTENT : In parallel with its presentation of new employment guidelines for the year 2000, the Commission submitted to the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers a report on the employment measures taken by Member States to implement the 1999 employment guidelines. The main conclusions of the report are as follows: 1) Significant progress has been made across the Union, but it varies from one Member State to the next. For the first time since 1990, employment increased in all Member States, although the increase in Germany was negligible. Unemployment fell to 9.9% of the workforce in 1998 and the trend appears to be continuing in 1999. The fall in unemployment was similar for men and women; 2) Important structural challenges persist on the labour markets of the Member States: the EU employment rate is 61%, and still far below that of the US and Japan. The last four years of economic recovery have done little to improve the low rate of employment in the Union, in particular the employment of inactive pprime-age women and older people. The employment rate of women, at around 51% is still 20% lower than that for men. For older people in the age bracket 50-64 years, the employment rate amounted to only 47.6%. Long-term unemployment is still a serious problem because it affects 5.2 million in Europe; youth unemployment has fallen but remains too high with 4.3 young people unemployed in 1998; 3) The Member States respond to the challenges by adopting more preventive than active strategies, although Member States' approaches do differ quite widely; 4) The reform of tax and social security systems is under way but progress is slow. Radical changes are needed to ensure a transition from passive measures of benefits to active measures of support for employability; 5) Member States recognise the crucial role played by life-long learning; however, their commitment is inadequate and in many Member States there is a lack of practical objectives to offer continuing training for all those who want it; 6) The Member States mention a large number of initiatives aimed at improving entrepreneurship but the absence of clear objectives and deadlines, in conjunction with the lack of comparable indicators, makes it difficult to evaluate the results achieved, including the creation of jobs in the service sector: most Member States propose measures linked to the promotion of the information society and health services but progress is slow. Even if there hase been a reduction in administrative constraints in most Member States, important efforts are still required to make the taxation system more favourable to employment; 7) Greater progress is required in promoting adaptability, in modernising work organisation, an area in which the social partners have a particular reqponsibility; 8) Strengthened political efforts are needed in regard to the persistent problem of equal opportunities between men and women on the labour market: considerable progress needs to be made to reduce the gap between men and women in terms of access to employment, unemployment, and remunerations. The situation in regard to child care and the care of otherdependents also requires improvement; 9) The progress achieved in drawing up and using common indicators for commitments made at European level needs to be followed up and developed: much remains to be done in 2000 in order to arrive at an agreement between Member States on a common monitoring system; 10) The partnership approach needs to be further developed: the social partners need to play a role at local level via the national employment action plans. They still need to work on putting the guidelines into practice. Lastly, the report stresses the dissemination of good practices between Member States in terms of employment. There are 27 practical cases which constitute, for each one of the pillars of the guidelines, pilot or experimental examples of good practice in combating unemployment and promoting employment.