Promoting decent work for all

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PURPOSE: Communication on the EU’s contribution to promoting the decent work agenda.

CONTENT: This paper follows the ILO’s strategy on the decent work agenda. The agenda is based on an integrated approach covering productive and freely chosen work, rights at work, social protection, the social dialogue and the inclusion of the gender dimension. It therefore encompasses the “core labour standards” which form the minimum basis of social rights established by the international community and whose implementation the Union already supports. But the decent work agenda implies more: it seeks not only to guarantee a minimum basis of rights but also to tailor development to values and principles of action and governance which combine economic competitiveness with social justice.

Combining economic competitiveness and social justice in this way is at the heart of the European model of development. Playing an active part in promoting decent work forms an integral part of the European Social Agenda and of the EU's efforts to promote its values and share its experience and its model of integrated economic and social development. In supporting the promotion of the decent work agenda the Commission takes the characteristics and diverse nature of the economic and social situations across the world fully into account. It recognises the importance of a step-by-step strategy which will help partner countries to take ownership and is geared to the circumstances and priorities at national and regional level.

In this Communication, the Commission proposes strategies for ensuring that EU policy and action play a greater part in promoting the decent work agenda. These strategies involve strengthening cooperation between the European institutions, the Member States and all the relevant stakeholders. The EU could promote the agenda by sharing its experience with international organisations and developing a political dialogue with regions and countries outside the EU. The Commission has already introduced specific measures in this area, such as stepping up its cooperation with the ILO, implementing the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), developing the European consensus on development and initiating

dialogues on employment with the countries in Asia and Latin America. The Commission proposes the following:

- raising awareness in order to convince and mobilise more effectively: the Commission will work with the ILO, the UN and other organisations to explore in greater depth the problem of decent work, improve the capacity of the partner countries and develop appropriate indicators, i.e.:

- identify good practice and successes in the field;

- examine decent work in greater depth and the way in which it interacts with other policies;

- develop methodologies for measuring how decent work is affected by trade liberalisation and global production and distribution systems at global level, including in export processing zones; expand the pilot study under way with the ILO in order to measure the impact of trade on decent work;

- examine in greater depth the impact of trade on sustainable development (SIA);

- improve the link between analyses, operational activities and the planning of external assistance;

- promote a concerted approach between partner countries and regions in order to select priorities more effectively and harness external assistance.

- **harnessing the EU's external policies more effectively:** with regard to candidate countries, the Commission will support initiatives on:

- promoting trade union freedom and collective bargaining in order to enhance the capacity of the parties concerned to engage in autonomous social dialogue;

- improving labour administration, labour inspectorates and bodies for managing social protection;

- developing prevention strategies in the field of health and safety at work.

With regard to those countries covered by the European neighbourhood policy, the policy will help to promote decent work through:

- implementation of clear reforms concerning core labour standards, employment, social affairs and equal opportunities set out in the action plans agreed between the EU and the countries concerned;

- regular political dialogue concerning issues relating to the institutional structures established as a result of the partnership and cooperation agreements and the association agreements;

- implementation of the five-year work plan agreed as part of the Barcelona process which seeks to strengthen systems of social protection in the southern Mediterranean countries;

– inclusion of thematic planning and other aspects of cooperation in the strategy documents for each country and region; possible involvement of the countries concerned in certain Community programmes and cooperation with EU agencies, in accordance with arrangements which are still to be determined.

With regard to development cooperation, the Commission will support the following measures as part of thematic programming and the country and regional programming:

- integrate decent work into national and regional strategies to promote development and reduce poverty;

- gradual inclusion of the decent work objective in budget support measures;

- improve the capacity of the competent authorities and civil society organisations;

-development of small and medium-sized enterprises;

- involvement of the social partners and civil society in development strategies and in poverty reduction strategies;

- strengthening of external assistance for social adjustments in countries and regions outside the EU which are involved in trade liberalisation;

- promotion of policy coherence and cooperation with relevant international and regional organisations.

In addition, Regulation 2110/2005/EC imposes an obligation on those submitting tenders for contracts financed by Community assistance to respect core labour standards. The Commission plans to extend this provision to contracts financed through the European Development Fund. The Commission calls on the Member States and other donors to adopt the same approach.

Trade: the Commission will put more of its commercial weight behind efforts to promote social standards and decent work in bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations. In particular, it plans to:

- improve the link between the GSP, the GSP + and Community external assistance;

- take account of the social dimension, decent work and the recommendations of SIA studies in bilateral and regional trade negotiations (including the APE/EPA, the ACP countries, Mercosur, the Gulf Cooperation Council, MED and Central America);

- make use of EU policies and instruments, such as external assistance, to promote decent work in the context of an open system of trade;

- adopt the approach concerning the interaction between trade, social rights and employment which was presented in 2004 in the submissions to the trade policy review mechanism, and encourage other members of the WTO to adopt this approach;

- promote cooperation between the WTO, UNCTAD, the ILO and other relevant organisations.

The Commission also discusses in this paper the need to strengthen international and multilateral governance as part of economic and social cooperation, the need for better management of economic migration, and strengthening the capacity of the social partners and of civil society. It states that it will continue to promote corporate social responsibility, andcalled on businesses, the European Alliance for CSR and other stakeholders to take action to promote decent work for all.

The Commission will produce a report on the follow-up to this Communication by the summer of 2008.