Promoting decent work for all

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Regarding the Communication of the Commission "Promoting decent work for all - the EU contribution to the implementation of the decent work agenda in the world", the Council published a series of conclusions in which it gave its opinion of the Communication, and, at the same time, its interpretation of “decent work” in the framework of Community policy.

The conclusions may be summarised as follows :

Decent work in the EU: the Council felt that decent work must be promoted in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the EU in a socially sustainable way, to improve productivity and the quality of working life, life-long learning, good working relations as well as better reconciliation of work and private life. The policy must be implemented through combating gender discrimination and all other forms of discrimination in the light of Article 13 (TEC), as well as promoting the social integration of vulnerable groups. EU Member States have ratified a large number of ILO Conventions, including the Conventions on core labour standards. The Council emphasised the relevance of the Decent Work Agenda for EU candidate countries and the complementarity of certain ILO Conventions and strategies with the Community acquis. It also welcomed the Commission's commitment in its Communication on decent work to encouraging the ratification and application of the ILO Conventions on core labour standards, and other ILO Conventions that have been classified by the ILO as up to date.

Decent work and development cooperation: the Council indicated that the promotion of decent work for all across the world is one of the key means of fostering development, poverty eradication and social cohesion. Recalling the European Consensus on Development, it encouraged governments in partner countries to increase their efforts to create an enabling environment for private sector development and investment, the benefits of which include increased investments and employment for the population. The Council recognised in particular the need to promote country-led Decent Work Country Programmes through development cooperation – including policy dialogue on employment impacts of economic policies and governance, budget support measures and capacity building, in particular institutional capacity building. This must be well-coordinated between the European Commission, the Member States and other international development partners, as well as the international financial institutions. All those submitting tenders for EC external assistance funded contracts should respect core labour standards. This obligation should be extended to contracts financed in the framework of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement.

Decent work and trade related issues: the Council stressed that trade liberalisation plays an important role in helping to achieve sustainable growth, full employment, poverty reduction and the promotion of decent work. Highlighting the key role of the EU Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) in the promotion of international conventions on core labour standards and human rights, it welcomed the new GSP with its special incentive for sustainable development and good governance, and supported the improvement of the link between GSP and EC external assistance. There needs to be further development of methodologies assessing the effects of trade and trade agreements on decent work, including in global supply chains and export processing zones. The Council recalled that the endorsement of social objectives should not be used for protectionist purposes, since the objective is to achieve social progress across the board and to ensure that it is spread fairly for the benefit of all.

Cooperation with UN and ILO and other relevant actors: the Council supported the ILO initiative on Decent Work Country Programmes, and felt that the EU should encourage the worldwide ratification and implementation of the ILO Conventions, on core labour standards and other Conventions that have been

classified by the ILO as up to date, through technical cooperation and through support for the strengthening of the ILO supervisory mechanism. The EU should take the findings of the ILO supervisory mechanism into account more systematically in its own international relations.

Follow-up: the Council highlighted the importance of an effective and regular follow-up and coordination of the initiatives and actions to promote decent work for all, and welcomed the Commission's intention to produce a follow-up report to its Communication on decent work by the summer of 2008.