



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



6226/07 (Presse 23)

PRESS RELEASE

2786th Council Meeting

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

Brussels, 22 February 2007

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Main Results of the Council

The Council adopted the Key Messages in fields of Employment, Social Policy and Gender Equality, intended to be reflected in the Spring European Council conclusions.

The Council adopted decisions on the position to be taken by the European Community with regard to draft regulations of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, concerning the approval of:

- partitioning systems to protect passengers against displaced luggage, supplied as non-original equipment;
- motor vehicles with regard to the forward field of vision of the motor vehicle driver.

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 - Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
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Mr James PLASKITT

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Mr Vladimir ŠPIDLA

Member

ITEMS DEBATED

PREPARATION OF THE SPRING EUROPEAN COUNCIL

– *Key Messages*

The Council held a wide-ranging policy debate with a view to finalising its contribution (*Key Messages*) to the Spring European Council in the fields of employment, social policy and equal opportunities.

The debate was based, in particular, on the following documents:

- the Communication from the Commission: Implementing the renewed Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs: "A year of delivery" (5074/07);
- the draft Joint Employment Report 2006/2007 (6076/07);
- the draft Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (6097/07);
- the Commission Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2007 update of the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and the Community and the implementation of Member States' employment policies (6465/07);
- the report from the Commission on equality between women and men, 2007 (6205/07).

At the end of the debate, the President concluded that all Ministers fully supported the Key Messages paper to the European Council as prepared jointly by the Employment and Social Protection Committees.

He further noted that there was a general consensus on the need for more visibility of the social dimension in the framework of Community actions and that this should be kept in mind with a view to the second cycle of the Growth and Jobs Strategy being launched in 2008. Particular emphasis was given to the importance of social cohesion, priority being given to fighting the trans-generational transmission of poverty. The role of the social partners and of non governmental organisations in promoting social cohesion was also highlighted.

The Key Messages adopted by the Council and intended to be reflected in the Spring European Council conclusions are as follows:

"A call for delivery

1. The dual approach of partnership and policy reform that underpins the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs is **showing its positive impact** on labour market performance. The integrated nature of the strategy promotes policy reform on cross-cutting issues and joined-up responses. The objectives of strengthening competitiveness, increasing employment and improving social cohesion are equally important, interlinked and mutually supportive.
2. However, as there is still an urgent need to address the fact that 17 million Europeans remain unemployed as well as to create 20 million new jobs, **considerable delivery gaps need to be bridged**. To meet the Lisbon targets, further progress is needed to address the challenges of globalisation and demographic ageing. The common social objectives of the Member States should be better taken into account within the Lisbon agenda in order to make a decisive impact on social exclusion and poverty. The favourable economic outlook provides a **window of opportunity** to deepen reform and pursue the modernization of the European social model in order to ensure adequacy and sustainability, taking due account of gender mainstreaming. The social partners and civil society have a key role to play.
3. To proceed with the structural improvement of employment performance, Member States should enhance flexicurity as a method of facilitating adjustment and easing transitions; a lifecycle approach to work; opportunities for people at the margins of the labour market and investment in human capital. The country-specific recommendations will contribute to effective delivery in this respect. To further strengthen social cohesion, Member States should give priority to implementing comprehensive policies to fight child poverty, promote active inclusion, and modernize pension provision and health and long term care systems.

Better functioning labour markets

4. Fostering employment and productivity growth requires a better functioning of the labour markets and quality at work. This calls for comprehensive policies, which encourage the inactive to enter the labour market and increase the total number of hours worked in the economy, which reward work within the framework of modern social security systems and which facilitate restructuring and improve workers' adaptability and skills development.
5. **Flexicurity** should ease the transitions between different stages of working life. The internal and external components of flexicurity should mutually reinforce one another, so that at the same time the modernisation of labour law, investment in training and active labour markets, and the provision of adequate social protection and income security can take place in a context of modern work organisation. Flexicurity should also be conducive to addressing precariousness, reducing segmentation on the labour market, and combating undeclared work. The social partners have an important role to play here. The Commission Communication on flexicurity should be instrumental in preparing a range of flexicurity pathways to find the right mix of policies tailored to labour market needs.

6. A reinforced **lifecycle approach to work** should improve access to the labour market, and promote a longer working life and professional mobility over the life cycle. This should include the urgent improvement of the situation of young people on the labour market in the context of the implementation of the European Youth Pact; more incentives for active ageing and prolonging working lives; the implementation of the European Pact for Gender Equality, with a view to increasing female participation in the labour market. Stronger efforts must be made to reconcile work and family life of both women and men.
7. Due attention should be given to **people at the margins of the labour market** to avoid anyone being left behind. Making work more attractive than benefits should be developed through appropriate incentives to make sure that work and work transitions pay. A balanced approach could further consist of individually-tailored measures, appropriate minimum wages or targeted payroll tax cuts and the creation of the right environment for the provision of good quality jobs. More efforts should be undertaken to create opportunities for the low-skilled, for example through the development of the personal services market.
8. To achieve the goal of more and better jobs, effective and efficient **investment in human capital** is indispensable and a breakthrough in lifelong learning is required. Reaping the full benefits of innovation is built on accompanying learning. Recognition of non-formal and informal training is important in this respect.
9. Economic migration is an emerging labour market issue and may be relevant in alleviating labour shortages.

Strengthening social cohesion and modernising social protection

10. The integrated open method of co-ordination is starting to have a greater impact on the ground. Building on the findings in the 2007 *Joint Report on social protection and social inclusion*, Member States and the Commission should now explore ways to **enhance further the integration and visibility of the process**, its governance, and the mutual learning within it. The first plans on health and long-term care show that these areas too are well suited for policy exchange.
11. Priority must be given to **fighting child poverty** and giving all children equal opportunities. Success will require developing comprehensive strategies that address the different angles of the problem, such as quality education, low family income and parents' employment status, inadequate access to quality services, including decent housing, and often insufficient recognition of children's rights.

12. **Active inclusion** is a powerful means of promoting social and labour market integration through combining personalised labour-market support, skills development and accessible, high-quality social services. In order not to push those unable to work further into exclusion, more attention should be given to ensuring adequate levels of minimum resources for all, balanced with making work pay. Fighting social exclusion of migrants and ethnic minorities requires tackling educational disadvantages and developing language skills, but also fighting discrimination and promoting equal opportunities.
13. **Modernisation of pension provision** should take better account of new forms of working and of career breaks. The effects of reforms on pension adequacy should be monitored carefully to protect older citizens from poverty (notably older women), provide an adequate standard of living, avoid unforeseen pressure on public finances, and maintain the confidence of citizens. Occupational and private pension systems should ensure broad coverage and avoid creating obstacles for mobility both within and across Member States.
14. In spite of Europe's commitment to ensuring universal access to high-quality **health and long-term care**, important inequities remain. More effective and efficient use of resources is an essential factor in rendering healthcare systems sustainable, without abandoning high quality standards, and ensuring adequate coverage of the whole population. The ageing of the population means that some countries need to reform and properly resource their long-term care systems as well as put them on a sound financial footing. Win-win strategies could include improved coordination between healthcare and social services, the prevention and promotion of healthy life styles, as well as support for informal carers and exploiting new technology to help people stay as long as possible in their own homes.
15. With respect to the German presidency initiative for a European Alliance for Families, the importance of enhancing the exchange of views and knowledge on family-related policies is underlined."

– *Joint Reports on Employment and on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2006/2007)*

The Council adopted the 2007 Joint Commission and Council reports on Employment and on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and agreed to transmit them to the Spring European Council.

The two reports, which will be submitted to the Spring European Council, take stock of progress made and of that still to be made on the achievement of the objectives of the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs.

The Joint Employment Report is intended to contribute to the European Council's conclusions, on which the employment part of the 2007 guidelines will be based¹. It assesses the employment policy part of national reform programmes, addressing the following issues:

- *Progress in achieving the objectives of the European Employment Strategy;*
 - *Full employment;*
 - *Quality and productivity at work;*
 - *Social and territorial cohesion.*

¹ Under the heading "Employment", Article 125 of the Treaty provides that the Member States and the Community are to work towards developing a coordinated strategy for employment, the objectives of which it defines. The joint employment report, the recommendations to the Member States and the annual employment guidelines are all components of the European Employment Strategy (EES) launched by the European Council meeting in Luxembourg in November 1997. The annual EES procedure is defined in Article 128 of the Treaty: on the basis of a *joint annual report by the Council and the Commission*, the European Council shall each year consider the employment situation in the Community and adopt conclusions thereon. On the basis of those conclusions, the Council shall each year draw up *guidelines* which the Member States shall take into account in their employment policies. The Member States shall provide the Council and the Commission with *annual national reform programmes* on the principal measures taken in the light of those guidelines. On the basis of those programmes, the Council shall each year carry out an examination of the implementation of the employment policies of the Member States, and it may make *recommendations* to Member States. In addition, on the basis of the results of that examination, the Council and the Commission shall make a *joint annual report* to the European Council on the employment situation in the Community. Since 1997 the EES has been reinforced by initiatives taken at spring European Council meetings. At present, within the framework of a three-year cycle, the EES has three general objectives: full employment, quality and productivity at work, cohesion and an inclusive labour markets.

- *Implementing the priorities for action;*
 - *Attract and retain more people in employment, increase labour supply and modernise social protection systems;*
 - *Improve the adaptability of workers and enterprises;*
 - *Increase investment in human capital through better education and skills.*

The Joint Report on social protection and social inclusion is based on reports submitted to the Commission by Member States under the "Open Method of Coordination" (OMC) and covers social inclusion, pensions, and health and long-term care. It addresses the following topics:

- *Overarching issues facing social protection and social inclusion policies,*
- *Key challenges in the different strands of work under the OMC.*

– *Council Recommendation on the 2007 update of the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and the Community and the implementation of Member States' employment policies*

The Council reached political agreement on the Joint Council Recommendation 2007, with a view to its formal adoption at a forthcoming Council session following endorsement by the European Council. In view of the Recommendation's economic dimension, it would also be submitted to the Ecofin Council for political agreement.

In 2005, the Lisbon Strategy was streamlined. New governance structures were established, with a clear division of responsibilities between the Community and the national levels. As part of this, Member States drew up three-year National Reform Programmes.

The 2006 Spring European Council welcomed the Commission's assessment of the National Reform Programmes and urged Member States to implement them with vigour. It also identified four priority areas: investing more in knowledge and education; unlocking business potential, especially of SMEs; increasing employment opportunities for priority categories; and an integrated energy policy for Europe. In each one of these areas, it agreed a number of specific actions which it urged Member States to implement by the end of 2007.

In October 2006, Member States presented their first reports on the implementation of their National Reform Programmes. Based on these reports, the Commission has prepared the 2007 Annual Progress Report¹. It contains a detailed assessment of the progress made and takes into account the work carried out by the Council on selected themes.

In order to pursue the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs in a coherent and integrated manner, the Commission put forward draft country-specific recommendations concerning economic policies and employment policies in a single instrument, which also reflected the integrated structure of the National Reform Programmes and their Implementation Reports. It believes that using this instrument will help to cement the partnership between the Commission, the other EU institutions and the Member States which forms the basis for the renewed Strategy.

The proposed recommendations relate in particular to those issues which the Commission highlighted as deserving particular attention by Member States in its 2006 Annual Progress Report. In addition, the Commission has flagged up some key issues where progress during 2007 should be closely monitored.

In addition, the Council took note of the:

¹ COM(2006) 816, Part I.

– ***Communication from the Commission: Implementing the renewed Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs: "A year of delivery"***

The Commission presented its annual progress report on the national reform programmes, intended to be the key input to the conclusions of the Spring European Council.

Part I of the report, "*A year of delivery*", evaluates the process of drawing up national reform programmes and highlights a number of key initiatives for agreement at the European Council, recalling the four policy areas identified by the 2006 Spring European Council: investing more in knowledge and innovation; unlocking the business potential, especially for small and medium size enterprises; greater adaptability of labour markets based on flexicurity; energy and climate change.

Part II, "*Country chapters*", is a detailed assessment of the national reform programmes, pointing out their strengths as well as areas where they need review and updating by Member States.

– *Commission's 2007 Report on equality between women and men*

The Commission has submitted its annual report on equality between women and men, as requested by the European Council in Spring 2003. The priority fields for action in 2007 are:

- *The elimination of inequalities in the labour market;*
- *Finding a better balance of family and domestic tasks between women and men;*
- *The support for gender equality policies in the operation of the structural funds;*
- *The efficiency of the legal framework.*

– *Preparation of the tripartite social summit*

As part of the preparation of the Spring European Council, the Council was also briefed by the Presidency concerning the preparation of the tripartite social summit for growth and employment to be held in Brussels on 8 March, prior to the Spring European Council.

The main topic on the agenda at this year's meeting is the sustainability of Europe, in its competitive, social and environmental dimensions. A series of priorities for action proposed in the Commission's annual progress report: "*A year of delivery*" will require an active contribution from the social partners.

In the action areas knowledge and innovation, adaptability and flexicurity and better regulation/integrated impact assessment further progress needs to be made.

The task of the tripartite social summit for growth and employment, which was established by Decision 2003/174/EC¹, is to ensure that there is a continuous social dialogue between the Council, the Commission and the social partners at the highest level.

The troika (the current and two subsequent presidencies) of the Heads of State or Government and of Ministers for Employment, the President of the Commission, the Commissioner responsible for social affairs and delegations of the social partners meet before each Spring European Council to examine the components of the re-launched Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs.

¹ OJ L 70, 14.3.2003, p. 31.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN EUROPE

The Council held an exchange of views on *structuring the European debate on demographic change (5799/07)* and adopted a Resolution set out below.

Following the Commission Communication "The Demographic Future of Europe - From Challenge to Opportunity" (14114/06), presented last October, the Presidency aims at developing momentum at the European level, to cope with the historical change in the structure of the EU populations. This change covers the rapid increase in the number of people of retirement age, with all that that implies in terms of pension provision in many Member States, as well as a decline in the birth rate, and therefore, in the longer term, that of the working-age population, all having considerable social and economic implications. The speed at which these changes are taking place means that there is no time to lose.

The debate aimed at exploring how existing structures could support the efforts of Member States to cope with the challenges and opportunities they face and to discuss the possibility of developing a multi-annual approach, involving the next Presidencies, to deal with this issue.

The exchange of views focused particularly on the following questions (5799/07):

- *Do the Lisbon Strategy and the Open Method of Coordination represent a sufficient framework for supporting Member States in their efforts to cope with demographic change or is there a need to define complementary objectives, targets, and working methods in order to facilitate monitoring and the exchange of experience at the EU level?*
- *Does a multi-annual approach need to be developed to deal with issues linked to demographic change?*
- *Is the list of priorities (presented below) adequate to prepare for issues related to demographic change that may come up for discussion at EPSCO?*
- *Would it be useful to assess the progress made by the Member States in dealing with the issue of demographic change in the Commission's future Annual Progress Reports?*

The delegations unanimously welcomed the opportunity of such a debate on demographic challenges and opportunities at Council level.

The large majority of the delegations agreed that the Lisbon Strategy and the Open Method of Coordination provided the framework within which the Member States should operate and that no new structures should be created, rather there should be increased coordination between existing structures including also the reporting mechanisms.

Most delegations agreed with a multi-annual approach and supported the programme presented jointly by the German, Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies.

Furthermore, the delegations supported the priorities outlined in the Presidency paper:

- ageing: the contribution of older people to economic growth, employment and social development
- harnessing public policies, social dialogue and corporate social responsibility for family friendliness: a factor for business location and the mobility of families
- human capital: promotion of the potential offered by well-educated and highly trained women in the workplace, as well as of a higher employment rate for older people
- access to high quality care services both for children and the elderly,
- reconciliation of family life and work, including flexible working-time arrangements and care responsibilities for children and the elderly
- migration: better opportunities for persons with migrant backgrounds, in particular children and young people
- strengthening both inter-generational solidarity and the social and cultural commitment of all age groups
- the impact of demographic change on both local and regional infrastructure and social cohesion

A number of Member States also supported the Presidency's initiative for an Alliance for Families and underlined the importance of family-friendly policies that would encourage a higher birth rate.

At the end of the debate, the Council adopted the following resolution on the contribution of older people to economic and social development:

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL

- (1) RECALLING that Europe is in a process of significant demographic change, as was recently stressed by the Commission in its communication "The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity" dated 12 October 2006¹;
- (2) RECALLING that achieving the goals of the renewed Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and of the renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy, through a comprehensive policy mix, including action at the level of the European Union and national, regional and local levels, will both make a central contribution to coping with the consequences of the demographic change and enhance the quality of life of all EU citizens, as was also underlined by the March 2006 European Council²;
- (2a) RECALLING the Madrid International Action Plan on Ageing, adopted in April 2002 in the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing,³ which includes the recognition that persons, as they age, should enjoy active participation in the economic, social, cultural and political life of their societies as a main development objective;
- (3) RECALLING the Berlin Ministerial Declaration of 11 September 2002 "A Society for all ages in the UNECE Region"⁴, which underlined that older people make an essential contribution to society and thus need to be enabled to participate fully in all aspects of life by mainstreaming ageing in all policy fields;
- (3a) RECALLING the Opinion of the Social Protection Committee on the Commission's Communication: "The demographic future of Europe - from challenge to opportunity"⁵ which states that demographic change will have an impact on all aspects of the European Social Model and that the maintenance of social cohesion is crucial if Europe is to turn its demographic challenge into an opportunity;

¹ 14114/06 [COM (2006) 571 final].

² 7775/1/06 REV 1 CONCL 1, para. 73.

³ United Nations Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8-12 April 2002 A/CONF.179/9. <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/397/51/PDF/N0239751.pdf?OpenElement>

⁴ United Nations, Economic and Social Council – Economic Commission for Europe – ECE/AC.23/2002/3Rev.2; 11 September 2002.

⁵ 15140/06 endorsed by the EPSCO Council on 30 November/1 December 2006

- (4) RECALLING that demographic change can have very different structural and regional consequences and that these differences will have to be taken into account when any action is initiated;
- (5) WITH REGARD to the 18-Month Programme of the German, Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies endorsed by the Council on 11 December 2006¹, which describes the demographic change as a key issue over the next years, requiring action in a number of policy fields, and underlines that the contribution of older people to economic and social development should be one of the focal points of the overall strategy to be developed in the years to come;
- (5a) RECALLING that mobilising the full potential of older people is a key response to demographic change which should, however, be seen as part of a comprehensive strategy covering the five policy areas highlighted in the Commission Communication on the demographic future of Europe. This Communication stresses the importance of better conditions for Europe's demographic renewal, the need to raise employment levels and to boost productivity, the potential of legal immigration and the importance of sound public finances;
- (5b) RECALLING that EU's demographic change requires further efforts to allow men and women to have their desired number of children without having to sacrifice their career by promoting gender equality and by facilitating the reconciliation of work, family and private life, taking into consideration the role of the fathers;
- (6) RECALLING that the 50-plus age group is the part of the population which is increasing most rapidly in all EU states, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the total population, and to which the post-war baby-boom generation already belongs:

EMPHASISE that:

0. older people should be seen as active participants in society who have resources and potentials which benefit society as a whole. Society needs their knowledge, know-how and their contribution and they must not therefore be marginalised;
- 0a. older people make useful contributions to society, to the strengthening of cohesion between the generations and to the development of civil society, which may not be reflected in purely economic terms. This includes their social and cultural commitment and their family activities;

¹ 16541/06

- 0b. older men and women are a heterogeneous group with different abilities and needs depending on individuals' age, specific social, cultural and economic circumstances and health status, and that this diversity must be taken into account when mobilising the potential of older women and men or addressing their needs in a spirit of social cohesion and solidarity between the generations;
1. the increased ageing of the population is not only a challenge but also offers opportunities to improve the competitiveness and innovative abilities of the European economy and to promote growth and employment;
 2. responding to the needs of older people by making accessible specific goods and services to improve their quality of life represents new economic opportunities ("silver economy") which should be seized upon to enhance economic growth and create new jobs;
 3. the continued participation in working life of older workers can make a valuable contribution to improving the performance and productivity of the national economy which in turn is of benefit to all parts of society. This requires active age management and workplace development, improving well-being at work, maintaining workers' health and working ability, ensuring equal access to various high-quality health and social services, and updating the skills of ageing personnel by encouraging lifelong learning;
 4. [...]
 5. the knowledge and experience of older workers are frequently underestimated although teams and businesses of mixed age often demonstrate outstanding working results; the raising of the average age of actual retirement is therefore likely to have a positive economic impact;
 - 5a. older people should be encouraged to remain in employment and be offered continued employment opportunities, as well as opportunities for voluntary work. It is therefore important to improve incentives, eliminate obstacles for individuals for instance taxation and social security systems and to develop employment and social policies to take into account the challenges brought about by ageing;
 - 5b. Governments alone cannot take forward employment policies for older people; to do so they must co-operate with the social partners and have the support of the business community to promote the employment of older people;
 6. [...]

7. a positive image of ageing and of older people is extremely important for their full social, cultural and economic integration and participation, as well as for social cohesion in general;
- 7a. disease prevention, the promotion of a healthy life-style and lifelong learning enable the elderly to maintain their autonomy and to make a longer contribution to society's development.

CONSIDER IT NECESSARY that against the background of the progressive increase in the life expectancy of European citizens and in accordance with the objective set out in the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs, to increase the employment rate of older workers (55 to 64 years of age) to 50 per cent, every effort should be made to foster the active participation of older people in the labour market. At the same time CONSIDER IT NECESSARY that, in the context of the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, awareness of the economic potential of older people as consumers should be strengthened and consequently the development of the "silver economy" be promoted.

INVITE THE COMMISSION:

1. to continue to observe and to analyse the processes of demographic change and – as announced in its communication of 12 October 2006 – to report on the adjustment of economic and social structures to the needs of older people in 2008;
2. to continue to work on the opportunities and challenges of demographic change on a horizontal basis, so that the possible contributions of all policy areas may be considered when developing options to act;
3. to regard the first Forum on Europe's Demographic Future held in Brussels on 30/31 October 2006 as a starting point for a structured and sustainable dialogue both in and among Member States and to support relevant fora also at national, regional and local levels, thus promoting the necessary exchange of experience in dealing with the consequences of demographic change;
4. to take measures to enable the envisaged high-level expert group quickly to commence its work on demographic issues and to set out its priorities in a work programme;
5. to support the Social Protection and Employment Committees in dealing with issues relating to the opportunities and challenges of demographic change and to encourage constructive cooperation between them and the high-level expert group;

6. to take into account the growing and diversifying demand for goods and services for older people in the 7th Framework Programme on Research in order to encourage developments in this area and thus to increase the chance of Europe becoming a leading example of the "silver economy";
7. to take care that, on the basis of the possibilities offered by the European Structural Funds, appropriate financial support is granted to local, regional and national initiatives for adapting to and positively coping with demographic change;
8. to develop suggestions for the exchange of good practices in policy areas concerning older people, in particular in the field of the voluntary involvement of older people;

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES:

1. to respond to the needs of an ageing society and to create suitable framework conditions for opening new markets in the context of the "silver economy" in order to make better use of the opportunities for economic growth. This includes, in particular, the development of innovative approaches for activities which reflect different regional and national conditions and for which financial support from the European Structural Funds should be used;
2. to better develop and make the most of the potential of older people in contributing to the general well-being of society and to enhance the possibilities of active participation by older people. This especially includes avoiding stereotypes and promoting a positive public image of older people, which values them as partners with many years of experience, considerable economic strength and valuable professional qualifications. This could be achieved by working together with the social partners and stakeholders from the economy, science, civil society and the media and politics;
3. to facilitate access to knowledge and experience gained when coping with the consequences of demographic change, in particular to relevant studies and innovative approaches, and thus to facilitate the exchange of experience at European level; here, Member States may make use, in particular, of the experience of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions;
4. to establish partnerships, for example with industry, trade federations and chambers of trade and commerce and with older people's associations with the aim of encouraging the development of "silver economy" products and services;

5. to support initiatives at all levels that promote solidarity between the generations by encouraging the active participation of the elderly in society; the establishment of networks and the exchange of experience in respect of such initiatives should be supported with the aim of enhancing their spread and effectiveness;
6. to initiate, encourage and support, on the basis of the Commission Communication and in the light of the results of the first Forum on Europe's Demographic Future, a broad discussion process in action-orientated fora on demographic development at national, regional and local levels. Such fora should promote a constructive dialogue between representatives of politics, the economy, science and older people, taking account of international experience. Relevant outcomes should then be considered at future demographic fora at the EU level."

OTHER BUSINESS

The chairpersons of the employment and of the social protection committees informed the Council on the work programmes of the committees for 2007.

The Commission presented to the Council a Commission communication on "New Community strategy on health and safety at work 2007-2013".

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**HEALTH****Health Security Committee - Council Conclusions**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:

1. RECOGNISES that while health security and pandemic preparedness planning remain primarily a Member State competence, and that policy decisions on preparedness and planning are for Member States, it is necessary to enhance the coordination of national measures and to improve information-sharing and communication at European level.
2. NOTES the importance of ensuring an effective response and a high level of operational preparedness with regard to chemical, biological and radio-nuclear (CBRN) threats and pandemic outbreaks.
3. RECALLS Decision No 2119/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council setting up a network for the epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases in the Community¹.
4. RECALLS the Council Conclusions of 2 June 2004 on Community Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Planning².
5. NOTES the Commission's Communication on transitional prolongation and extension of the mandate of the Health Security Committee in view of a future general revision of the structures dealing with health threats at EU level³.
6. RECALLS that the Health Security Committee was established as an informal cooperation and coordination body by the Health Ministers and the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection in 2001 and that its terms of reference are to:
 - exchange information on health-related threats from acts of terrorism or any deliberate release of biological or other agents with intent to harm health;

¹ OJ L 268, 3.10.98, p. 1.

² 9507/04 (Presse 163).

³ 15561/06 SAN 244.

- share information and experience on preparedness and response plans and crisis management strategies;
- be able to communicate rapidly in case of health-related crises;
- advise Health Ministers and the European Commission services on preparedness and response as well as on coordination of emergency planning at EU level;
- share and coordinate health-related crisis responses by Member States and the Commission;
- facilitate and support coordination and cooperation efforts and initiatives undertaken at EU and international level and help and contribute to their implementation at national level.

7. AGREES TO:

- the Commission and Health Ministers prolonging temporarily the mandate of the Health Security Committee under the above-mentioned terms of reference, covering also pandemic influenza and generic preparedness and response planning;
- review the Health Security Committee's mandate within the general revision of the structures dealing with health threats at EU level, in any case at the latest within two years after the submission of the report on the achievements of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) to the European Parliament and the Council, as envisaged in Article 31 of Regulation (EC) No 851/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004¹.

8. CALLS ON THE MEMBER STATES TO:

- provide active support to the work of the Health Security Committee;
- ensure the appropriate follow-up at a national level to the issues raised at the Health Security Committee.

9. CALLS ON THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION TO:

¹ OJ L 142, 30.4.2004, p. 1.

- keep each other informed of developments, in particular ensure rapid information in a health-related crisis;
- continue to cooperate with the relevant international and inter-governmental organisations, in particular the World Health Organisation;
- facilitate technical assistance at an operational and multisectoral strategic level;
- work towards coordination and interoperability of their preparedness and response planning and their implementation of the International Health Regulations;
- facilitate regular meetings of the Health Security Committee at a high level and with adequate security clearance in accordance with Council Decision 2001/264/EC of 19 March 2001 adopting the Council's security regulations¹, on the basis of rules of procedure agreed by the Health Security Committee; and
- prepare for and participate in Joint Evaluation Exercises.

10. CALLS ON THE COMMISSION TO:

- ensure that the Council is fully and regularly informed of, and consulted on, the ongoing work of the Health Security Committee;
- keep the role of the Network established under Decision No 2119/98/EC under review and assess in particular the roles of the European Medicines Agency and the ECDC in this area;
- come forward as appropriate with a proposal for a long-term solution for the Community framework for health security taking into account the structures in all relevant sectors to ensure that work is taken forward in the most appropriate forum, avoiding duplication and supporting effective cross-sectoral collaboration."

¹ OJ L 101, 11.3.2001, p. 1.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Passenger name records data

The Council adopted a decision authorising to open negotiations for an agreement between the European Union and the United States of America on the use of passenger name records data to prevent and combat terrorism and related crime, and other serious crimes that are transnational in nature, including organised crime.

INTERNAL MARKET

Motor vehicles - Systems to protect passengers - Field of vision

The Council adopted decisions on the position to be taken by the European Community with regard to draft regulations of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE), concerning the approval of:

- partitioning systems to protect passengers against displaced luggage, supplied as non-original equipment (11523/06);
- motor vehicles with regard to the forward field of vision of the motor vehicle driver (11522/06).

The intention is for the Community to vote in favour of the draft regulations at a forthcoming meeting of the UN/ECE World Forum for harmonisation of vehicle regulations.

The main purpose of the UN/ECE regulation is to establish harmonised technical prescriptions, thereby avoiding the creation of technical barriers to trade in motor vehicles between the contracting parties, while ensuring a high level of safety and environmental protection.

The European Parliament gave its assent on both decisions on 1 February 2007.

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

Iceland - Trade in agricultural products

The Council adopted a decision approving an agreement with Iceland concerning additional trade preferences in agricultural products (6017/07).

The agreement is a result of bilateral negotiations undertaken on the basis of Article 19 of the agreement on the European Economic Area, which foresees that the contracting parties will continue their efforts with a view to achieving progressive liberalisation of agricultural trade between them.

TRADE POLICY

Agreement with Canada - EU enlargement

The Council adopted a decision approving the conclusion of an agreement with Canada, under the general agreement on tariffs and trade (GATT), relating to the modification of concessions in the schedules of the ten new Member States in the course of their accession to the EU (15655/2/06).

The Council also adopted a regulation on implementation of the agreement as regards amendments to Regulation 2658/87 on the tariff and statistical nomenclature and on the EU's common customs tariff (15656/1/06).

Antidumping - Asian countries - Polyethylene terephthalate

The Council adopted two regulations imposing:

- a definitive countervailing duty on imports of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) originating in India following an expiry review pursuant to article 18 of regulation 2026/97 (5722/07), and

- a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of certain PET originating in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and Taiwan following an expiry review and a partial interim review pursuant to article 11 of regulation 384/96 (5719/1/07).