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Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

Brussels, 6 and 7 December 2010

President **Ms Joëlle MILQUET**
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Employment and Equal Opportunities,
Ms Laurette ONKELINX, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health, and
Mr Michel DAERDEN, Minister for Pensions.

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Main results of the Council

Employment and Social Policy

The Council discussed the draft directive on **maternity leave** for the first time since the European Parliament adopted its first-reading position and took note of a presidency progress report on the directive on **equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation**. Ministers adopted two sets of conclusions concerning gender, one on the **implementation of the strategy on equality between women and men**, and one on the **fight against the gender pay gap**. Ministers exchanged views on **employment policies in the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Semester**, and adopted two opinions paving the way for the new governance structure under the European Semester.

During lunch, ministers discussed the **social dimension in the national reform programmes in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy**.

Furthermore, the Council adopted a general approach on a draft decision declaring **2012 as the year of active ageing**. Ministers adopted conclusions on the **social dimension in the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy**. They held a policy debate on the **future of pensions systems** and adopted conclusions on **adequate and sustainable pensions.** Ministers adopted a declaration on the **fight against poverty and social exclusion** to mark the closing of the 2010 European Year against poverty and social exclusion. Finally, the Council adopted conclusions on **social services of general interest.**

Health and Consumer Affairs

Ministers reached political agreement on the draft regulation on **food information to consumers**. They exchanged views on the follow-up to the **lessons learnt from the A/H1N1 pandemic**, and in particular on the joint procurement of vaccines and antiviral products.

During lunch, ministers exchanged views on the joint Economic Policy Committee - European Commission report on **health care systems in Europe**.

Furthermore, the Council adopted three sets of conclusions on:

- investing in **Europe's health work force for tomorrow**: scope for innovation and collaboration;
- **innovation and solidarity in pharmaceuticals**;
- innovative approaches for **chronic diseases**.

As "A"-items, ministers decided without discussion:

- not to accept the European Parliament's second-reading amendments to the draft regulation on **novel foods**, meaning that a conciliation procedure will now be launched;
- to mobilise a total amount of EUR 6.17 million under the **European Globalisation Adjustment Fund** (EGF), providing support for workers made redundant in Poland and Spain.
- to adopt a regulation allowing for the financing of investment projects in the area of **energy efficiency and energy from renewable sources**, by local, regional and national public authorities, in particular in urban settings.

With the exception of the lunch discussions and the "other business" points the whole two-day-meeting will be public can be followed, together with the press conferences, by video streaming at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/videostreaming.

[1]
- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (http://www.consilium.europa.eu).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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Ms Viviane REDING	Vice President
Mr László ANDOR	Member
Mr John DALLI	Member

ITEMS DEBATED

Directive on maternity leave

On the basis of a presidency progress report (*16509/10* + *16509/10 COR 1*) and a questionnaire (*16510/10*) the Council held a policy debate on the draft directive aimed at improving the protection of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding.

A very large majority of ministers considered that the amendments adopted by the European Parliament at first reading, notably the requested extension of the minimum maternity leave to 20 weeks on full pay, did not constitute an appropriate basis for negotiations. They expressed concerns regarding the cost implications and emphasised that a directive should set minimum standards while respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the diversity of situations in the different member states.

Many ministers were reluctant to include paternity leave within the scope of the draft directive on maternity leave, of which the main purpose was to improve the health and safety at work of pregnant women and workers who had recently given birth or were breastfeeding, and not to reconcile work, family and private life, which was covered by other EU rules. Some delegations, however, considered that the draft directive should also cover fathers.

Many ministers were open to the idea of including a "passerelle" clause in the draft directive, allowing the member states to take into account forms of leave other than maternity leave offered to the mother which fulfilled certain conditions.

Many ministers stressed the need to carefully reflect on the draft directive, and some of them called for a further impact assessment.

The Belgian Presidency concluded that the Commission's original proposal aiming to extend the minimum length of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks could be a more acceptable basis for a compromise than the European Parliament's amendments. It also stressed the need to examine this issue carefully, including with the social partners, in order to achieve a balanced outcome. The Belgian Presidency announced that it would consider how best to continue dealing with the file over the coming weeks, in coordination with Hungary and Poland, the two forthcoming presidencies.

This was the first time that the Council had discussed this issue since the adoption of the European Parliament's first-reading position on 20 October 2010 which asked that the minimum maternity leave be extended to 20 weeks on full pay (*http://www.europarl.europa.eu/en/pressroom/content/20101020IPR88388*). The last time that this draft directive was on the agenda of the Council was 8 June 2009, when the EPSCO Council took note of a progress report by the Czech Presidency *10064/1/09* + *10064/1/09 COR 1*).

The main objective of the Commission's proposal is to extend the minimum length of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks of which at least six weeks must be taken after childbirth. Other elements of the proposal include the principle of full pay during the 18 weeks, with a possibility for member states to introduce a ceiling that must not be below sickness pay; the right for women coming back from maternity leave or already during maternity leave to ask their employer to adapt their working patterns and hours; and the right to return to the same job or an equivalent post.

The proposal forms part of the Commission's work-life balance package which aims to contribute to a better reconciliation of work, private and family life. Another part of the package was a proposal for a directive on the equal treatment of the self-employed and their assisting spouses which was adopted by the Council on 24 June 2010 (*11299/10*) following a second-reading agreement with the European Parliament.

In this context, it should be recalled that on 8 March 2010 the Council adopted a directive extending workers' rights to parental leave from three to four months for each parent (*16945/09* + *5922/1/10 REV 1*). At least one of the four months cannot be transferred to the other parent (i.e. it is lost if not taken), encouraging fathers to take the leave.

Directive on the principle of equal treatment

On the basis of a progress report (*16335/10*), the presidency briefed the Council on the state of play in the discussions on the draft directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

In view of the complexity of the areas to which the proposal relates, and since there is no current prospect of achieving unanimity, the Belgian Presidency has opted for a different path to that of its predecessors and has gone for a targeted approach. It has focused on two areas: financial services and housing, its intention being to achieve greater clarity in provisions relating to the legitimate age-based or disability-based distinctions which are made in **financial services** (e.g. insurance, life assurance, loans, mortgages), and to draft more clearly the texts governing **housing**, for instance those relating to scope and to the meaning of "improvement".

The Commission proposal seeks to extend the protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation to areas outside the labour market (e.g. social protection, including social security and healthcare; social advantages; education; and access to goods and services, including housing).

Gender equality

Ministers adopted **two sets of conclusions** on gender equality. The first, entitled "Support of the implementation of the European Commission's **Strategy on equality between women and men 2010-2015**" (*16880/10*), welcomes the strategy and underlines its links with the Europe 2020 strategy. It makes the economic case for equality, which is needed to boost growth and employment, and is a prerequisite for reaching the headline target of a 75% employment rate for women and men. By adopting the conclusions, ministers also invited the European Council to adapt and improve the European pact for gender equality.

The new strategy replaces the Commission's "Roadmap for equality between women and men (2006-2010)", which was supported by the European Council of March 2006 in the form of a European pact for gender equality.

The second set of conclusions concerns the fight against **inequalities in salaries between women and men** (*16881/10*). By adopting the text, ministers emphasised the need for a more detailed understanding of the gender pay gap, which still averages 18% in the EU. The conclusions invites the member states to adopt or pursue a comprehensive set of measures to tackle the full range of causes of the gender pay gap linked to labour market inequalities between women and men, coordinating the actions of all relevant key actors, particularly the social partners, at all levels. Members states and the Commission are invited to take the necessary steps to monitor the gender pay gap and monitor progress on a regular basis by using *main indicators,* taking into account the methodology of the Structure of Earnings Survey (SES), considering *complementary indicators*.

Ministers also took note of a report prepared by the Belgian Presidency on the issue of the gender pay gap (*16881/10 ADD 1* + *16516/10 ADD 2*). Belgium also revised the set of indicators developed during its previous presidency in 2001.

Employment policies in the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Semester

Ministers exchanged views on employment policies within the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Semester.

This discussion was based on inputs concerning some of the Commission's flagship initiatives, the employment policy for a low-carbon economy, the impact of ageing on employment policies and the European Semester.

In the exchange of views, ministers who spoke focused on the implementation and monitoring of the Europe 2020 strategy and in particular on the European Semester. As employment policies and macroeconomic policies are interlinked, the work of the EPSCO Council will feed into the spring European Council by producing key messages on employment policies. It is important to coordinate the EPSCO Council's action with the activities of other Council configurations, inter alia the ECOFIN Council.

Delegations considered that the objective of aiming to reach a 75% employment rate for women and men by 2020 was central to the Europe 2020 Strategy. It was pointed out that special care must be taken of young people, women and elderly workers especially in terms of training schemes, which should coincide with the needs of the labour market.

On the **EU 2020 flagship initiative** "New skills and jobs", ministers heard a presentation by the Commission (*17066/10 REV 1*), as well as a presentation of the presidency conclusions on this initiative and on the flagship initiative "Youth on the move" (*16993/10*).

Ministers then adopted two sets of conclusions dealing with the two of the main challenges at the centre of EU 2020 policies, which are climate and demographic changes.

First, ministers adopted conclusions on "Employment policies for a **competitive, low-carbon, resource-efficient and green economy**" (*16992/10*), recalling that "green employment" has the potential to become a key growth segment of the future EU labour market, and calling for ambitious actions with the twin aims of stimulating employment in the green sectors (green jobs) and of ensuring the greening of all jobs. The conclusions seek to invite the member states and the Commission inter alia to better anticipate labour markets needs in particular in terms of green skills and restructuring processes, to ensure the quality of jobs created or transformed by climate change, to promote the greening of workplaces and to lower their ecological impact, to encourage ownership by all relevant labour market actors and stakeholders (i.e. the social partners, employment services, and training delivery bodies), and to explore the possibilities of making tax systems more employment-, environment- and growth-friendly. The conclusions also invite the Commission to propose further steps in 2011 with a view to adopting guidance for employment policies aimed at preparing the labour market for the transition to a green economy, and to investigate how the relevant European funds could meet the challenge of the transition to a competitive, low-carbon, resource-efficient and green economy.

Ministers also endorsed the Employment Committee's (EMCO) opinion on "The employment dimension of tackling environmental challenges" (*16514/10* + *16514/10 ADD 1*). This document calls for the full potential of the European Employment Strategy instruments, e.g. the Mutual Learning Programme, to be used, to make sure that "green jobs" are more than a slogan in the decade to come and to provide for a comprehensive set of up-to-date indicators (on green jobs, green skills, green workplaces, green transition, green labour markets and green growth) to ensure properly designed monitoring of reform measures aimed at addressing the employment aspects of climate change in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Second, ministers adopted conclusions on the **impact of ageing on employment policies** (*16506/10*) with the twin aims of ensuring better working conditions so that people are able to work longer and reaping the benefits of the jobs needed in the health and personal services sector (white jobs). The conclusions call upon the member states and the Commission to fight the stereotyping of older people by developing public awareness initiatives and to develop common principles for employment policies for active ageing based on a comprehensive approach in human resources policies, more investment in skills of older workers, and the provision of career guidance. They also call upon the member states to consider the adoption of action plans to support the development of member states' workforce policies in the care and personal services sector in the areas of training and education, working conditions and the attractiveness of these sectors, taking into account examples of best practice from across the European Union.

Concerning the **European Semester,** the Council endorsed a joint opinion of the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Social Protection Committee (SPC) on **the joint assessment framework and the employment performance monitor** (*16984/10* + *16984/10 ADD 1*) as was requested by the Council in October. This analytical instrument will allow efficient monitoring of the implementation by the member states of the Employment Guidelines and their progress towards the EU and national headlines targets of the Europe 2020 strategy, thereby reinforcing the efficiency of the European Employment Strategy in the new European Semester and the new governance structure.

As one element of the new governance structure, the Council will also endorse an **EMCO opinion containing the policy conclusions of the "light" country multilateral surveillance** that took place on the basis of the draft National Reforms Plans submitted by the member states in November. (*16985/10*). The opinion underlines the priority areas for policy reforms on the labour market: increasing labour market participation, promoting targeted activation and skills policies, ensuring sufficient education and training opportunities, facilitating occupational and geographical mobility, and the importance of policies directly contributing to job creation.

Social dimension of the Europe 2020 Strategy

Over lunch, on the basis of a presidency questionnaire (*17280/10*) ministers discussed the social dimension within the Europe 2020 Strategy, and in particular certain preliminary considerations drawn from the draft National Reform Programmes (NRPs).

The presidency summarised the discussion as follows:

– more attention needs to be given to better coordinating budgetary and fiscal policies with the social policies so that austerity measures do not obstruct social development; the role of social policies as a stabiliser in times of crisis was widely recognised;

– economic and social challenges need to be addressed together in the national reform programmes; Member states bear primary responsibility for employment and social policies; nevertheless the Social Protection Committee could provide support so that the NRPs take better account of social matters;

– there is not only a need for enhanced coordination between the relevant committees at EU level; it is also important that the social consequences of the policies conducted in other relevant Council formations be better assessed.

Year of active ageing

Ministers adopted a general approach on a draft decision designating 2012 as the European Year of active ageing (*16511/10*), pending the adoption of the European Parliament's opinion at first reading.

The draft decision is aimed to strengthen intergenerational solidarity by increasing awareness of the contribution of older people to society and by spreading innovative measures which could help to mobilise the full potential of the growing population in their late 50s and above. It seeks to stimulate debate and develop mutual learning between member states in order to promote active ageing policies, and it offers a framework for commitment and concrete action to enable member states and stakeholders to develop policies through specific activities.

Social protection and social inclusion

Ministers adopted conclusions on the social dimension in the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy (*16512/10*), encouraging member states to continue their work on the definition of national targets and policy measures to reduce poverty and social exclusion, and stressing the key role of the EPSCO Council in the European Semester in reviewing progress made towards the Europe 2020 target to promote social inclusion. The conclusions also seek to recall that the implementation of the social aspects of the Integrated Guidelines, in particular Guideline 10 concerning the promotion of social inclusion and the fight against poverty, is one of the prerequisites for achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and its headline targets.

The Council also took note of the executive summary of a joint report of the Social Protection Committee and the Commission assessing the social impact of the economic crisis and of policy responses (*16905/10 ADD 1*).

The future of the pensions systems

On the basis of a presidency questionnaire (*17082/10*) the Council held a policy debate on the future of pensions systems and adopted conclusions on adequate and sustainable pensions (*16513/10*).

The Council held an extensive debate on the future of pensions systems, in the light of the joint report of the Social Protection Committee and the Economic Policy Committee, after which it adopted conclusions about adequate, safe and sustainable pensions for all European citizens. Concluding the discussions, the presidency noted a general consensus on:

– the need to respect the principle of subsidiarity, taking into account the diversity of national systems,

– the fact that beyond this diversity, member states share common values and common objectives in this area,

– the need for a holistic approach taking into account the principles of adequacy and sustainability of pensions,

– the role of the open method of coordination on social protection and inclusion and the importance of appropriate indicators,

– the willingness of member states, despite budgetary constraints related to the financial and economic crisis, to ensure a decent income for pensioners.

By adopting the conclusions on adequate and sustainable pensions, ministers invited member states to inform future pensioners about their future public and private pension entitlements and to ease access to pension entitlements for individuals in atypical employment. The Commission and the member states were called upon to consider the consequences of the budgetary measures and the ongoing pension reforms, and to take into account their impact in terms of adequacy, safety and sustainability. The Commission and the EU countries should also collaborate on the development of methodologies allowing member states to assess the implications of pension policies on sustainability and adequacy.

In addition, the Council took note of the joint report of the Social Protection Committee and the Economic Policy Committee on pensions (*15886/10 ADD 3*).

The Commission published a green paper entitled "Towards adequate, sustainable and safe European pensions systems" on 7 July 2010 (*12102/10*).

Fight against poverty and social exclusion

Ministers adopted a declaration on "The European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion: Working together to fight poverty in 2010 and beyond" (*16435/10*), recalling the achievements of this European Year and outlining the challenges lying ahead. In adopting the declaration ministers argued for further development of the legacy of the European Year to combat poverty and social exclusion through the flagship initiative "European Platform against Poverty" and called upon the EU and its member states to continue their work together in the fight against poverty.

Social services of general interest

The Council adopted conclusions entitled "Social Services of General Interest: at the heart of the European Social Model", calling upon the Social Protection Committee to work further on this issue with the aim inter alia of preparing for the next Forum on social services of general interest. The conclusions invite the Commission to further clarify the application of EU rules to social services of general interest, in order to enhance their legal certainty. The Commission should also for instance outline its views on how to identify a social service as an economic or non-economic service of general interest.

Ministers were briefed about a Social Protection Committee document on a voluntary European quality framework for social services (*16319/10*) establishing quality standards which should be met by social services of general interest. They also heard an oral presentation by the Commission of its biannual report on social services of general interest, giving an overview of the initiatives taken by the member states to improve the quality of such services.

Food information to consumers

Ministers reached political agreement, at first reading, on a draft regulation on food information to consumers (*16555/10*). This new piece of legislation is aimed to ensure that food labels carry essential information in a clear and legible way, thereby enabling herewith consumers to make informed and balanced dietary choices.

One of the key elements agreed by the Council is the mandatory nature of the nutrition declaration: the labelling of the energy value and the quantities of certain nutrients (fat, saturates, carbohydrates, protein, sugars and salt) should become compulsory.

As a general principle, the energy value and the amounts of those nutrients would have to be expressed per 100g or per 100ml, but could also be indicated as a percentage of reference intakes. However, food business operators could also use additional forms of expression or presentation as long as certain conditions are met (e.g. provided that they do not mislead consumers and are supported by evidence of understanding of such forms of expression or presentation by the average consumer). Although all elements of the nutrition declaration should appear together in the same field of vision, some elements may be repeated on the "front of pack".

The Council also agreed that the labelling of the country of origin should, as at present, be compulsory if failure to do so would mislead consumers. Moreover, compulsory labelling of the country of origin would be requested for several types of meat (pork, lamb, and poultry), subject to implementing rules.[1] In addition, the Commission should submit within three years after the entry into force of the new regulation a report examining the possible extension of the compulsory labelling of the country of origin to other products (milk, milk used as an ingredient, meat used as an ingredient, unprocessed foods, single-ingredient products, ingredients that represent more than 50% of a specific foodstuff).

Furthermore, the Council agreed to exempt certain alcoholic beverages (such as wines, products derived from aromatised wines, mead, beer and spirits, but not alcopops) from nutrition labelling rules as well as from the indication of the list of ingredients. The Commission should, however, examine within five years after the entry into force of the new regulation whether this exemption is still justified.

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[1] Beef is already subject to compulsory labelling of the country of origin through a separate piece of legislation.

Non-prepackaged food would also be exempted from nutrition labelling, unless member states decide otherwise. Allergens, however, must always be indicated.

Finally, the Council fixed a minimum font size for the mandatory information on the labelling which, added to other criteria, such as contrast, is aimed to ensure the legibility of the labels.

The text of the political agreement reached by the Council will now be reviewed legally and linguistically before it is formally adopted at one of the forthcoming Council session as its first-reading position. The text would then be forwarded to the European Parliament for its second reading. The European Parliament adopted its first-reading position on 16 June 2010 (*http://www.europarl.europa.eu/en/pressroom/content/20100615IPR76127*).

Pandemic A/H1N1

Based on a presidency questionnaire (*16862/10*) ministers exchanged views on the follow up to the Council conclusions on the lessons learnt from the A/H1N1 pandemic adopted in September 2010, and in particular on the joint procurement of vaccines and antiviral products.

Recalling the weaknesses of the individual procurement of pandemic influenza vaccines and antivirals during the H1N1 influenza pandemic in terms of equitable access and purchasing power, many ministers argued in favour of the joint procurement of pandemic vaccines and antiviral medication. A large majority of delegations agreed that framework contracts that member states may enter into on a voluntary basis constitute the most suitable form for a joint procurement. It is expected that this would strengthen the member states' negotiating position in discussion with the pharmaceutical industry and ensure equitable access to vaccines. The need to further clarify some outstanding issues, such as the question of product liability and the compatibility with competition rules, before taking any decisions has been highlighted.

A broad majority of ministers also recognised the need for a common minimum coverage of pandemic vaccines and agreed that the vaccines for covering this common minimum should be delivered prior to all other additional orders and on an equitable basis. Ministers wished to target the common minimum coverage at strategic sectors such as healthcare workers, policemen and fire-fighters. The suggestions for such a common minimum cover rate varied between 2% and 20%, with many delegations stressing the need to take account of national specificities as well. Some delegation considered the definition of a common vaccination strategy as a precondition for setting up a common minimum cover rate.

The Council's attention has been drawn to the fact that an indication of the expiry date for vaccines can, if exceeded, further reduce citizens willingness to being vaccinated, even though the vaccines in question would still be safe and effective.

The Commission in charge of health and consumer policy, John Dalli, announced that the Commission would take work on a joint procurement scheme further in the Health Security Committee. With regard to the shelf life of vaccines, Commissioner Dalli said that he would ask the European Medicines Agency (EMEA) to continue working with the industry on this issue.

The discussion was a follow-up to the conclusions adopted on 13 September 2010 in which the Council invited the Commission, inter alia, to report on and develop, as soon as possible and no later than December 2010, a mechanism for the joint procurement of vaccines and antiviral medication which grants member states, on a voluntary basis, the right to common acquisition of these products or common approaches to contract negotiations with the industry, clearly addressing issues such as liability, availability and price of medicinal products as well as confidentiality.

Health care systems in Europe

During lunch, ministers exchanged views on the joint report of the Economic Policy Committee and the Commission on health care systems in Europe. Afterwards, the presidency drew the following conclusions in the formal session.

The member states' health security systems are currently facing different pressures, such as the financial crisis, the ageing population and the need to make expensive investments. Health should not be considered as a budgetary adjustment variable, and preventive health measures should not be regarded solely as expenditure, but also as an investment which may reduce expenditure.

The Commissioner in charge of Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli, emphasised that sustainability was not about cutting costs, but about higher cost-efficiency.

The ECOFIN Council taking place the same day as the EPSCO Council adopted conclusions on the joint report on health care systems in Europe (*16939/10*).

Europe's health work force for tomorrow

The Council adopted conclusions entitled "Investing in Europe's health work force for tomorrow: Scope for innovation and collaboration" (*16558/10*), inviting the member states to strengthen collaboration in forecasting future health workforce needs and to raise awareness of the importance of attractive working environments in motivating the health workforce. The member states and the Commission are called upon to develop an action plan to tackle the key challenges for the health workforce throughout the EU in the medium and long-term perspectives. The Commission should include training and education of the health workforce as a priority area and consider how to make the best use of EU tools for financing this.

The conclusions take into account the results of the conference organised by the Belgian Presidency in La Hulpe on 9 and 10 September 2010. The future of Europe's health workforce constitutes one of the presidency's priorities in the field of public health.

Innovation and solidarity in pharmaceuticals

The Council adopted conclusions on innovation and solidarity in pharmaceuticals (*16586/10*), calling upon member states to take initiatives to promote the rational and responsible use of valuable innovative medicinal products with a view to obtaining an optimal clinical outcome and an efficient management of expenditure. The European Commission and the EU countries should continue to work towards a stronger prioritisation in the allocation of resources for pharmaceutical research to increase the probability of valuable innovations. They should also give priority to revising the clinical trials directive with the aim of ensuring an improved regulatory framework for developing medicinal products. Furthermore, they should examine the possibilities of enabling an efficient cross-border exchange of clinical data, and take appropriate initiatives to establish interoperable registries, for instance on rare diseases. They should also examine how to facilitate availability to innovative medicinal products throughout the EU.

Chronic diseases

The Council also adopted conclusions on innovative approaches for chronic diseases in public health and healthcare systems (*16559/10*), inviting the member states to further develop patient-centred policies in the field of chronic diseases. The EU countries and the Commission are called upon to start a reflection process with a view to optimising the response to the challenge of chronic diseases. This reflection should cover inter alia health promotion and prevention of chronic diseases, healthcare, research into chronic diseases and comparison of chronic diseases at European level. The outcomes of the reflection process should be summarised in a paper by 2012.

The conclusions take into account the results of the conference organised by the Belgian Presidency in Brussels on 20 October 2010. Chronic diseases are one of the presidency's priorities in the field of public health.

Any other business

Employment and social policy

External dimension of employment policies

The Council took note of presidency conclusions on the external dimension of EU Employment and Social Policies (*16652/10*) calling for the promotion of international labour standards and the development of the social protection floor promoted by the ILO, as well as more international and regional cooperation on labour, employment and social policy, in particular at the G20 level. The presidency also briefed ministers on the second conference of the Union for the Mediterranean - Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour (*17042/10*) and on the third Conference of ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Employment ministers.

Legal immigration

The Belgian Presidency provided the Council with information (*16929/10*) on the following three files which are being examined in the Justice and Home Affairs Council:

- the draft directive on a single application procedure for a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a member state and on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a member state;

- the draft directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of seasonal employment;

- the draft directive on conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer.

The intra-corporate transfer and seasonal workers directives are currently being examined by the JHA Council. The Presidency gave information on the provisions of the directive which deal with important subjects for employment, working conditions, rights of workers or social protection, and emphasised the importance of the EPSCO Council in discussions about immigration directives.

The future of cohesion policy

Ministers heard a presentation by the Commission on the conclusions of its fifth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Summit for equality

The Belgian Presidency informed the Council about the conclusions of the Summit for equality (*17206/10*).

Policy on people with disabilities

The Commission provided the Council with information on the European Disability Strategy-2010-2020: a renewed commitment to a barrier-free Europe (*16489/10*). The Belgian Presidency briefed ministers on the state of play on implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol.

2010 report on citizenship of the Union

The Commission presented its 2010 report on citizenship of the Union.

Conferences organised by the Presidency

Belgium informed the Council about the outcome of the conferences held during its presidency (*17207/10*).

Health and consumer affairs

Pharma-package

The Commissioner in charge of Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli, expressed the Commission's willingness to modify its proposals concerning information to the general public on medicinal products for human use which are subject to prescription in order to take into account the concerns of the member states. The incoming Hungarian Presidency announced its willingness to address this file as a matter of priority as soon as the modified proposal has been presented.

European partnership initiative on healthy and active ageing

Commissioner Dalli informed ministers of this initiative (*17309/10*) and announced a public consultation culminating in the production of a strategy paper to be published next year.

"Legal Highs"

The Polish delegation drew the ministers attention to the rapidly increasing problem of legally sold psychoactive substances and called, supported by several delegations, for a joint preventive EU initiative to supplement the national measures (*17260/10*). Commissioner Dalli said that the Commission was ready to provide support to the member states and to develop a comprehensive solution for the problem in the EU.

Information on the conferences organised by the Presidency

Belgium informed the Council on the following conferences organised during its presidency (*17137/10*):

- health security: lessons learned from the A(H1N1) pandemic in 2009 - better management of future health threats (1-2 July 2010) (*16615/10*);
- investing in the health professionals of tomorrow in Europe: innovation and collaboration (9-10 September 2010);
- innovation and solidarity in the pharmaceutical sector (23-24 September 2010);
- innovative approaches for chronic illnesses in public health and healthcare systems (20 October 2010);
- reducing health inequalities from a regional perspective. What works, what doesn't? (8-9 November 2010);
- the challenge of dementia in Europe (25-26 November 2010);
- conferences on a Community framework for the environment and health;
- high-level conference on the assessment of EU nutrition policy (8-9 December 2010);

Information on international events organised by the Belgian Presidency

Belgium also informed the Council of certain international events during its presidency (*17264/10*).

Horizontal issues

Work programme of the forthcoming presidency

Hungary informed ministers on its work programme.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

EMPLOYMENT

Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Poland and Spain

The Council adopted decisions mobilising a total amount of EUR 6.17 million under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF), providing support for workers made redundant in Poland and Spain due to a decline in demand in their respective sector following the global financial and economic crisis. An amount of EUR 2.06 million is being allocated for dismissed workers in the Spanish textiles manufacturing sector, EUR 1.56 million is dedicated to former workers of the Spanish retail sector, EUR 1.42 million to dismissed workers from the Spanish manufacture sector of finished natural stone products, EUR 0.63 million to dismissed workers of the Polish enterprises SEWS Polska and Leoni Autokabel Polska, EUR 0.38 million to former workers of the Spanish enterprise Lear Automative and EUR 0.11 million to workers made redundant by the Polish enterprise H. Cegielski-Poznań and four of its suppliers. The support measures must be co-financed by the two member states and include, inter alia, training, professional orientation, job search and assistance for entepreneurship.

SOCIAL POLICY

Coordination of social security schemes - EU and Switzerland

The Council adopted a decision on the position to be taken by the EU in the joint committee established with Switzerland under their agreement on the free movement of persons as regards the replacement of annex II to that agreement on the coordination of social security schemes (*11632/10*).

AGRICULTURE

Novel foods

The Council rejected the European Parliament's second-reading amendments to the draft regulation on novel foods. This means that a conciliation procedure will be launched in accordance with article 294 of the Lisbon treaty. Once a meeting of a conciliation committee composed of representatives of both institutions has been convened, the committee has a maximum of eight weeks to find a compromise.

The main objective of the draft regulation is to stimulate the development and placing on the EU market of safe innovative foods and to ensure a high level of food safety and of human health protection.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

EU-Switzerland agreement on government procurement

The Council adopted a position to be taken within the joint committee of the EU/Switzerland agreement on government procurement with a view to updating the lists of contracting entities of the EU member states.

EU/Canada framework agreement

The Council authorised the Commission and the High Representative to open negotiations on a framework agreement with Canada.

The Commission will also negotiate, on behalf of the EU member states, those provisions of the future agreement that do not fall within the competences of the Union.

FISHERIES

Partnership agreement - EU and Solomon Islands

The Council adopted a decision on the conclusion of a Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the EU and the Solomon Islands. This decision concludes the negociations between the EU and the Solomon Islands on a fisheries agreement providing EU vessels with fishing opportunities in the waters over which the Solomon Islands has sovereignty or jurisdiction in respect of fisheries (*9335/10*).

Alignment with Lisbon Treaty - Technical measures in Baltic Sea

The Council approved a regulation amending regulation (EC) No 2187/2005 ase regards the prohibition of highgrading and restrictions on fishing for flounder and turbot in the Baltic sea, the Belts and the Sound. This regulation lays down specific technical measures for the conservation of fishery resources in the Baltic Sea, the Belts and the Sound. In particular, it provides specific provisions relating to size and type of all components of fishing gears, including mesh sizes, among other measures (*49/10*).

In the light of the Lisbon Treaty, the provisions regarding technical measures, and in particular the prohibition of highgrading and restrictions on fishing for flounder and turbot, have to be removed from the current regulatory framework establishing annual fishing opportunities and included in Council regulation (EC) No 2187/2005.

The European Parliament delivered its opinion on this text at first reading at its plenary session on 23 November 2010.

ENERGY

Ecodesign requirements for fans

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption by the Commission of a regulation implementing directive 2009/125/EC with regard to ecodesign requirements for fans driven by motors with an electric input power between 125W and 500kW.

The draft regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny, which means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

European Energy Programme for Recovery

The Council adopted a regulation allowing for the financing of investment projects in the area of energy efficiency and energy from renewable sources, by local, regional and national public authorities, in particular in urban settings (*51/10*). The total amount allocated to this financial facility is EUR 146.3 million which comes from unspent funds from the European Energy Programme for Recovery as established by regulation 663/2009, in line with the Commission declaration annexed to the regulation *(OJ L 200, 31.7.2009).*

Regulation 663/2009 established a programme to aid economic recovery in Europe by granting EUR 3.98 billion for 2009 and 2010 to projects in the field of energy, in particular gas and electricity infrastructure, offshore wind electricity and carbon capture and storage (CCS).

INTERNAL MARKET

Textile labelling

The Council adopted its position at first reading on a draft regulation aimed at reviewing the EU system for the standard description of fibres and the labelling of textile products *(13807/10, 13807/10 ADD 1 and 16705/10 ADD1)*. The Italian delegation voted against.

The adoption of the Council's first-reading position, which will be forwarded to the European Parliament for a second reading, follows an agreement reached within the Council on 13 September 2010.

The draft regulation is aimed to revise current rules on the use of textile fibre names, labelling, marking and determination of the fibre composition of textile products, with a view to improving the functioning of the internal market and providing accurate information to consumers.

In accordance with the Council position, the future regulation should also contain provisions to improve the system in order to:

- further harmonise the names of textile fibres and the indications appearing on labels, markings and documents which accompany textile products at the various stages of their production, processing and distribution.
- ensure that correct information is made available to consumers across the Union. The regulation will not prevent economic operators from indicating, in addition to compulsory rules on composition labelling and marking, the presence of small quantities of fibres requiring particular attention in order to maintain the original quality of the textile product.
- reduce the administrative burden for national authorities, by allowing a faster adoption of new fibre names to be applied simultaneously throughout the EU.
- lay down methods for the sampling and analysis of textile products that can be turned into European standards.
- reinforce legal clarity, by replacing the three existing relevant directives (73/44/EEC, 96/73/EC and 2008/121/EC) with a single legal instrument.

The new act will explicitly state the responsibility of manufacturers and importers in ensuring the supply of the label or marking and the accuracy of the information contained therein when placing a textile product on the market.

On 25 May 2010, the Council took note of the Parliament's opinion *(9905/10)*, adopted at first reading on 18 May 2010. It also took note of information from the Commission concerning the state of play of the inter-institutional work *(10120/10)*.

The original Commission proposal was presented in 2009 *(6095/1/09)*.