

BACKGROUND

Riga, 10 April 2015

Informal meeting of the Ministers for Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO)

Riga, 20-22 April 2015

A three-day informal meeting of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) is organised during each presidency. The meeting will be hosted by the Latvian Presidency and will take place at the National Library of Latvia on 20-22 April 2015.

MEETING OF MINISTERS FOR HEALTH

Health Ministers will meet on 20-21 April to discuss the development of EU policy on alcohol and nutrition and the role of EU in common health policy.

Working lunch: What do EU Member States need from the EU health policy? (20 April)

With a newly-elected Parliament, new President of the European Council and newly-appointed Commission, the European Union has opened a new chapter which will be shaped by all Member States.

Future EU health initiatives should be oriented as much towards the needs of the whole Union as towards the needs of each Member State. Diseases and other health-related threats have no borders and this must be borne in mind when discussing common solutions. A clear example of the need for coordinated action was the recent outbreak of Ebola that tested the world's public health emergency preparedness.

When discussing sustainable and efficient health initiatives, discussions on health promotion and prevention and management of chronic diseases cannot be ignored. Health promotion and prevention is the most cost-effective and efficient way of eradicating the causes of diseases and thus should be of common interest for all Member States.

Working Session I: Towards a new framework for EU alcohol policy? (20 April)

Alcohol is the third largest risk factor for disease and mortality in Europe as a whole and the leading factor in Eastern Europe. Despite substantial evidence of the effectiveness of different policies to reduce alcohol-related harm, this remains a serious public health concern in the EU.

Taking action at EU level would have a positive impact on achieving the targets and measures set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy and in the WHO European health policy framework – Health 2020.

Working session II: Facing the challenges of nutrition policy in the EU (21 April)

The major non-communicable diseases – mainly cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and mental health disorders – account for an estimated 86% of deaths and 77% of the disease burden in Europe. This growing burden represents a major challenge for health systems and economic and social development across Europe. In addition, in the past decades, changes in the average European's lifestyle have led to an increase in overweight and obesity.

Taking into account the above, the Latvian Presidency would like to initiate the discussions about the challenges of nutrition and food policy in EU by focusing on the following topics: the high intake and content of TFA in food, the high intake and content of free/added sugar in food, the safety and risk assessment of the use of food additives and, more generally, the significant differences between countries in the implementation of recommended measures, despite the evidence of their effectiveness for improving people's health.

Press conference:
Thursday, 21 April at 12:00.

MEETING OF MINISTERS FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL POLICY

The Latvian Presidency is organising the informal meeting of Ministers for Labour and Social Policy to address broad issues related to strengthening the role of social dialogue in European economic governance and other policy processes. The framework of the informal meeting is as follows:

- 1) Plenary session I “The role of social dialogue for inclusive growth”;
- 2) Two parallel workshops:
 - a) Workshop 1 “Existing and emerging challenges for social dialogue”,
 - b) Workshop 2 “Social dialogue and wage-setting – experience and recent developments”;
- 3) Plenary session II “Towards a true and responsible social dialogue”.

Plenary session I: The role of social dialogue for inclusive growth (21 April)

Inclusive growth is one of the three priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy which aims to achieve a high-employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The EPSCO Council recently identified the need to better involve social partners and civil society in discussions on how to improve job quality and ensure sustainable labour market inclusion while taking due account of job demand (Council Conclusions – Moving towards more inclusive labour markets, Council of the EU, March 2015). The Member States and the European Commission were invited to work together with social partners, within their respective competences, towards delivering inclusive labour markets.

Workshop 1: Existing and emerging challenges for social dialogue (22 April)

Various factors have contributed to the (at least partial) de-standardisation of employment relations which has posed a major challenge to the traditional actors in social dialogue.

A key characteristic of the European social dialogue is the own-initiative (autonomous) agreements that have to be implemented in accordance with procedures and practices specific to management and labour and the Member States. This mode of governance necessitates a functioning social dialogue at European and national level. Autonomous agreements constitute a demanding challenge for social partners who have to ensure their timely and adequate implementation and subsequent monitoring at national level.

Workshop 2: Social dialogue and wage-setting – experience and recent developments (22 April)

As outlined in the recent Council Conclusions, wages are a crucial element of job quality and workers' well-being that encourages labour market participation. Wages have to be looked at in conjunction with non-wage labour costs.

The European Commission has used its Annual Growth Surveys to highlight how wage trends influence the prospects for recovery by playing a role both in competitiveness and in aggregate demand. The crisis has led to the further decentralisation of wage-setting in a number of Member States.

Plenary session II: Towards a true and responsible social dialogue (22 April)

Whilst there is considerable diversity in the national systems governing social dialogue across the EU, a number of factors do appear to be of importance for effective social dialogue to take place – in particular, support from the public authorities, the autonomy of the negotiating parties and trust between the parties.

The EPSCO Council has discussed the involvement of social partners, including dialogue with EMCO and SPC as the preparatory committees for the EPSCO Council. A recent practice started under the Italian Presidency, whereby the European social partners participate directly in discussions at the informal meetings of the employment and social affairs ministers, has been welcomed by the European social partners.

Press conference:
Thursday, 21 April at 18:00.



Latvian Presidency
of the Council of the
European Union

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The handshakes, doorsteps, tour-de-table and press conference will be broadcast live on www.eu2015.lv.

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