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og deres stedfortrædere

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Til underretning for Folketingets Europaudvalg vedlægges formandskabets kommuniké fra det uformelle social- og ligestillingsministermøde i Norrköping den 21.-23. januar 2001.

23 January 2001

**INFORMAL MINISTERIAL MEETING OF  
MINISTERS FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL  
SECURITY**

**Norrköping, 21 {{SPA}}23 JANUARY**

**PRESIDENCY COMMUNIQUE**

1. The EU ministers for gender equality and the ministers for social affairs gathered in Norrköping on 21 {{SPA}}23 January 2001 for an informal ministerial meeting convened by the Swedish presidency. The 13 candidate countries as well as all the Member States of the European Union were represented. The candidate countries took part in a joint seminar along with the Member States.

2. The idea of interlinking two policy areas {{SPA}} social security and gender equality {{SPA}} and thereby providing a practical example of gender mainstreaming, informed the work of drafting the discussion papers and reports. This approach was confirmed by Ministers as a successful working method and as a concrete example of gender mainstreaming.

3. The Norrköping meeting was an important stepping-stone in the run-up to the Stockholm summit. The European Council meeting in Lisbon the previous spring, laid down a new, interlinked strategic objective for the Union, namely "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". Policies aimed at promoting equal opportunities between

women and men and modernising social protection were both cited as having an important contribution to the achievement of this objective as well as improving the quality of work.

4. Lisbon also established full employment as a goal. An intermediate goal was to boost employment rates among women from the current 51% to over 60% by 2010. The employment guidelines for 2001, endorsed at the Nice European Council, stress the importance of Member States giving attention to gender equality in relation to tax and benefit systems. The social agenda adopted at the Nice European Council also provided clear directions on the equality issue.

5. The Norrköping meeting provided an excellent opportunity for the two sets of ministers to sit together and discuss ways in which the EU could achieve these objectives and ensure that they were mutually supportive. It was clear that there were obstacles in our social protection systems to increasing women's participation in the labour market. On the other hand, increased participation of women would improve the sustainability of our social protection systems.

6. The informal meeting focused on the structure of tax, benefits and social security systems from a gender perspective and the elimination of unwarranted pay differentials. The reconciliation of work and family life against the backdrop of demographic change and as part of the post-Nice process was also an important aspect of the meeting.

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7. Gender equality and social security are important preconditions for higher employment levels and therefore of economic growth.

8. The EU is reinforcing its cooperation in the fields of social protection and pensions within the process of cooperative exchange on the modernisation of social protection. During the Swedish Presidency, the EU will strengthen its efforts to combat social exclusion and further promote the ongoing exchange of information on policies for safe and sustainable pensions. If we are to remove obstacles to women's participation in the labour market, it is vital to ensure that the gender dimension is fully taken into account.

**9. Increasing and improving women's participation in the labour market is essential to realize gender equality and constitutes a key factor in ensuring the future sustainability of social protection systems, since it can both help to secure the future funding base for these systems and reduce dependency on benefits. Inequalities in wages are often reproduced in inequalities in social security. Therefore equitable social protection systems require equal pay for equal work and of equal value. Job quality is fundamental to attract women into full work participation.**

10. Social protection systems should make it easier for women and men to engage in gainful employment. To enable women and men to reconcile work and family life, men must assume an equal share of the responsibility for the home and family. Equal treatment should therefore be realised in the context of modernised systems that have the promotion of gender equality as an explicit goal.

**11. Policy cooperation on the modernisation of social protection has been in progress for some years and has intensified since the Commission's July 1999 Communication A Concerted Strategy for Modernising Social Protection. Moving the process forward had previously been the responsibility of the High Level Working Party on Social Protection. In December the Social Protection Committee was formally established to serve as the main forum for conducting this cooperative exchange.**

**12. Given the importance of gender equality within the social protection systems, a gender equality perspective must be mainstreamed into the work of the Social Protection Committee. Data and performance indicators should show the impact of policies for women and men respectively and comparable indicators should be compiled and analysed in line with gender equality principles. A gender equality perspective must be included in the Committee's work. This can be achieved through analyses and by ensuring that each issue from planning stage to final decision incorporates and reflects their results.**

**13. With regard to meeting the Lisbon targets and, in particular, to the promotion of gender equality and sustainable social protection systems, ministers emphasised**

- the importance of mainstreaming the gender perspective in social security systems. On this basis, the ministers **invited** further analysis of the interrelation between gender equality and social security, of the impact of social security systems on gender equality and of ways of modernising the social security systems with a view to promoting gender equality,

- that the Social Protection Committee, working in close co-operation with other relevant Committees will mainstream gender equality both in its current work on the two priority areas of social exclusion and pensions, which have been its priorities to date and when taking up issues relating to the other social protection objectives cited in the Commission's Communication of July 1999, namely making work pay, which addresses the interface between social protection and the world of work; and ensuring high quality and sustainable health care.

- that the further analyses of the possible correlation between women's participation in the labour market and derived versus individualised tax- and benefit systems and of the impact of these systems on women's employment rates and economic growth could be a useful exercise and promote future discussions, while fully acknowledging that the design of social protection systems is the responsibility of the Member States,

- that, as a minimum, the objective of promoting women's employment, in quantitative and qualitative terms, calls for a renewed focus on ensuring that tax and benefit systems provide strong incentives to enter and stay in the labour market, while reducing the negative consequences on their future career and social protection due to temporary career interruptions. Ministers also emphasised that a climate of rising female labour participation provides the best possible context for the modernisation of tax- and benefit systems.

- that ensuring equal pay for equal work and work of equal value is an important step towards the future safety and equity of social protection systems, while social protection systems based on income reflect the consequences of pay differentials between women and men.

**14. Regarding the need to provide more and better opportunities to combine work and family life, an important factor for the well being of children, ministers recognised that**

- the responsibility for reconciling work and family life rests equally on men and women, that it is important to safeguard male and female workers' rights relating to paternity, maternity or the reconciliation of working and family life,

- a well adapted parental insurance scheme with reasonable benefit levels increases flexibility and makes it easier for women and men to work, and

- affordable, high quality child care services as well as services for dependant people are a prerequisite for the reconciliation of work and family life for women and men, and that the indicators developed during the French Presidency should be the basis for continued discussion.

- there is a need for increased provision of flexible working arrangements to help parents combine work and family life. The continuing contribution of the social partners in developing such arrangements is recognised in accordance with the provisions of the Employment Guidelines.

**15. Aware of the link between lower labour market participation among women and the wage gap, and in order to eliminate unwarranted pay differentials between women and men, meet the Lisbon targets, promote gender equality and sustainable social protection systems, ministers stressed**

- the need to make pay differentials between women and men visible in order to establish an informative basis for various steps aimed at shrinking the wage gap. A possible measure would be the establishment of targets for the elimination of the wage gap,

- that statistics on wages must be supplemented and improved in various respects to facilitate assessment of the wage situation at EU and national levels, that the development of indicators to gauge this trend should be considered, and that a multi-faceted approach involving the exchange of good practice and proactive measures, particularly at workplace level, must be adopted in order to eradicate wage discrimination, and

- the basic role to be played by social partners by means of social dialogue and collective bargaining in order to eliminate the wage gap between women and men in the labour market and to promote gender equality. To this effect, it is positively **assessed** the rising female participation in the management and representative bodies of social organisations.

- that an European Gender Institute could serve as an important tool in this context. The urgent need for a feasibility study to examine the need for an institute was reiterated.

- that there is also an urgent need to develop an effective structure to mainstream gender equality into all aspects of the Council, to monitor progress against indicators and focus on policies that can make a positive impact on gender equality.

#### 16. Ministers also **discussed**

the need for a clearer and more prominent role for gender equality issues and the integration of a gender equality perspective in the enlargement process, in view of the fact that women bear most of the hardships induced by the economic transition, and

- the need to boost women's participation in the new economy emphasising that education and training of women in the IT-profession should be improved and to encourage more women to start up new enterprises.