



13. november 2006

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## Referat fra EU finans- og økonomiministermøde (ECOFIN) den 7. november 2006

### **Dagsordenspunkt: Revisionsrettens årsrapport 2005**

Revisionsretten præsenterede sin årsberetning for 2005. Rådet tog præsentationen til efterretning. Rådet så frem til en drøftelse af Revisionsrettens DAS<sup>1</sup>-metodologi og til at fortsætte behandlingen af Kommissionens handlingsplan for bedre intern kontrol.

Danmark fremførte, at det er utilfredsstillende, at Revisionsretten forsat må afgive en revisionserklæring med væsentlige forbehold for gennemførelsen af EU's budget. Man opfordrede bl.a. Revisionsretten til at offentliggøre fejlprocenter for betalingerne samt til at revisionserklæringen prioriterede problemernes art, omfang og konsekvenser. Fra dansk side støttede man endvidere, at Rådet skal arbejde tæt samarbejde med Kommissionen og Revisionsretten for at sikre en bedre budgetgennemførelse.

### **Dagsordenspunkt: Statistik – statusrapport 2006**

Rådet vedtog konklusioner om Den Økonomiske og Finansielle Komité's (EFC) statusrapport om informationskravene i ØMU'en, *jf. vedlagte bilag*.

### **Dagsordenspunkt: Holdbarheden af de offentlige finanser**

Rådet behandlede Kommissionens rapport om holdbarheden af de offentlige finanser. Der blev vedtaget rådskonklusioner, der bl.a. fastslår, at de årlige holdbarhedsvurderinger af stabilitets- og konvergensprogrammerne skal baseres på rapporten og dens fremtidige opdateringer samt relevant information fra landene, samt at der skal arbejdes videre på metoder til at indregne aldringens effekter på også de offentlige indtægter, *jf. vedlagte bilag*.

### **Dagsordenspunkt: Alkoholbeskatning**

Rådet havde en drøftelse af Kommissionens forslag om at inflationsregulere minimumssatserne for punktafgifter på alkohol og alkoholholdige drikkevarer. Et flertal af medlemslande støttede Kommissionens forslag. Enkelte medlemslande var imidlertid skeptiske over for forslaget, herunder forhøjelsen af minimumssatsen for øl.

Det finske formandskab fremlagde et alternativt forslag, der ikke kunne opnå enighed om. Sagen ventes behandlet igen på ECOFIN den 28. november 2006.

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<sup>1</sup> Déclaration d'assurance (revisionserklæring)

**Dagsordenspunkt: Rejsegodsdirektivet**

Rådet drøftede med udgangspunkt i Kommissionens forslag om en modernisering af de eksisterende ordninger for rejsendes indførsel af varer fra tredjelande til EU det finske formandskabs kompromisforslag.

Der var generel opbakning til formandskabets kompromisforslag, men et enkelt medlemsland ønskede dog en højere beløbsgrænse. Sagen ventes drøftet igen på ECOFIN den 28. november 2006.

**Eventuelt: Fransk forslag om nedsat moms på elektroniske aviser**

Frankrig redegjorde for et forslag om at introducere muligheden for at kunne anvende nedsat moms på elektroniske aviser på linie med de trykte aviser. Rådet noterede sig det franske indlæg.

**Diverse:**

I margin af mødet blev ministrene præsenteret for indholdet i Kommissionens efterårsprognose og blev af eurogruppens formand kort orienteret om drøftelserne under eurogruppens møde den 6. november 2006. Derudover præsenterede direktøren for Den Internationale Valutafond (IMF), Rodrigo Rato, ministrene for sine overvejelser om den videre proces for justeringen af medlemslandenes kvote- og stemmefordeling i IMF.

Ministrene havde endvidere en dialog med EFTA-landene (Island, Liechtenstein, Norge og Schweiz) med særlig fokus på energipolitiske emner.

Under frokosten fulgte ministrene op på drøftelsen af EIB's eksterne lånemandat for perioden 2007-2013, senest behandlet på ECOFIN den 10. oktober 2006.

## Bilag

### Rådskonklusioner om statistik

“The Council endorses the 2006 EFC Status Report on Information Requirements in EMU, and in particular:

- WELCOMES progress made on the availability and quality of Principal European Economic Indicators (PEEIs) which enables a more timely and reliable assessment of the euro area and the EU economy;
- Recognising the positive developments and enhanced efforts by the National Statistical Institutes, CALLS FOR further improvements in areas where the implementation of PEEI targets, particularly related to timeliness and other quality features, has not yet been completed in the light of the original deadline of end 2005; and NOTES that progress should be achieved especially in the area of services and labour market statistics in the context of the objective of an overall reduction in the administrative burden;
- WELCOMES the promising findings on best national practices for producing high quality PEEIs to enable further improvements in timeliness, coverage, consistency and other quality features of statistics both at European and national level; and INVITES Member States to undertake concrete steps to implement earlier estimates benefiting from other Member States' experience; and
- WELCOMES the improvements and timeline required for the PEEIs and CALLS FOR a closer coordination of national statistics on processes as identified in the ECOFIN conclusions of 8 November 2005 and as specified further in the recommendations of the 2006 EFC Status Report;
- INVITES Eurostat and the ECB to review progress achieved as well as on the main outstanding issues concerning the implementation of the EMU Action Plan by Autumn 2007, and the EFC to prepare a new Status Report in 2007; and NOTES that high quality statistics are needed for structural analyses of economic policy and progress in this area should also be reviewed in 2007.

The Council furthermore:

- NOTES that ways should be considered to ensure a coherent approach as regards the public communication of major statistical revisions in Member States and, to this end, INVITES the Committee for Monetary, Financial and Balance of Payments statistics (CMFB), by mid-2007, to examine this issue and put forward a proposal;
- NOTES that important progress has been made during the past year by Eurostat in providing advice to Member States on planned transactions;

and WELCOMES the recent guidelines for ex ante advice by Eurostat, as well as the fact that timetables for consultation are being clarified in the CMFB procedure; and

- LOOKS FORWARD to the forthcoming Commission Communication for a strategic approach on the reduction the statistical burden and will RECALL this issue at its forthcoming meeting.”

## **Rådskonklusioner om holdbarheden af de offentlige finanser**

“The Council welcomes the Commission's comprehensive sustainability assessment of Member States' public finances, on the basis of the new age-related expenditure projections, released in February 2006, for pensions, health care, long-term care, education and unemployment transfers for the period 2004 to 2050.

The Council notes that several Member States have implemented structural reforms in recent years, allowing for a reduction of the projected increase in age-related expenditure and thus contributing to long-term sustainability. Other countries are in the process of doing so, which is welcome. Ensuring sustainability of public finances remains a major challenge and EU Member States are encouraged to undertake further substantial reforms to address this where needed. Delaying further policy action could be costly.

In the Commission's assessment, based on a no-policy-change scenario, the EU-wide sustainability gap, i.e. the gap between the structural budgetary position in 2005 and a sustainable budgetary position, stood at about 3½% of GDP and would lead to an EU-wide debt-to-GDP ratio of almost 200% of GDP in 2050. In the absence of further reforms and relying only on fiscal adjustment to ensure sustainability of public finances would mean that the 2% of GDP structural deficit observed in the EU in 2005 should be transformed into a surplus of 1½% of GDP.

Even before considering the impact of ageing populations, the initial budgetary position in about half of the Member States is not sufficiently strong and contributes in itself to the risks of unsustainable public finances. On the assumption that the medium-term budgetary objectives (MTO) are attained in 2010 by all Member States, the EU-wide sustainability gap would be more than halved, to 1½ % of GDP, and the debt-to GDP ratio brought to 80% of GDP. This would be an important step, but it is not sufficient.

This points to the need for further structural reforms and/or budgetary consolidation, in line with the three-pronged strategy to ensure sustainability decided by the Stockholm European Council in 2001, i.e. (i) reducing debt at a fast pace; (ii) raising employment rates and productivity; and, (iii) reviewing and, where appropriate, reforming pension, health care and long-term care systems.

There are however large variations between Member States, both in terms of risks and appropriate policy responses. The Council notes that: the appropriate combination of policies in the threepronged strategy will depend on the reasons behind the sustainability challenges and Member States' policy priorities. In this respect, the Council considers that the risk categorisation used in the sustainability report, introduced in the last round of assessments of Stability and Convergence Programmes, provides an important tool to assess the sustainability challenges that Member States are facing.

The Council:

- will continue to assess developments of the sustainability of public finances in the Member States in the context of the annual examination of the Stability and Convergence Programmes;
- considers that the multi-annual assessment by the Commission, the sustainability report, updated with missing data from several countries, should be the basis for the annual examination of the Stability and Convergence programmes, while taking into account all other relevant information given in the programmes, including the starting budgetary positions. A new sustainability report should be prepared by the Commission when new common age-related expenditure projections become available in 2009;
- invites the EPC and the Commission to explore further improvements in the methodology in dealing with the impact of ageing on government revenues over the long-term, including the feasibility and value-added of more detailed projections.”