

"Making decent work a global and national reality"
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I would like to thank the organisers for this timely initiative. The affirmation of decent work as a global goal and the recognition by the United Nations Summit of September 2005 of its great potential for contributing to development is of key importance. The European Union has actively supported the uptake of decent work as a global goal by the UN.

The effective and operational implementation of this goal at national, regional and international level should now be our joint priority. It is not sustainable that over half of the world population has no social protection at all and is by definition confronted with a major decent work deficit. Many persons covered by social protection are not adequately protected. This affects in particular social security, health and safety at work, labour inspection and working conditions.

The European Commission welcomes the recent mobilisation on decent work both by a growing number of international and regional institutions, initiatives and actors and by more and more countries. However much remains to be done in order ensure that decent work becomes a reality for all. .

I would like to concentrate my intervention on some issues related to the way forward towards promoting decent work:

1. Decent work as part of the European Social Agenda and of the social dimension of globalisation
2. The integrated approach to decent work is in line with the EU economic and social model of development
3. Promoting decent work in EU external policies and relations
4. The EU decent work roadmap and the social dimension of regional integration
5. Strengthening cooperation between European Commission, EU and ILO
6. Upcoming initiatives

1. Decent work as part of the European Social Agenda and of the social dimension of globalisation

1.1. The European Social Agenda 2005-2010 puts a strong emphasis on the EU contribution to strengthening the social dimension of globalisation. The European Commission Communication of Mai 2004 on the EU contribution towards strengthening the social dimension of globalisation had laid down the orientations for EU policies and actions. This initiative was adopted shortly after the publication of the final report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation in February 2004. The Commission strongly contributed to the work of the World Commission.

1.2. The European Commission support for promoting decent work for all in EU internal and external policies is part of the EU efforts to strengthen the social dimension of globalisation.

The European Commission has developed in its communication of 24 Mai 2006 on decent work an integrated strategy with a view to mobilising EU internal and external policies¹. These include of course employment, social affairs and equal opportunities policies but also development and external cooperation, trade, enlargement, neighbourhood policy and wider EU external bilateral and multilateral relations.

1.3. The EU Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee have strongly endorsed this communication. It is important to note that the EU mobilises not only the efforts of the European Community but also those of the EU Member states. Social partners at EU and international level have also expressed a strong interest in this issue.

2. The integrated approach to decent work is in line with the EU model of integrated economic and social development

2.1. It is important to underline that the decent work agenda goes beyond the core labour standards and includes the four pillars of decent work: employment, rights at work, social protection including health and safety at work and labour inspection, social dialogue. It also takes into due account the gender dimension in the four pillars.

This means also that, as underlined by the 2006 Communication, decent work is not only seeking to guarantee a minimum basis of rights but also tailor development to values and principles of action and governance which combine economic competitiveness with social justice.

2.2. The decent work approach is in line with the EU Lisbon strategy for jobs and growth and the European Social Agenda. Promoting decent work forms an integral part of EU efforts to promote its values and principles of action and governance. It is therefore in line with the EU model of integrated economic and social development.

2.3. Although decent work is broader than the core labour standards, it is of key importance that all countries industrialised and developing countries alike ratify and apply effectively the eight ILO conventions on the core labour standards². In the meanwhile all countries that have not yet ratified these should effectively apply the ILO 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Rights and Principles at Work.

The core labour standards are establishing the enabling framework that constitutes the minimum basis for addressing the broader decent work issues. The European Commissioner, responsible for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Vladimir Spidla had the pleasure to announce at the June 2007 International Labour Conference that all 27 EU Member states have ratified all the eight ILO core labour standards conventions. The

¹ For the communications on decent work and social dimension of globalisation and related texts see: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/international_cooperation/index_en.htm

² Freedom of association, collective bargaining, prohibition of forced labour, prohibition of child labour, equal pay for men and women, prohibition of discrimination in employment (Conventions 87,98, 29, 105, 138, 182, 100, 111).

European Commission had put pressure on the last remaining EU Member states that had not ratified all the 8 core labour standards conventions.

This positive EU ratification record, in relation to the core labour standards conventions at least, strengthens the credibility of EU efforts to promote core labour standards, and more generally decent work, in its external relations.

3. Promoting decent work in EU external policies and relations

3.1. I would like to highlight that in supporting the promotion of decent work in EU external policies and relations the European Commission takes into account the specific characteristics and diverse nature of the economic and social situations across the world. In this context the Commission very much welcomes the establishment and implementation of decent work country programmes as these facilitate ownership and commitment of both authorities and social partners.

3.2. The reference EU document on development cooperation- the December 2005 European Consensus on Development - has included employment, social cohesion and decent work as part of EU development policy³. This group of issues is listed as one of the nine themes for cooperation with partner countries. A related group is human development covering health and education. The EU consensus on development guides both the European Community and EU Member states development policy. The document underlines the importance of national ownership.

3.3. It is important that EU partner countries take up employment, social cohesion and decent work in their priorities for cooperation with the European Community and the EU Member states. However, as the European Community development and external cooperation programmes cannot cover all nine themes and all needs in all partner countries, it is important that EU Member states also include employment, social cohesion and decent work in their external action. It is encouraging that more and more EU Member states are indeed taking initiatives in this regard. Decent work related issues can also be taken up under the other themes for cooperation, such as through infrastructure and rural development and through the cross cutting theme of governance. This is also highlighted by a Commission staff working document of April this year on employment and development and by Council Conclusions of June 2007 on the same issue.

3.4. Decent work and decent work issues, including the gender dimension, are also part of the new EC thematic programmes 2007-2013 for external action⁴ and they are also taken up in other programmes managed through different services. The European Commission services and ILO are for instance preparing further cooperation under different programmes on decent

³ http://ec.europa.eu/development/How/iqsg/docs/Links_various/european_consensus_2005_en.pdf

⁴ EC Thematic programmes 2007- 2013 on "Investing in people", " Democracy and Human Right", "Migration and Asylum" and "Non state actors in development". For "investing in people" see:

http://ec.europa.eu/development/Policies/9Interventionareas/HumanDev_en.cfm

Although these programmes are much smaller than the ones engaged under the national and regional programming for external action, they are very useful to promote concrete multi country and global initiatives on decent work or decent work related issues, including strengthening the knowledge basis and awarenessraising.

work indicators, on assessing and addressing the effects of trade on decent work and also on social protection issues.

3.5. Decent work and related issues are also progressively taken up in EU neighbourhood policies. They are also useful for EU enlargement and for potential enlargement candidates in particular in relation to for instance strengthening capacity building of administrations, labour market and social protection agencies and of social partners.

3.6. EU trade policy is also promoting - in a non protectionist way - decent work issues. I can refer to the EU Generalised System of Preferences in relation to core labour standards, the EU support on strengthening joint work between ILO and WTO on the interaction between trade, employment and social policy and to the uptake of sustainable development, including its social dimension, in ongoing bilateral negotiations of free trade agreements.

3.7. The European Commission is engaged in a growing number of bilateral dialogues and cooperation's on employment, social affairs and decent work with emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil and with other regions such as through ASEM (Asia- EU meeting) and the EU- Latin America Summit. This is also related to the growing interest of third countries and regions in the EU model of integrated economic and social development.

3.8. The European Commission, in cooperation with the EU Presidency, has also strongly contributed to the recent uptake of decent work by the UN such as the UN 2005 Summit and the 2006 ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration and by the recent G8 Employment Ministerial and G8 Summit in Germany.

4. The EU decent work roadmap and the social dimension of regional integration

4.1. The EU internal decent work roadmap consists of the European Social Agenda, the Lisbon Strategy for Jobs and Growth and increasing efforts to promote and facilitate the ratification and application by EU Member States of international labour conventions that have been classified as up to date by the ILO. These conventions include health and safety at work, labour inspection and maritime labour.

4.2. The World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation highlighted the importance of the social dimension of regional integration as a stepping stone towards a stronger social dimension at global level. The EU regional social dimension has its specific features as it is related to a unique model of integration. This goes beyond the decent work agenda⁵.

4.3. At the same time it is very important that the EU takes up directly or indirectly decent work issues. I would like to refer again to the ratification of all 8 core labour standards conventions by all the EU 27 Member states. In addition a number of issues covered by the core labour standards are covered by the EU treaty or EU Directives such as non discrimination in employment, equal pay for men and women for work and minimum age in

⁵ We can refer to the internal market including the free movement of EU citizen, the solidarity through the EU structural funds, the enforcement system of EU standards and the EU level social dialogue.

employment. This illustrates that international and regional social standards can usefully complement and strengthen the effective protection of social rights.

4.4. This positive interaction between EU and international initiatives is equally relevant for health and safety standards. The EU has adopted, in February 2007, a new Communication called "Improving quality and productivity at work: Community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work"⁶. This initiative proposes a strategy for promoting health and safety at work in the European Union in the coming years. It builds on the achievements of previous strategies and on the comprehensive corpus of legislation on occupational health and safety adopted over the years in the EU. It sets for the first time ever, a quantified target of 25% for the reduction of accidents and occupational diseases in the EU during the period.

The strategy seeks, also, in the context of an increasingly globalised economy, to raise labour standards throughout the world by strengthening cooperation with the ILO and the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other international organisations for the establishment of higher levels of protection globally and through bilateral action in its relations with third countries.

4.5. However the ratification record of EU Member states on ILO occupational health and safety conventions and on other up to date ILO conventions is not very bright. In this context, the new EU strategy on health and safety at work calls on Member States to ratify the ILO conventions. It promotes full implementation of the 2003 ILO Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health as well as the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health convention adopted in 2006.

4.6. The Commission has already taken initiatives to authorize and promote the ratification by the EU Member states of the 2006 maritime convention. The Commission is considering similar initiatives to promote the 2007 convention on work in the fishing sector. The Commission is also considering initiatives to promote the ratification of other up to date ILO conventions that do not affect EC exclusive competences⁷. I take the opportunity to invite the representatives of the EU Member states, present at this Conference, to contribute to the renewed efforts towards the ratification of up to date ILO conventions.

5. Strengthening cooperation between European Commission, EU and ILO

5.1. The European Commission has a long standing cooperation with the ILO. In fact the first cooperation agreement was already signed in 1958. This cooperation covers also Safe Work and Labour Inspection. However the European Commission and ILO have considerably intensified their cooperation in recent years both in the EU and externally.

5.2. The European Commission services and ILO Office are holding annual high level meetings in order to guide and follow-up their cooperation both on policies, on programmes and projects and on strengthening the knowledge basis.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/health_safety/index_en.htm

⁷ The Commission adopted for instance on 15 September 2000 a Recommendation to the EU Member states on the speedy ratification of the convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour. This approach could also be explored for other conventions classified by ILO as up to date in line with the decent work communication.

5.3. All this had also a positive effect on the overall EU support for ILO and ILO initiatives both at political and operational level. The European Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee have welcomed and endorsed this cooperation.

5.4. The EU has for instance strongly contributed to the first discussion in June of this year on Strengthening ILO's Capacity in the Context of Globalisation and supports the upcoming ILO Globalisation Policy Forum on 01/11-02/11/2007 in Lisbon. The European Commission and the EU at large take into account the global ILO context when preparing and intervening in ILO official discussions.

This constructive approach contributed for instance to the successful adoption of the ILO maritime convention and to the 2006 framework convention on occupational health and safety.

6. Upcoming initiatives

6.1. The European Commission welcomes the progress achieved so far. However much more should be done in order to address the large decent work deficits in the world.

I have already referred to a number of ongoing or planned initiatives by the European Commission on employment, social protection, social dialogue, rights at work and gender.

6.2. The European Commission will present in 2008 a follow-up to its decent work communication. To that end, and also with a view to contribute to the February 2008 session of the UN Commission on Social Development on employment and decent work, the European Commission will organise in January (probably on 24 and 25 /1/08) next year a conference on decent work. It will concentrate its efforts on the implementation of decent work in countries, regions and at global level. Another interesting step is the request by the Council of Ministers, in its conclusions of June 2007 on employment and development, addressed to the Commission to prepare by the end of 2008 a document on social protection and development.

I thank you for your attention.