Chronology 2008
Key events in European social policy

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JANUARY

1st January: Cyprus and Malta adopt the euro, now the common currency of 15 of the 27 EU Member States (IP/08/2 and IP/08/6).


FEBRUARY


20 February: the ETUC gives the go-ahead for a European campaign on wages, including minimum wages (http://www.etuc.org/a/4599).

20 February: the Commission invites the social partners to negotiate on European Works Councils (IP/08/265).

25 February: Hungary decides to allow the forint to float.

29 February: the Employment Ministers adopt the Joint Employment Report. According to this report, unemployment in the EU was likely to dip below the 7% mark in 2008, the lowest level achieved since the mid 1980s. 2855th Council meeting Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs, Brussels, 29 February 2008 (6753/08 - Presse 46).
3 March: the seafarers’ trade unions FSU (Finnish Seamen’s Union) and ITF (International Transport Workers’ Federation) reach an agreement with the ferry company Viking before the English Court of Appeal, putting an end to all litigation in this case (C-438/05).

13 March: Tripartite Social Summit. The leaders of the European Union and the social partners explore the next steps in the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs (IP/08/441).

17 March: the European Commission publishes a communication on reviewing the application in the EU of the directive establishing a general framework for informing and consulting employees in the European Community (2002/14/CE). For the time being the Commission does not intend to propose any amendments to the directive on employee information and consultation. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the review of the application of Directive 2002/14/EC in the EU, COM (2008) 146 final of 17 March 2008.


27-29 March: the new regional organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) for the Americas is established at a founding congress held in Panama. This new body, named the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA), brings together 68 affiliates from 26 countries in the region and represents more than 50 million workers (http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article1946&lang=en).
**APRIL**

2 April: Europe’s employers (BusinessEurope) agree, as part of the European social dialogue, to negotiate an agreement on **European works councils**.


4 April: CEEP (public sector employers) and the ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation) adopt a Joint Declaration on the **EU climate change and energy package** which has a clear link with employment. **Joint declaration on the EU climate change and energy package with a view to employment** (http://www.etuc.org/a/4828).

5 April: in response to a call from the ETUC, 35,000 trade unionists from all over Europe take part in a demonstration in Ljubljana to demand higher **wages** (http://www.etuc.org/a/4843).

11 April: the ETUC announces that it will not negotiate with BusinessEurope an agreement on **European Works Councils**. It asks the European Commission to legislate in this area (http://www.etuc.org/a/4867).

15 April: an unjustified succession of fixed-term contracts is unlawful, considers the European Court of Justice. Its judgment affords fixed-term employees better protection of their rights under European law (Judgment of the Court in Case C-268/06, OJ C 142 of 7 June 2008, page 4).


28 April: the Commission’s spring forecasts confirm the slowdown in growth and the strong inflationary pressure in Europe (IP/08/649).

MAY

14 May: the euro zone Finance Ministers back the Commission’s view of the economic situation in the euro zone. Wage restraint remains necessary. They also examine the effectiveness of welfare spending and adopt two recommendations, one on the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPGs) and the other on country-specific recommendations. 2866th Council meeting Financial and Economic Affairs, Brussels, 14 May 2008 (8850/08 – Presse 113).


22 May: the Permanent Representatives Committee of the Member States in the EU (COREPER) supports the Slovene Presidency’s compromise text on the proposed ‘**return**’ **directive** laying down detention conditions and expulsion procedures for illegal immigrants.

23 May: an informal meeting of EU Ministers responsible for **disability** policy takes place in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia (Memo/08/325).


28 May: according to a Commission report, millions of Europeans are at greater risk of **social exclusion** owing to a lack of access to basic financial services. *Financial Services Provision and Prevention of Financial Exclusion* (http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/docs/social_inclusion/2008/financial_exclusion_study_en.pdf).


**JUNE**

4 June: hundreds of Italian and French fishermen demonstrate in Brussels, protesting against the rise in diesel prices.

5 June: the EU Member States reach a compromise on the proposed ‘return’ directive laying down expulsion procedures for illegal immigrants. 2873th Council Meeting Justice and Home Affairs, Luxembourg, 5-6 June 2008 (9956/08 – Presse 146).


10 June: the EU Employment and Social Affairs Ministers adopt conclusions on improving administrative cooperation in relation to the posting of workers for the provision of services. They also agree on the draft directive regulating working time and on temporary work. 2876th Council Meeting Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs, Luxembourg, 9-10 June 2008 (10414/08 – Presse 166).

12 June: the Irish people reject the Treaty of Lisbon by a clear majority in a referendum (53.4 % of no-votes).


19-20 June: a report entitled ‘Joint study on restructuring in the EU-15’ is presented at a seminar. This report is the outcome of joint work by the ETUC (trade unions), BusinessEurope, UEAPME (craft and SME sector) and CEEP (public and general interest enterprises) (http://www.etuc.org/a/5114). Reports website: http://resourcecentre.etuc.org/Reports-39.html.

25 June: the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights publishes its first annual report. It notes that racist violence and discriminatory behaviour is on the rise throughout the EU but is being inadequately penalised (http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/ar08/ar08_en.pdf).

JULY

1st July: establishment of the 36th European sectoral social dialogue in the area of professional football.

2-3 July: the Commission presents its renewed social agenda, which contains in particular a legislative proposal aimed at improving the role of European works councils in informing and consulting employees, a proposal seeking to ensure equal treatment outside of the workplace, a report on social services of general interest, and a proposal for a directive


3 July: the European Central Bank (ECB) raises the key interest rate by 25 basis points.

7 July: the Commission adopts a regulation automatically approving aid for jobs and growth (IP/08/1110).

7 July: the European social partners send a joint letter to Commissioner Špidla telling him that if the EU Member States continue to invest in childcare infrastructure at the current pace, they will fail to attain the Barcelona targets for the provision of childcare services which they set in 2002. Joint letter from the European Social Partners on Childcare (http://www.etuc.org/a/5204).


8 July: the Ecofin Council adopts the final decisions regarding Slovakia’s entry into the euro zone on 1st January 2009. 2882nd Council Meeting Financial and Economic Affairs, Brussels, 8 July (11236/08 – Presse 193).

8 July: the European Parliament formally approves the compromise on the European directive aimed at including civil aviation activity in the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) (IP/08/1114).


11 July: Informal meeting of the Ministers for Labour, Employment and Social Policy in Chantilly.


24 July: the Internal Affairs Council is divided over a draft directive containing minimum harmonisation of penal sanctions against employers of illegally staying third-country nationals and imposing inspections in various economic sectors. 2887th Council Meeting Justice and Home Affairs, Brussels, 24-25 July 2008 (11653/08 – Presse 205).

31 July: having risen to 4% in June, consumer prices rose to a record level of 4.1% in July, according to Eurostat. The unemployment rate rose too. Eurostat, Press Release, 1008/2008 of 31 July 2008.

AUGUST

20 August: according to Eurostat, output in the construction sector fell by 0.6% in the euro zone and by 1.5% in the EU 27 compared with the previous month. The euro zone likewise recorded a foreign trade deficit. The economic indicators were down throughout Europe. Eurostat, Press Releases Nos.116/2008 of 18 August and 117/2008 of 20 August 2008.


SEPTEMBER

1st September: the European Parliament’s Industry Committee postpones by three years the introduction of CO2 emission standards scheduled by the Commission. This vote weakens the proposals aimed at forcing automobile manufacturers to reduce the CO2 emissions of new cars, COM (2007) 856 final of 19 December 2007.

10 September: the Commission announces a major scaling-back of the economic forecasts for Europe: a slowdown in growth, high inflation and stagnation of the European economy (IP/08/1305).


15 September: the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers rocks the global financial system.


16 September: the first EU summit devoted to the Roma and travellers is held in Brussels (MEMO/08/559).


25 September: the Competitiveness Council lends its support to the indicative target of 50 % per Member States of Green Public Procurement. 2891st Council Meeting Competitiveness, Brussels, 25-26 September 2008 (12959/1/05 REV1 – Presse 251).

26 September: the publication by the Global Carbon Project (GCP) of global data on carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) emissions for the year 2007 indicates that CO$_2$ emissions have greatly exceeded forecasts. Carbon Budget and trends 2007 (http://www.globalcarbonproject.org/carbon trends/index.htm).


27-28 September: the financial crisis tightens its grip in the EU with an emergency bail-out of the Belgian/Dutch bank and insurance house Fortis, through concerted action by the authorities of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

OCTOBER


have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, COM (2008) 637 final of 3 October 2008 (IP/08/1450).


4 October: a mini-summit on the financial crisis held at the Élysée Palace in Paris brings together French President Nicolas Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Commission President José Manuel Barroso.


8 October: the world’s major central banks, including the ECB, decide jointly to lower their interest rates by half a percentage point.


12 October: at the end of another extraordinary summit devoted to the financial crisis, held in Paris, the Heads of State and Government adopt a concerted action plan to ensure that national measures taken to shore up the banking system are consistent. ‘Summit of the Euro area countries’ (http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/ publications/publication13260_en.pdf).

13 October: in its October 2008 report on the World Economic Outlook, the IMF predicts that the global economy is about to enter a

15 October: at the Tripartite Social Summit, the ETUC makes its voice heard on the financial crisis, as well as on the energy and climate change package (http://www.etuc.org/a/5432).


16 October: an informal meeting of ministers responsible for combating poverty and social exclusion takes place in Marseille. A majority of Member States remain cautious about setting numerical targets for reducing poverty. Conclusions of the informal meeting of ministers responsible for combating poverty and social exclusion (http://www.ue2008.fr/webdav/site/ PFUE/shared/import/1016_Ministerielle_Pauvrete/Results_informal_meeting_ministers_combating_poverty_and_social_exclusion_EN.pdf).

20 October: a study presented by the European Commission confirms an increasing trend towards the use of private pension schemes in the European Union, while emphasising the need for comprehensive coverage and adequate levels of pension payouts. Privately managed funded pension provision and their contribution to adequate and sustainable pensions (http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/docs/social_protection_committee/final_050608_en.pdf).

21 October: according to a report published by the OECD, poverty has risen significantly in OECD countries over the past twenty years. Growing Unequal? Income Distribution and Poverty in OECD Countries.


28-29 October: the second forum on social services of general interest (SSGI) in Europe takes place in Paris. A roadmap containing the priorities of the French presidency of the EU in the field of SSGIs is forwarded to Member States, the European Commission and the European Parliament.


31 October: the autumn 2008 report from the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) on the economic situation sounds the alarm

NOVEMBER


5 November: the European Parliament’s Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopts the Cercas report on the working time directive, which repudiates the position taken at the June meeting of the Employment and Social Affairs Council. The report calls for maximum working time to be confined to 48 hours per week, and for the opt-out to be eliminated within three years (A6-0105/2005 of 25 April 2005 and A6/0440/2008 of 11 November 2008 – Recommendation for second reading).

5 November: the US Democrats win the presidency and a majority in Congress. Barack Obama becomes the 44th President elect of the United States.

6 November: for the second time in a month the European Central Bank (ECB) reduces interest rates in the euro zone by 50 basis points.


13 November: Germany goes into recession.
13 November 2008: on the eve of the G20 crisis summit, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the TUAC and the Global Unions adopt a ‘Global Unions Washington Declaration’ calling for a major economic recovery plan, new financial and economic governance, and a campaign against the explosion of inequality in income distribution ‘that lies behind this crisis’ (http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/0811t_gf_G20.pdf).

14 November: the euro zone goes into recession.

14 November: an informal Council and a conference take place in Lille in order to clarify the challenges of equal opportunities for men and women in working life and to define the objectives to be attained (IP/08/1713).


18 November: the United Kingdom is the first country in the world to adopt a law aimed at achieving an 80% reduction in its 1990 levels of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.


27 November: the Mixed Committee (EU, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland) approves Switzerland’s accession to the Schengen Area as from 12 December (15698/08 of 14 November 2008 and 16325/08 – Presse 344).

27 November: the EU undertakes at a meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council to take in approximately 10,000 Iraqi refugees located in countries bordering on Iraq. This announcement is welcomed in particular by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. 2908th Council Meeting Justice and Home Affairs, Brussels, 27-28 November 2008 (16325/08 – Presse 344).


DECEMBER

1st December: experts at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) point out that the US economy has been in recession since December 2007 and that the recession is continuing. (http://research.stlouisfed.org/publications/net/20081201/netpub.pdf)


3 December: the ETUC warns of looming deflation and demands deep cuts in interest rates (http://www.etuc.org/a/5629).

4 December: the ECB decides to lower interest rates in the euro zone by 75 basis points.
4 December: according to Eurostat, GDP in the euro zone and the EU 27 have fallen by 0.2% compared with the second quarter, when it had already fallen by 0.2% in the euro zone and had remained stable in the EU 27 (Press Release 171/2008 of 4 December 2008).

8 December: Competition Commissioner Neelie Kroes announces the adoption of a communication on bank recapitalisation in the current financial crisis (IP/08/1901 and OJ C 270 of 25 October 2008, pp.8-14).


12 December: Switzerland becomes the 25th member of the Schengen Area.


15 December: Montenegro submits an application for EU accession.


16 December: a Euro-demonstration, called by the ETUC, is held in Strasbourg on the revision of the Working Time Directive (http://www.etuc.org/a/5552).


Chronology drawn up by Christophe Degryse, with the assistance of Dominique Jadot.