Chronology 2006
Key events in European social policy

JANUARY

13 January: At the informal Justice and Home Affairs Council, the Justice and Home Affairs Ministers unanimously back a proposal for European intervention teams to assist Member States in coping with a sudden influx of illegal immigrants or asylum seekers into their territory. (http://www.eu2006.at/en/News/Press_Releases/January/1301prokop.html?null).


FEBRUARY


13 February: First meeting of the high-level group of experts on the social inclusion of ethnic minorities, established under the strategy for tackling discrimination adopted by the European Commission in June 2005 (IP/06/149).


MARCH


2 March: The European Central Bank (ECB) raises interest rates in the euro zone by 25 basis points (0.25%).


13 March: First sectoral social dialogue conference organised by the Commission. Items on the agenda: anticipating and managing change, intensifying social dialogue in an enlarged Europe and responding to demographic challenges (IP/06/299).

13 March: France decides to gradually open up its labour market to employees from the East in occupations where there is a demand for labour. Bulletin of the European Union, No.9150 of 14 March 2006.

15 March: The Netherlands announces the lifting of all restrictions on access to its labour market by nationals of the new EU Member States in Central and Eastern Europe. Bulletin of the European Union, No.9152 of 16 March 2006.

16 March: The European Court of Justice, in its Robinson-Steele judgment, rules that the British system of ‘rolled-up holiday pay’ (inclusion of annual holiday pay in the hourly or daily wage) contravenes the working time directive. OJ C 143 of 17 June 2006, page 7, Press Release, No.24/06 of 16 March 2006 – Judgment of the Court of Justice in Joined Cases C-131/04 and C-257/04 – Robinson-Steele, Clarke, Caulfield and others.

23 March: The European social partners unveil their new work programme 2006-2008 at the tripartite social summit.

23 March: The German Minister for Employment confirms his intention to keep in place for three years, until 30 April 2009, the restrictions on access by workers from the Central and Eastern European Member States to the German labour market. Bulletin of the European Union, No.9158 of 24 March 2006.

APRIL


4 April: Final agreement between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on the financial perspectives 2007-2013 (20060404PR07021).


6 April: Luxembourg decides to prolong by 3 years its restrictions on the free movement of workers from Central and Eastern European countries. Bulletin of the European Union, No.9169 of 7 April 2006.

25 April: Signature of the first European ‘multi-sector’ agreement on workers’ health (crystalline silica), APFE, BIBM, CAEF, CEMMET, CERAME-UNIE, CEMBUREAU, EMCEF, EMF, EMO, EURIMA, EUROMINES, EURO-ROC, ESGA, FEVE, GEPVP, IMA-Europe, UEPG, Agreement on Workers Health Protection through the Good Handling and Use of Crystalline Silica and Products containing it, Brussels, 25 April 2006.


MAY

1 May: Expiry of the first phase of implementation of transitional measures allowing the Fifteen to restrict access to workers from eight new Member States to their labour markets (workers from Malta and Cyprus were not affected by this waiver). Entry into force of the second phase 2006-2009. Apart from the United Kingdom, Sweden and Ireland, which had not applied any transitional measures, the following countries decide to lift or ease these measures on 1 May 2006: Portugal, France, Finland, Spain (and Italy on 21 July). Germany, Luxembourg, Austria, Belgium and Denmark keep restrictions in place for the period 2006-2009 (MEMO/06/176 of 28 April 2006).


24 May: The Commission publishes a Communication entitled ‘Promoting decent work for all’ in the world. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions ‘Promoting decent work for all - The EU contribution to the implementation of the decent work agenda in the world’, COM (2006) 249 final of 24 May 2006.
30 May: The EU Ministers for Economic Affairs signal their political agreement on the proposal for a directive on services in the internal market. 2731st Council Meeting Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry and Research), Brussels, 29 and 30 May 2006 (9334/06 – Presse 136).

JUNE

1 June: The session of the Employment and Social Affairs Council sees a further setback in the negotiations on the working time directive. 2733rd Council Meeting Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs, Luxembourg, 1-2 June 2006 (9658/06 – Presse 148).

7 June: The ETUC Executive Committee adopts a resolution calling for a framework directive on services of general (economic) interest (http://www.etuc.org/a/2477).

8 June: The European Central Bank (ECB) raises the interest rate in the euro zone by 25 basis points (0.25%).


JULY

11 July: The Ecofin Council completes the procedure enabling Slovenia to adopt the euro on 1 January 2007. On that date, therefore, Slovenia becomes the 13th Member State of the Eurogroup. 2741st Council Meeting Economic and Financial Affairs, Brussels, 11 July 2006 (11370/06 – Presse 209).


AUGUST

3 August: The European Central Bank (ECB) announces another quarter-point interest rate rise, bringing it to 3%.

11 August: The European Union creates the first European patrol against illegal immigration: effective implementation of an action plan under the aegis of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders (Frontex), aimed at halting the influx of sub-Saharan illegal immigrants into the Spanish Canary Islands.

SEPTEMBER


7 September: The European Court of Justice declares that Community law is infringed by the British ‘guidelines’ on working time (a document serving to facilitate understanding of the UK legislation transposing the 1993 European Directive on the organisation of

20 September: The ETUC unveils a draft framework directive on services of general economic interest. Annex to the Resolution ‘Towards a framework directive on services of general (economic) interest’ - 06-07/06/2006, Draft European framework to guarantee and develop services of general economic interest, adopted by the ETUC Steering Committee in their meeting held in Brussels on 20 September 2006 (http://www.etuc.org/a/2829).

20 September: Inaugural session of the 33rd Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee, in the hospital sector.

26 September: In its monitoring reports, the European Commission opens the door to EU accession by Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007, whilst allowing for the possibility of safeguard measures (IP 06/1257).


OCTOBER


5 October: The European Central Bank (ECB) decides to raise the interest rate by a quarter of a point, to 3.25%.

18 October: The European Commission proposes full liberalisation of the market in postal services by 2009 (IP/06/1419).

20 October: At an informal tripartite social summit in Lahti (Finland), the European Union calls on the social partners to take part in the debate about ‘flexicurity’ (http://www.etuc.org/a/2947).

24 October: The United Kingdom and Ireland announce their intention to restrict the free movement of Romanian and Bulgarian workers after the two countries accede to the European Union on 1 January 2007. *Bulletin of the European Union, No.9293 of 25 October 2006.*


NOVEMBER


6 November: The European Commission publishes the report ‘Employment in Europe 2006’. *Employment in Europe 2006, Office for*

7 November: The Extraordinary Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting fails yet again to agree on the revised ‘working time directive’ (14634/06 – Presse 298).

10 November: The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the biggest trade union confederation in Russia (FNPR) adopt a joint initiative aimed at incorporating a social dimension, and social dialogue in particular, into relations between the EU and Russia (http://www.etuc.org/a/3027).

20 November: Volkswagen announces the closure of its Belgian site in Forest, causing anguish in European trade union circles and reviving the issue of restructuring in the European Union.


28 November: The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) launches a Europe-wide petition calling on the Commission to propose a framework directive to protect and strengthen public services (http://petition.etuc.org/).

DECEMBER

4 December: Europe’s Ministers of Justice agree on the establishment of a European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (15801/06 – Presse 341).

5 December: The European Union launches Progress, the new integrated programme for employment and social solidarity, endowed with a budget of some €700 million for the period 2007-2013. This programme aims to support the objectives laid down by the Social Agenda and the Union’s wider strategy on jobs and growth (IP/06/1682).

11 December: The Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council formally adopts the directive on services in the internal market, 2772nd Council Meeting Transport, Telecommunications and Energy, Brussels, 11-12 December 2006. (15900/06 – Presse 343).


13 December: The European Parliament approves the launch of the new European Globalisation Adjustment Fund.

14 December: The European social partners agree on the draft autonomous framework agreement on harassment and violence at work, an outcome of the social dialogue. Autonomous framework agreement on harassment and violence at work – Joint proposal from the Drafting Group, 14 December 2006.

18 December: the Reach legislation on the marketing of chemicals is formally adopted by the Council of Environment Ministers. 2773rd Council Meeting Environment, Brussels, 18 December 2006 (16164/06 – Presse 349 – provisional version) and (16889/06 – Presse 368).

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