

**Meeting of
the presidents of national Economic and Social Councils and of the EESC**

Dublin 29.11.2002

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Contribution by

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on

"The open method of coordination"

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1. Thanks to the Irish Economic and Social Council for carrying out this interesting and comprehensive review of the open method of coordination. The discussion of the Irish situation gives us a good insight into our host country's successful efforts to implement this method at national level and to align it with coordination at European level.
2. Let us make it clear from the start: the working document submitted by our Irish colleagues does not deserve to be hidden away in a drawer. We should use it as the starting point for a debate to be continued within the national Economic and Social Councils, the European ESC and the economic and social organizations concerned.
3. I propose making this document available to a wider public by posting it on our joint information network, CESlink.
4. The progress towards the open method of coordination is a process which started as long as 15 years ago. It was developed further in the famous 1993 White Paper by Jacques Delors and formalized in the Lisbon Strategy. It is therefore already possible, as is indeed the case in the Irish document, to carry out a review of progress over a considerable period.

Allow me to make a few observations about the method and the substance thereof:

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5. There is no doubt that some coordination must be achieved between economic policy, including the action of the European Central Bank, and employment and social policy. At present there is no balance between the instruments of macroeconomic coordination and employment policy.

6. The open method of coordination is an interesting process of comparison and mutual learning. I agree entirely that the exchange and dissemination of experience is useful. But it does not constitute coordination unless a set of instruments are created which incorporate binding and coordinated quantitative and qualitative objectives in the two areas.

7. The Irish working document also makes clear that there are differences in the degrees of involvement of the economic and social players of civil society, both at European and national level. It should be stressed that coordination also means equal treatment in the involvement of the social partners. It is generally agreed that further players must be drawn in. For example, I believe it is extremely important for representatives of young people to be involved on the subject of unemployment.

8. In its resolution addressed to the European Convention, the Economic and Social Committee made the following proposals on improving economic and social governance:

- "economic policies to be coordinated in such a way as to make the most of the Union's potential for growth and employment". We also agreed that "full employment [is] to be mentioned explicitly in the constitutional Treaty";
- "mandatory consultation of the EESC in the procedure for drawing up the economic policy guidelines". The European ESC obviously supports the demands of national economic and social councils to be given greater involvement at national level;
- "a better mix of macro-economic and structural policy instruments". In particular, this should provide for greater synergy between employment policies and the use of funds;
- "a sustained dialogue between the various players involved in macro-economic policy, the social partners in particular".

In conclusion, the document states emphatically "that the success of the Lisbon strategy must be supported by the implementation of the Gothenburg Council conclusions, thus incorporating all the essential principles for the achievement of sustainable development".

Based on these points, which I can only touch upon here, I would like to conclude by mentioning two of the points for discussion raised at the end of the Irish working document:

9. **Further application of the open method of coordination**

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The EESC is in favour of the further development of the open method of coordination in areas such as education and lifelong learning and recognises the value of this method for the policy of social inclusion. The Irish experience is extremely helpful and positive in this respect. However, the method should not be a substitute for exhausting the full potential of legislative measures and should be compatible with the social dialogue and the role ascribed to it in the Treaty.

10. **Enlargement**

The enlargement process largely consists of adopting the "acquis communautaire". In the areas of social policy and employment policy in particular, there are still many gaps in the EU's achievements to date. It will be crucial for measures taken at the level of an enlarged EU to have a real bearing on common practice in the new Member States. For this reason, it is particularly important that the principle of systematically involving the economic and social players of organised civil society be applied as a matter of course at all levels.

The Economic and Social Councils of the Member States and the EESC are to take on the task of helping the newly formed or emerging economic and social councils in the new Member States to play a major role in implementing economic and social policy coordination. I therefore reiterate that the groundwork carried out by the Irish Economic and Social Council must be taken further. The next step could be to extend our analysis to the new countries and to pursue it in greater detail in the context of a joint working group of all councils with a particular interest in the subject.
