

Brussels, 22 November 2010

Press release

Conclusions of the second Conference of ministers for Labour and Employment of the Union for the Mediterranean

The 2nd Conference of ministers for Labour and Employment of the Union for the Mediterranean was held on 21 and 22 November in Brussels at the invitation of Belgium as current President of the Council of the European Union and host nation and under the UfM Co-Presidency of Egypt and France, with the support of the European Commission.

The ministers welcomed that the reunion took place despite the difficulties that affect the peace process in the Middle East. By this initiative, Belgium wanted to support the peace process by creating a climate of political cooperation on social and employment policies and to reinforce the Union for Mediterranean process which cannot be jeopardized by the israelo-palestinian problematic.

The ministers have strengthened the 'employment' dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in labour, employment and social dialogue, by which they contribute to the social dimension of globalisation. The political successes of such a cooperation could also inspire for the G20 and would be very meaningful within the the International Labour Organization since every country endorsed the Agenda for Decent Work.

During this meeting, the social partners and the ministers for Labour and Employment acknowledged that the Framework for Actions on Employment, Employability and Decent Work, as adopted in Marrakesh during the first Conference in 2008, is fully relevant since the recent economic crisis as well as in the economic recovery. They also agreed upon new political priorities to reinforce the regional political dialogue and de Framework for Action.

This Conference was also the occasion for Belgium to strengthen its cooperation with several countries from the Mediterranean Regions, casu quo Morocco. The Moroccan and Belgian ministers for Employment have signed a new bilateral cooperation agreement which is in accordance with the Framework of Actions of Marrakesh and Brussels.

The key elements of the Framework for Actions are the following:

- Welcome the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Social Dialogue Forum and several cooperation projects between States ;
- Set out 9 new policy priorities on cooperation projects between States, supported by the European Union ;
 1. Supporting small and medium sized enterprises and providing micro-credit facilities to encourage the creation of new jobs ;

2. Enhance the quality of existing and created jobs to make them more decent, as set out by the ILO, pay specific attention to health and safety at work; a regional Euro-Mediterranean Observatory will be set up;
3. Increase efforts to provide job opportunities for young people, strengthen education systems and vocational training, reduce the school drop-out rate, improve professional skills and modernize apprenticeship training. Many States declared to launch cooperation projects on this subject;
4. Enhancing women's participation in economic and social life by encouraging the follow-up of the conference on strengthening the role of women in society, held in Marrakesh in November 2009 ;
5. Reinforce all vocational training systems, especially life-long learning, in order to develop new visions and practices, also within companies ; the ministers welcome the outcome of the Symposium on the Governance on Vocational training and Technical Education organised in Paris at the end of October, that gathered representatives of the governments and the social partners;
6. Strengthen capacities of the public employment services to match the job offer and demand ;
7. Make of poverty alleviation a priority on national level by cooperating with the NGOs, by developing more inclusive employment policies and by improving the situation of the most vulnerable, including the young unemployed, women and the working poor;
8. Reinforce the basic social protection systems to ensure a fair income, facilitate access to healthcare and make the social security interventions more sustainable; the ministers took note that this subject will be thoroughly discussed by the ILO next year;
9. Promote social dialogue, as well as cooperation between the social partners organisations on the subjects included in the Framework for Actions.

This Framework for Actions will be developed thanks to:

- A stronger regional political dialogue;
- the creation of a network of experts and specialists on employment issues ;
- thematic initiatives (such as conferences) in cooperation with leading countries on these topics, of both sides of the Mediterranean ;
- strengthened bilateral cooperation projects, such as Belgium and Morocco signed today;
- actions decided by the social partners within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Social Dialogue Forum, launched in Barcelona in March 2010 and that will meet again in 2011 ;
- projects promotion by public and private development actors whose access to international financing and funding of the European Union will be facilitated;
- the stability of the intended cooperation.

Through this partnership, the European Union makes a series of financial instruments available and supports the political and technical cooperation between Member States of the Union for the Mediterranean. The Belgian Presidency, which strengthened relations with several countries of the region, was pleased to contribute, thanks to this initiative, to the social dimension of the Union for the Mediterranean and its 43 partner countries.