

ECOS-034

Brussels, 22 October 2004

**OPINION**

of the  
Committee of the Regions  
of 29 September 2004

on the  
**Mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy:**

**Communication from the Commission on Strengthening the implementation of the  
European Employment strategy**

**Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies  
of the Member States**

**Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the implementation  
of Member States' employment policies**

COM(2004) 239 final – 2004/0082 (CNS)

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THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

**Having regard to** the *Mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy: Communication from the Commission on Strengthening the implementation of the European Employment Strategy; Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States; Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the implementation of Member States' employment policies (presented by the Commission)* (COM(2004) 239 final – 2004/0082 (CNS));

**Having regard to** the decision of the European Commission on 7 April 2004 and of the Council on 16 April 2004, under the first paragraph of Article 265 and of Article 128 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to consult it on this matter;

**Having regard to** the decision of its president on 5 April 2004 to instruct its Commission for Economic and Social Policy to draw up an opinion on the subject;

**Having regard to** its draft opinion (CdR 152/2004 rev. 1) adopted on 6 July 2004 by the Commission for Economic and Social Policy (rapporteur: **Ms Pauliina Haijanen**, Member of the Board of the Regional Council of Southwest Finland, First Vice-chairman of Laitila Town Council (FI/EPP);

**adopted the following opinion at its 56<sup>th</sup> plenary session on 29 and 30 September 2004 (session of 29 September).**

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## 1. **The Committee of the Regions' views**

### **Overall priorities of the Lisbon strategy**

#### **The Committee of the Regions**

- 1.1 **believes** that in implementing the Lisbon strategy the primary focus should be on improving employment and competitiveness. No new processes should be initiated or new objectives set; rather, the emphasis should be on effective implementation of earlier decisions;
- 1.2 **considers it important** that a sound macro-economy based on the sustainability of public finances and economic policies geared to sustainable growth be adopted as the starting point for the Lisbon strategy;

- 1.3 **feels it is important** to see economic, employment and social policy, environmental policy and education and research policy as integrated and complementary elements in the Lisbon strategy to support competitiveness, economic growth and social cohesion. Interaction between social protection systems, the economic policy guidelines and the employment process should be further deepened;
- 1.4 **thinks** that structural reforms, support for research and innovation, promotion of entrepreneurship and development of education and training are key factors for improving EU competitiveness, fostering investment and the creation of new jobs;
- 1.5 **believes** that population ageing poses major challenges for the sustainability of public finances and the development of services and that this calls for effective measures for developing work and encouraging people to stay in employment;
- 1.6 **feels** that local and regional authorities have a key role to play and important practical tasks to perform in achieving the Lisbon strategy and strengthening its implementation, but that this potential has not been exploited sufficiently.

## 2. **The Committee of the Regions' recommendations**

### **Mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy**

#### **The Committee of the Regions**

- 2.1 **considers it essential** that in implementing the Lisbon strategy greater attention be paid to interaction between the various levels involved in implementation and to developing administrative mechanisms that enable partnerships to be built and effective participation by local and regional authorities in implementing the strategy;
- 2.2 **endorses** the goals set by the spring European Council for the mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy and **proposes** that the review include a critical assessment of the implementation of governance and of the added value brought to the implementation of the strategy by the decentralisation of administration;
- 2.3 **feels** that a decentralised approach should be adopted in applying the open coordination method thereby providing local and regional players with real opportunities to develop local and regional strategies. These strategies should be part of the national strategy. Member States' national action plans should contain a factual account of how local and regional authorities participated in drawing up the plans and how they will be involved in their implementation;

- 2.4 **stresses** that the open coordination method should be simplified so that, rather than detailed goals and performance indicators, greater emphasis is placed on forward-looking strategic policies and how these will be effectively implemented in practice;
- 2.5 **believes it is important** that the Union's new financial framework and Structural Fund activities be tied more closely than at present to the implementation of the Lisbon strategy.

### **Strengthening the employment strategy**

#### **The Committee of the Regions**

- 2.6 **agrees** with the Commission that no changes must be made to the guidelines but rather that the focus should be on the effective implementation of the existing guidelines;
- 2.7 **believes that** in some cases, it could be appropriate that, in addition to country-specific recommendations, Member States be given common recommendations in accordance with the recommendations of Wim Kok's Taskforce. In such cases, one should clarify the relation between the common recommendations and the overarching objectives set in 2003;
- 2.8 **feels** that there has not been sufficient compliance with the requirement contained in the 2003 guidelines concerning the need to support participation by players at local and regional level in the developing and implementing the guidelines;
- 2.9 **considers it essential** that greater importance be attached to governance in the employment strategy and that the implementation of governance be critically assessed in the 2005 Joint Employment Report;
- 2.10 **endorses** the Commission's recommendations on active ageing strategies but **believes** that employment policy should focus more on improving labour supply by paying particular attention to, among others, women, older people, young people, the disabled and immigrants and by promoting the functional capacity and health of the entire population;
- 2.11 **feels** that structural reforms in the labour market and changes in tax and benefit systems should be designed so as to make work pay and encourage people to remain in the labour market;

2.12 **thinks that it is important** to help the new Member States develop their labour markets also by strengthening the capacity of local and regional authorities and supporting cooperation and exchange of experience between the local and regional level in the old and new Member States.

Brussels, 29 September 2004.

The President  
of the  
Committee of the Regions

The Secretary-General  
of the  
Committee of the Regions

**Peter Straub**

**Gerhard Stahl**

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