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DWP PRIORITIES DURING THE LUXEMBOURG PRESIDENCY OF THE EU: JULY TO DECEMBER 2015

The Luxembourg Presidency of the EU started on 1 July 2015. As well as updating the two European Scrutiny Committees on Presidency priorities and draft Council agendas, giving a picture of likely developments on proposals and dossiers, I am keen from now on also to ensure the Departmental Select Committee is kept informed in a similar way..

It is now clearer what business the Presidency is expecting to take forward, so I would like to update you on my Department's plans and priorities over the coming months. This letter sets out the key dossiers that will be progressed. I apologise that I could not get this update to you sooner.

The Luxembourg Presidency work programme is based around 7 priorities: stimulating investment to boost growth and employment; deepening the EU's social dimension; managing migration, including freedom, justice and security; revitalising the single market with a focus on its digital dimension; placing EU competitiveness in a global and transparent framework; promoting sustainable development and strengthening the EU's presence on the global stage.

Employment and Social Policy Council (EPSCO)

Informal Council

The informal EPSCO took place on 16 and 17 July in Luxembourg. Ministers discussed issues around social inequalities, youth unemployment and gender equality.

Formal Councils

The two formal EPSCO Councils during the Presidency will be on 5 October in Luxembourg and on 7 December in Brussels. Although provisional agendas have been circulated for these meetings, the content is likely to change during the run up to each Council. My officials will provide your committee with annotated agendas and I will make the usual written statement before and after each Council meeting to set out the agendas and outcomes.

Business during the Luxembourg Presidency

Europe 2020:

Council Conclusions on Adequate Retirement Incomes in the context of Ageing Societies are planned, with the intention of helping Member States pursue reforms which avoid future adequacy risks while securing the long-term financial sustainability of pensions. While the UK is content with the draft, a final discussion is expected at the Social Protection Committee in September before adoption in October.

A General Approach to **Guidelines for the Employment Policies of the Member States** in support of the Europe 2020 Strategy was discussed at the June EPSCO. EU Member States are invited to take the Employment Guidelines into account when drafting their national employment policies. The guidelines are associated with the Broad EU Guidelines for economic policies; together they form integrated guidelines for Europe 2020.

Council Conclusions on Social Governance (including the social dimension of the EU and the Semester) are also expected as a way to address social and employment challenges in Europe.

Long-term Unemployment Initiative:

Work has progressed on a 'Council recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed in the labour market'. My officials have been working closely with the Commission to influence their thinking, as well as with other Member States to build consensus on potential options. We have shared our national approach and have been trying to ensure that the initiative is not too prescriptive. The launch of the initiative is due around the 15th of September 2015.

European Employment Service (EURES)

The EURES (the European network of Employment Services, workers' access to mobility services and the further integration of labour markets) regulation that we referred to in our last letter has made steady progress. The European Parliament has now voted through amendments to the Commission proposal, and like the Council's General Approach, the current compromise text broadly reflects the Government's position, with provision being made for employers to be able to choose whether to advertise on the EURES portal or not. The trilogue process started relatively informally in July. My officials are working to influence the mandates given by both Committees to ensure a successful trilogue negotiation. It is expected that the final compromise text will be presented to the EP plenary and to the Council for adoption in December 2015.

Labour Mobility Package

The Commission has announced it is progressing rapidly with its Labour Mobility Package which it plans to adopt on 9 December 2015. This is due to include a targeted review of the Posting of Workers Directive (96/71/EC) alongside amendments to the Social Security Coordination Regulation (883/2004). As part of finalising its plans for this package, the Commission has recently published a public consultation and will publish an impact assessment of potential options.

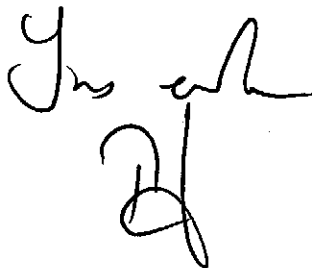
Although the precise details of the Package are still to be finalised, we understand the Commission is considering changes to the way that mobile workers access unemployment benefits across Member States and the export of family benefits. Consistent with its broader EU reform objectives, the Government welcomes proposals to reform the social security coordination rules and will continue to consider further ways to make changes to the rules that would provide a fairer balance of responsibilities.

Occupational Safety and Health

The Luxembourgish Presidency has proposed a set of Council conclusions on occupational safety and health (OSH). This follows the set of conclusions on OSH adopted under the Latvian Presidency in March. While we have expressed reservations about another set of conclusions, so soon after March, the Presidency is pressing ahead with discussions on its draft text. We will be making the case for the two texts to be complementary, particularly on the importance of better regulation. The text adopted in March calls for action on the latter.

I hope you find this information helpful. Should your committee be interested in further information on the priorities for this Presidency my officials and I would be happy to assist with an informal briefing session on topics you may be interested to hear more about.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Priti Patel', with a stylized flourish below the name.

The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP

MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT

