

ESIP CONFERENCE 2006



European Economic and Social Committee

(Jacques Delors Building)

Brussels, 11 December 2006

**Social Security, Employment and Mobility
in the European Union: state of affairs and perspectives**

Welcome address Franz Terwey

**Check against delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have great pleasure in welcoming you all today on behalf of the European Social Insurance Platform to this conference in Brussels. This is the third time that the ESIP organises a European conference of this kind, the first having taken place in Brussels in 2004, the second in Paris last year, and we are very happy that so many representatives from the EU Institutions, from the Member States and from the national social protection systems have accepted our invitation.

I also would like to stress that we are extremely grateful to benefit from this wonderful venue, the plenary chamber of the European Economic and Social Committee, for our meeting and I would like to thank the President of the EESC and his colleagues for the hospitality and the support they have given us. In particular we feel very honoured that the Vice President of the EESC, Alexander-Michael Graf von Schwerin, will speak to us later in his welcome address. Thank you, Mr Graf von Schwerin, for being with us today.

We also feel very honoured by the presence of the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Mr Vladimír Špidla who will also take the floor later and speak to us. Commissioner, we all know that your agenda is very busy today and tomorrow as you are hosting a European Conference in Lille at the moment. As such, we appreciate even more that you have devoted your precious time to open our conference. We see this as a token not only of the recognition of ESIP's work by the European Commission but also of the good partnership we share with each other. Let me assure you, Mr Špidla, of our best wishes and our support for your future work in the interest of the European citizens and the strengthening of their social protection everywhere in the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen, the European Commission has designated the year 2006 the "European Year for Workers' Mobility". This is why our conference is entitled "Social security, employment and mobility in the European Union". At this conference we want to take a look at the state of affairs today and focus on the future challenges for social security and employment in a Europe of free movement of persons and free provision of services. As most of you will know, the percentage of Europeans working and residing in another European country than their country of origin has consistently remained around 1.5 percent for the last 30 years. The reason for this is that there are still many legal, administrative and linguistic obstacles which keep our citizens from taking advantage of the mobility options in the EU.

Bearing that in mind and with the hope of finding some solutions for improvement, we want to take a look at current EU-wide initiatives and examples of good practice in the field of employment, and also at the issues for cross-border social security provisions in the fields of health care, family care and pensions. We want to highlight the role that social security organisations can play as facilitators of mobility in Europe. This conference will give us the opportunity to illustrate the added value that our national organisations can offer to the European Worker, the European Patient, the European Pensioner and the European families.

Following an introductory report on 35 years of Regulation 1408/71, which will be presented by Ms H  l  ne Michard of the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the conference will focus on two round table discussions. The first round table, chaired by Ms Sini Laitinen-Kuikka from the Finnish Centre of Pensions, will be devoted to the social security aspects, in particular in the context of cross border health care and patient mobility and the improvement of portability of complementary pensions. In the second round table discussion, chaired by Mr Heikki Pohja, the Director of the Finnish Unemployment Insurance Fund, we will hear reports on good practices designed to enhance mobility from a number of European organisations active in various policy sectors. And then, last but not least, we will receive an insight into mobility from the European Citizens' point of view, with a report presented by Ms Claire Damilano of the European Citizen Action Service.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as you all know the European Commission has recently launched several consultation processes in order to find out how the Member States and their respective social security organisations can better co-operate in order to improve the practical and legal arrangements for mobility. We, the ESIP and its Member organisations, want to take an active part in this consultation and we are presently preparing our contributions to that debate. It is of vital interest for us to prepare our social systems for their future in a world of increased cooperation and open borders. This is in fact the “raison d’être” of our transnational network: to be a part of the solution rather than a part of the problem.

Since its creation in 1996 the ESIP has continually grown in its membership, competence and strength. Now, in this our tenth anniversary year, we are proud to bring together more than 30 national social security organisations from 12 EU Member States and from Switzerland. In a few weeks, from 1 January 2007, we will be able to welcome another three national social security organisations from the United Kingdom as well as from Slovakia and Romania. This development seems to confirm that we are moving to the right direction, and I am confident that despite our diverse backgrounds, structures and traditions, we will continue to be a vibrant, dynamic European stakeholder and a constructive partner in the important discussions on social security that will be carried out in the years to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me already at this point express my thanks to all the speakers and moderators of our Conference for helping us to find some answers to the important questions that we will debate. I am convinced that they will provide us with much good advice and a good basis for our work today and in the future.

I wish our Conference every success.
