

ESIP CONFERENCE

Paris, 9 December 2005

Economic Performance and Social Protection

Welcome address Franz Terwey

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the great pleasure to welcome you all today on behalf of the European Social Insurance Platform to this conference in Paris which is supported by French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin. This is the second time that the ESIP organises a European conference of this kind, the first having taken place in Brussels in December last year, and we are very happy that so many representatives from the EU institutions, from the Member States (18 states to be exact) and from the national social protection systems have accepted our invitation.

In particular we feel very honoured by the presence of European Commissioner for Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities, Mr Vladimir Spidla who will later take the floor and speak to us. We see this as a token not only of the recognition of ESIP's work by the Commission but also of the good partnership we share with each other.

Donc merci, Monsieur Spidla, votre présence aujourd'hui est un signe fort et encourageant pour un réseau européen tel que le nôtre. Je peux vous assurer qu'en notre qualité de plateforme d'échange et de coopération vous pouvez toujours compter sur nous pour renforcer la solidarité et la cohésion sociale en Europe. Nous formons également des vœux sincères pour que vous-même au sein de la Commission européenne vous puissiez atteindre les objectifs ambitieux que vous vous êtes fixés.

Mesdames et messieurs, je voudrais aussi souligner à quel point nous sommes reconnaissants de pouvoir bénéficier, pour notre conférence, de ce lieu symbolique, la salle « Pierre Laroque », au sein du Ministère français de la Santé et des Solidarités.

Je voudrais pour cela remercier le Directeur de la Sécurité Sociale, M. Dominique Libault, ainsi que ses collaborateurs et particulièrement Mme Elizabeth Lion, pour l'hospitalité et le soutien qu'ils nous manifestent. M. Libault aura également l'amabilité de s'adresser à nous aujourd'hui, au nom du gouvernement français.

Enfin (*last but not least*), je tiens à remercier les organisations membres françaises : la Caisse Centrale de la Mutualité Sociale Agricole, la Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales, la Caisse Nationale d'Assurance Maladie des Travailleurs Salariés, la Caisse Nationale d'Assurance Vieillesse et la Fédération Nationale de la Mutualité Française, pour leur appui considérable dans l'organisation de cette conférence. Sans votre aide, chers collègues, nous n'aurions pas été en mesure de nous réunir ici aujourd'hui.

Le système de sécurité sociale français célébrant cette année son 60^{ème} anniversaire, je vous exprime, à cette occasion, mes félicitations ainsi que mes meilleurs vœux pour vos activités futures.

Ladies and gentlemen, our conference is entitled "Economic performance and social protection". Why did we choose this topic? At the Lisbon Summit in 2000, the European Union set itself the ambitious objective of becoming the "most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth". The aim was to achieve this goal within ten years from then. In 2005, at the mid-term period, it is clear that the majority of the Member States are still very far from achieving the Lisbon targets.

In this context, discussion is increasing throughout Europe on the effects of social protection on economic performance. Despite divergent economic theories, it is clear that countries with a high level of social protection benefit at the same time from a better than average overall economic performance compared with the world.

Faced with today's economic problems, the parallel development of economic performance and social protection becomes not only a necessity in the social and economic field but also, more widely, a political necessity for the European Union in view of its citizens, who expect it to find the right balance.

Building Europe means building a society in which the European social model needs to find its place alongside economic performance. As you all will agree, this is an issue that ranks very high on the political agendas not only at European but also at national level.

This is why, ladies and gentlemen, the discussion on how to prepare and strengthen our social systems for their future in a world of growing links is so vital. We, the ESIP and its member organisations, want to play a constructive role in this process – for the benefit of our common values and in the interest of our clients. Since its creation eight years ago the ESIP has continually grown in membership and in strength. Thus, I am confident that despite our diverse backgrounds, structures and traditions, we will continue to be a vibrant, dynamic and respected European body of social security proponents.

In this context and with view to our shared values and cooperation at global level I am particularly pleased to welcome Mr Roland Sigg, director of research at the International Social Security Association in Geneva, who gives us the honour of his presence and will later on provide us with some additional information on how the topic of this conference is being discussed under a global perspective. Thank you, Mr Sigg, for being here with us today.

Ladies and gentlemen, our conference programme is divided into three sessions. The first session, which will be chaired by Professor Alain Euzéby from the University of Grenoble, will take an academic look at the link between economic and social policies. During the second session, chaired by the director of the Association Internationale de la Mutualité (AIM), Mr Willy Palm, we will hear statements from representatives of some national social insurance organisations in the family, health and pensions sector as well as from the European Parliament. They will describe their views and experiences on how to meet the challenges of a changing economic and societal framework with regard to social protection.

In the third session, chaired by Mr Ad Bockting, the director of the Dutch workers insurance agency, we will focus on the employment sector and hear the views from representatives of some national unemployment funds as well as from the European organisations of the Social Partners, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the Union of European Industries (UNICE).

Let me already at this point, ladies and gentlemen, express my thanks to all the speakers at our conference for helping us to find answers to the important questions that we will debate. I am convinced that they will provide us with some good advice and a good basis for our discussions here and in the future. I wish our debate every success.
