

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

# **GREEN PAPER**

## **EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY**

### **Options for the Union**

#### *SUMMARY*

*The purpose of this document is to outline the principal themes of the Green Paper on social policy, and to reproduce the 65 questions contained therein. The full text of the Green Paper can be obtained by applying to the Commission's offices as listed on page 26.*

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EMPLOYMENT,  
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this publication.

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1994

ISBN 92-826-7118-6

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*Printed in Germany*

# INTRODUCTION — THE PURPOSE OF THE GREEN PAPER



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European social policy<sup>1</sup> is entering into a critical phase. This is due to three main factors:

- the present Social action programme is reaching its natural end. The Commission has presented all of the 47 proposals involved and, while some of the most important proposals are still pending before the Council, the majority have been adopted;
- the entry into force of the Treaty on European Union has opened up new possibilities for Community action in the social field, particularly by giving a stronger role to the social partners; and
- the changing socioeconomic situation, reflected notably in the serious levels of unemployment, is requiring a new look at the link between economic and social policies, both at national and Community level.

The Commission considers that this situation requires the launching of a wide-ranging debate

about the future direction of social policy, before it proceeds to put forward specific proposals in the form of a White Paper.

There is much debate in all Member States about how to address the problem of unemployment, much of which is now recognized as being structural in character. At the same time, there exists a growing degree of public concern that, contrary to the objective of ensuring that economic and social progress should go hand in hand as clearly stated in both the Treaties of Rome and Maastricht, the net impact of the integration process could be a levelling-down of social standards. In this context, the Green Paper, and the process of debate which it is designed to trigger, will be interactive with the discussions around the White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment.

The premise at the heart of this Green Paper is that the next phase in the development of European social policy cannot be based on the idea that social progress must go into retreat in order for economic competitiveness to recover. On the contrary, as has been stated on many occasions by the European Council, the Community is fully committed to ensuring that economic and social progress go hand in hand.

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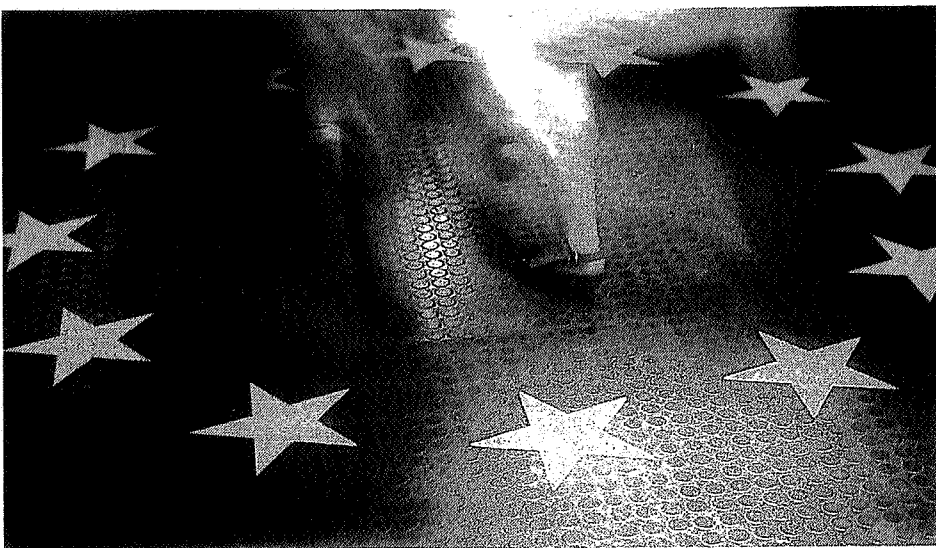
<sup>1</sup> The term 'social policy' has many different meanings which also vary from Member State to Member State. For the purposes of this document it is taken to mean the full range of policies in the social sphere including labour market policies.

In current conditions this will not be easy. But Europe's continuing contribution to the search for a model of sustainable development which combines economic dynamism with social progress can only be made if the issues are openly debated and a consensus arrived at. The rich diversity of the cultures and social systems within the European Union is a competitive advantage in a fast-changing world. All societies are in the same process of learning. But diversity may deteriorate into disorder if the common goals, which embody the distinctive values of European society and are set out in the Treaty on European Union, are not defended by the efforts of Member States and by people themselves.

Part I sets out what the Community has already achieved in the social sphere. Part II looks at the social challenges now facing us all. It examines the risks of declining social cohesion in Europe and the threats to important common goals such as social protection, solidarity and high levels of employment. A new medium-term strategy is needed which will draw together economic and social policies in partnership rather than in conflict with each other. Only in this way will sustainable growth, social

solidarity and public confidence be restored. It is acknowledged that European production systems need to be based on the new technologies. There can be no social progress without wealth creation. But it should also be recognized that the consequent structural changes will have considerable impact on other important areas, such as employment intensity, working and living conditions, the quality of life and the development of industrial relations. Part III discusses the possible responses of the Union to these challenges, both in terms of what Member States want and of what the Community is trying to achieve. Part IV provides a brief conclusion. Part V brings together the questions raised in different parts of the Green Paper. These will be the focus of the debate to follow.

Europe is at a turning-point. Decisions taken in the coming period will set the direction of social policy for many years to come. Now is the time for all sections of opinion to make their views known.



*The Community is fully committed to ensuring that economic and social progress go together*

Photo: © CEC

# I — ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY SOCIAL DIMENSION

Community social policy has covered a wide range of areas. These include equality of opportunity, health and safety matters, employment and labour law matters, issues of social protection and social security, as well as action focused on specific areas such as poverty and the role of the disabled. It has been developed both through the evolution of the Treaties and by social and economic change, and has drawn on a variety of instruments, depending on the objective concerned. It has, in this respect, fulfilled three major functions:

- to provide a legal framework in specific areas of the Treaty;
- to give substantial financial support, in particular for training and employment measures;
- to stimulate and encourage cooperation between the various representatives of social policy.

## A — LEGAL ATTAINMENTS OR 'ACQUIS'

Legal provisions have been put in place over a long period. They have furnished a sound basis

for the guarantee of fundamental social rights for workers, rights which have been further consolidated in the case-law of the European Court of Justice.

The first Regulations adopted in the social field relate to the free movement of workers, one of the four freedoms of the Treaty, and specifically concern the coordination of social security systems for migrant workers.

Another area of Community legislation is equal treatment between men and women.

A third area of more recent legal development concerns the protection of workers as regards health and safety at work.

Other legislation concerns the protection of workers and labour law.



*Fundamental social rights for workers have been further consolidated in the case-law of the European Court of Justice*

Photo: © CEC

## **B — THE CHARTER OF THE FUNDAMENTAL SOCIAL RIGHTS OF WORKERS AND THE ACTION PROGRAMME**

The instruments used by the Community either individually or in combination culminated in the Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers adopted in 1989 and in the Commission's action programme. The Charter represents a framework of principles, covering many aspects of working and living conditions.

## **C — FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

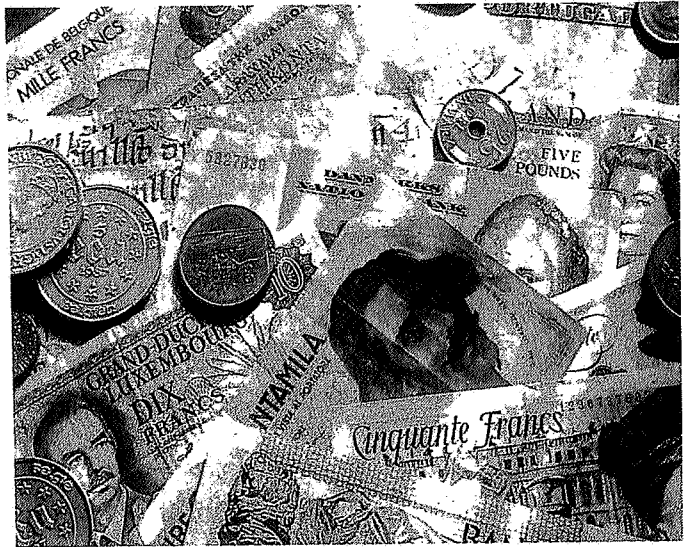
The massive financial support of the European Social Fund (ESF) for training and employment measures has contributed greatly to the development of national measures, especially as far as young people and the long-term unemployed are concerned. The role of the ESF has been especially significant in developing training programmes in the least-favoured regions of the Community.

During the period 1989-93, the ESF devoted more than ECU 21 billion to these activities, benefiting around 17 million people in the Community.

The scope of the European Social Fund has been widened as a result of the recent revision of the ESF Regulation. Its tasks now include broad human resources development and the improvement of the workings of the labour market.

## **D — COOPERATION, MOBILIZATION, EXCHANGES**

In response to social and economic change and to common challenges facing Member States, a number of programmes and exchanges have



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been developed. These have led to the creation of large and successful networks. In some cases, this has involved the promotion of exchanges of information on national situations and/or policies (e.g. observatories/networks on employment, equal opportunities, family policies, ageing, exclusion).

## **E — SOCIAL DIALOGUE: A CONSENSUS APPROACH TO SOCIAL POLICY**

A key feature of the Commission's work method in bringing forward proposals in the social field has been the practice of extensive consultation of the social partners at various stages. It has also involved a more *ad hoc* process of seeking the views of a wide range of representative bodies, including the three organizations, UNICE, ETUC and CEEP, which make up the present social dialogue at European level.

