

A European plan for the creation of "green" jobs and for the "greening" of the economy: the conclusions of the ministerial conference

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On the occasion of the first ministerial conference on "Green Jobs" within the framework of the European Union, held by the Belgian presidency on 28 and 29 September, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Employment Joëlle Milquet, together with the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and inclusion, László Andor, launched a proposal for the first European plan for the creation of jobs in 'Green sectors' and for the "Greening" of the economy and the labour market.

The ministeriële conference of 28 and 29 September, which brought together various ministers and experts from international organisations (OECD, ILO) and representatives from the green economy (in the construction sector, recycling, etc.) with the social partners and the actors involved in the labour market, for the purpose of preparing the concrete action trajectories for the European plan for the creation of green jobs, which forms one of the key challenges to which we need to formulate an answer.

The presentations at the recent two-day conference demonstrated that the 'green' growth will bring about changes in our labour markets. New jobs will be created, many others will evolve, and still others will disappear. Joëlle Milquet believes that it is essential for us to possess the capacity to anticipate these changes so that we can ensure that the changes that are underway will ultimately be positive ones for the employees, for the labour markets and for 'green' growth.

The aim of the minister is for the Council of Ministers of Employment in December to adopt policy decisions that will give concrete form to the outlines of a future plan for the creation of green jobs, on the basis of what has been said at this conference as well as the activities of the Committee on Employment, the Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee.

At the end of this two-day conference, various outlines had emerged:

1. The government has an important role to play in providing an impulse. Various national experiences with ambitious plans for "greening" the economy were presented. In some cases it was a question of global strategies, geared towards all industries and sectors (such as in Great Britain and France), in other cases strategies geared towards very specific sectors (such as the construction sector in Germany, for example). The decisions that will have to be adopted in December will have to be geared towards strengthening the exchange of 'good practices' and asking the Member States to devise a national strategy for the creation of "green" jobs, including additional benchmarked goals spread over a number of years.
2. The presentations demonstrated that all jobs will be affected by the transition towards a green economy. This makes accompanying measures for employees important: the employment services will have a key role to play and employees will potentially have to be reoriented towards new growth sectors. It would also be advisable to take into account the restructuring that might stem from this and to develop a strategy in anticipation of the need for reconversion. The Belgian Presidency is also organising an event on 18 and 19 October on socially responsible restructuring and necessary changes in that context.
3. The training of employees forms a key element in the transformation of our economies. Shortages are currently arising of employees with the skills required for certain sectors. In the context of the decisions to be adopted in December, measures will be requested for anticipating needs for skills and qualifications. The emphasis was also placed on the importance of training employees and job seekers for "Green Jobs", not only during the initial

training but also in the context of lifelong learning. The 'gender'-dimension was also raised: it is certainly essential that women are also steered in the direction of these new sectors.

4. Another point for attention is the importance of reducing the cost of labour and shifting towards green fiscal affairs, in order to increase the number of jobs in the green sectors and to stimulate the development of goods and services that promote employment.
5. The European funds must play an important role in providing support for employees, training them for new 'green' jobs, and ensuring that the most vulnerable employees are integrated into the new 'green' sectors. Better financing of these initiatives is of crucial importance. In the context of the decisions, the Presidency invites the European Commission to investigate whether the European funds, and particularly the European Social Fund and the Fund for Adaptation to Globalization could, in the context of the next programme for the period 2014-2020, take the transition to a green economy more into account.
6. The transition must take place in an equitable fashion. The jobs created must be high-quality jobs. The Member States must ensure this. A good representation of employees and employers within the new sectors is important for ensuring good employment conditions. In its decisions, the Presidency will invite the European Commission to integrate in its multiyear strategy for health and safety at work the identification of risks associated with the new professions connected with 'green' growth.
7. Although 99 percent of companies are SMEs and their added economic value amounts to 57 percent, they still are not paying sufficient attention to the environment. For example, only 6 percent have a management tool for the environment. The environmental challenge is all too often seen as an extra cost instead of an opportunity. In the context of the decisions to be adopted in December, special attention must be paid to SMEs. The Presidency invites the Member States and the European Commission therefore to undertake greater promotion of the toolkit for environmental management (developed by the European Commission).
8. All jobs have to become greener. The workplace, the labour conditions, the use of new materials that need energy efficiency standards, the work planning and commutes must be thoroughly revised. In order to achieve this, the social dialogue, the employees and employers will all have to play a crucial role.
9. All players in the labour market must be aware of the transition that is occurring and must prepare themselves: the public employment services, the social partners, the educational institutions, training operators, the local, regional and national governments, etc. All of these players must embrace the changes that are currently under way. For this reason, the approach through coordination and task forces must be reinforced.
10. In December the Belgian Presidency will present indicators for making the labour market Greener which can be applied in the various Member States.
11. Finally, today, indicators for the greening of jobs were presented that were drawn up within the indicators group of the Committee for Employment. Thanks to these indicators, an analysis plan can be created in order to track the evolution of the greening of our labour market. In this way it forms a valuable tool for evaluating the policy applied.

In light of all of these different elements, for Joëlle Milquet it is important that the European Commission propose principles in 2011 that will lead the labour market towards "greener" growth. The European Commission has already indicated that it is working on a working document on this matter that will be added to the flagship "an agenda for new skills and new jobs". In the framework of the decisions, the Belgian Presidency invites the European Commission in 2011 to present an ambitious initiative for a European policy that establishes the principles, methods and evaluation techniques for "greening" the labour market and creating "green" jobs.