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Lisbon strategy: two reports name good and bad "pupils"

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One week before the EU Spring Summit, two think tanks have presented an assessment of the progress of the Lisbon reforms strategy. Both studies do not hesitate to "name and shame" the good and bad member states.

Background:

On 23-24 March, heads of state and government will meet in their yearly Spring Summit to discuss progress on the reforms strategy for growth and jobs. The National Lisbon Reform Programmes will be one of their main points of attention.

In 2005, the Commission relaunched the Lisbon agenda, focussing it on economic growth and jobs and giving national governments, as well as national stakeholders more "ownership" of the process. This "Lisbon 2" relaunch was based on the recommendations from a wise men's group led by former Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok. One of the recommendations of the "Kok report" was not taken up by "Lisbon 2": the idea to "name and shame" countries' performances on their socio-economic reforms.

Two European think tanks have prepared evaluation reports on the progress of reform in the Member States and have come to slightly different conclusions. But both think tanks also dare to do what the Commission has avoided: to pinpoint the "heroes" and "villains" of the Lisbon reforms process.

The Brussels-based think tank **Bruegel** presented its assessment of the relaunched Lisbon agenda on 14 March. In a policy brief, Jean Pisani-Ferry and André Sapir warn the EU not to miss the "last exit to Lisbon". They evaluated the National Reform Programmes and the Commission's evaluation of those programmes. On a scale from 1 to 12, most countries score below 6 when it comes to ownership of the Lisbon agenda. "Ownership" in this context refers to the involvement of national parliaments, social partners and civil society in the criteria of the National Reform Programmes.

In the Bruegel ranking, Estonia has the best "ownership" (11 out of 12), followed by 9 other countries (Austria, Denmark, Poland, Spain and others) with 7 out of 12. The countries, where these stakeholders were least involved, were Belgium (3), Germany (2) and the UK (2).

In their evaluation of the Commission's report on the National Reform Programmes, Pisani-Ferry and Sapir criticised the "still too profuse" integrated guidelines and urged the Commission to "simplify and prioritise the Lisbon guidelines".

In a new Lisbon Scorecard to be presented on 20 March in Brussels, the London-based think tank **Centre for European Reform (CER)** is more positive about the progress. "Many underlying trends are positive", the CER says in its press release. "Slowly, but steadily, the EU is moving forward in most of the areas covered by the Lisbon agenda."

In the CER ranking of top performers ("heroes") and laggards ("villains"), Denmark is number one, with Sweden and Austria following close behind. The UK, the Netherlands and Finland also get high marks. The Mediterranean countries Italy, Greece and Portugal score poorly, but the report's number one "villain" is Poland.

Positions:

In a press conference during the European Business Summit on 17 March, Commission **Vice-President Verheugen** lambasted the Bruegel report, when asked for a reaction by EurActiv. "It is premature to judge the new strategy when the National Reform Programmes are only out for a few weeks", the Enterprise Commissioner stated. He also said that there was no evidence at all that in international affairs a "naming and shaming" strategy had ever had any success.

"This report is more about ideology than about science", Mr Verheugen concluded.

In the same press conference, **Philippe de Buck**, head of the European employers' federation UNICE, supported the Commissioner in his rejection of the "naming and shaming" approach. This was in clear contradiction to UNICE President Sellière a few months ago, who, during another UNICE press conference, indicated that his organisation would not shy away from shaming those countries that would not deliver.

Next steps:

- The European Council (Spring Summit) takes place from 23-24 March.

Links

EU official documents

- Commission: Growth and Jobs web site [FR] [DE]

Think-Tanks

- Centre for European Reform (CER): Launch of the Lisbon Scorecard VI
- Bruegel: Policy brief "Last Exit to Lisbon" , (14 March 2006)
- Bruegel: Press release "Last Exit to Lisbon" , (14 March 2006)