



Socialists renew campaign for jobs in Europe

Leading European social democrats today announced plans to involve national parliaments in an EU-wide campaign to stimulate growth and create five million jobs by the end of the decade.

The announcement came as former Dutch premier Wim Kok prepared to present the European Commission with an analysis of the ailing Lisbon Strategy to make the EU the world's most competitive, sustainable economy by 2010.

The President of the Party of European Socialists, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, and European Parliament Socialist Group vice-presidents responsible for policies linked to the strategy, Harlem Désir and Robert Goebbels, jointly welcomed the report but underlined the need to maintain the balance of the Lisbon agenda and warned about the risk of using it to undermine social priorities.

They said their campaign would focus on the need for simultaneous action by the EU's 25 governments, including investment in people, research and innovation, to stimulate growth.

But they warned: "The Kok report's lack of precision on some issues creates a risk that it will be misinterpreted and misused to undermine the European Union's broad economic, social and environmental agenda. This is regrettable since the report itself ringingly endorses that agenda."

Mr Goebbels, who is responsible for sustainable development policies in the Socialist Group, said: "The most important message from the Kok report is that it unequivocally re-affirms the original Lisbon strategy and finds that the major weakness has been a failure of implementation by EU member states."

Said Mr Désir, in charge of the Group's economic and social policies: "The report is a slap in the face for those, in some governments and in the Commission, who have argued for a narrower competitiveness strategy, focussed purely on the economy, and especially on liberalising markets."

Said the three politicians in a joint statement today: "We will not accept misuse of this report against social services or pension rights. It has specific proposals in most of the supply side but it is weak in detail on the demand side."

"The Kok report recognises that high environmental and social standards must be seen not as a cost but as a contribution to Europe's global competitive edge."

"The European social model is not an obstacle, but a means, to competitiveness. To revitalise the Lisbon strategy, Europe must prioritise reforms that help us to harness and develop the talents of all Europeans."

"To do this we need more than the Kok demands of reorientation of national and European budgets towards the Lisbon objectives. We need increased investment in human resources, in research and in innovation, lifelong learning and programmes of social inclusion."

"All of this should be framed more clearly in a real, proactive labour market policy."

"Europe will not achieve the growth that it needs just by focusing on the supply side. We need active investment cooperation in which each and every member state simultaneously invests more over the next four years. We are pleased that the Kok report reasserts the need to improve European budgetary coordination and confirms that the unreformed stability pact has been an obstacle to the Lisbon strategy. We are delighted that the Kok team joins us in welcoming Commissioner Almunia's proposed reforms of the pact."

"We cannot have real reforms without growth and working conditions that will empower and motivate our workforce."

The three social democratic leaders warned that the report's vagueness on some issues could help those who have sought to hijack the Lisbon strategy by concentrating on its deregulatory agenda. They declared their commitment to the strategy's central principle of marrying economic dynamism with social cohesion, fairness and environmental sustainability.

They said: "The report calls, for example, for removal of obstacles to free movement of services – but it does not mention the importance of

safeguarding social standards and public services. Good public services are essential to social cohesion and the quality of life."

Announcing new measures to take the issue forward, the three social democrats said: "The Lisbon Strategy has not been put into effect properly because national parliaments, businesses, trade unions or media are failing to keep governments on track.

"That is why we now propose a series of joint actions by the European and national parliaments next year to raise the political profile of the Lisbon strategy.

"Parliamentarians from across Europe will come together to define better ways of translating the key Lisbon issues into practical action.

"Europe's Parliaments are the key to bringing the Lisbon strategy out of the shadows and into the mainstream of political debate."

end

