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Til underretning for Folketingets Europaudvalg vedlægges Finansministeriets redegørelse for rådsmøde (økonomi- og finansministre) den 17. februar 2005.

[Handwritten signature]



28. februar 2005
12 CHM

Referat vedr. rådsmødet (ECOFIN) den 17. februar 2005

Dagsordenspunkt: Stabilitets- og Vækstpagten – Vurdering af opdaterede konvergens- og stabilitetsprogrammer for Belgien, Danmark, Estland, Frankrig, Tyskland, Irland, Italien, Malta, Polen, Slovakiet og Finland

Rådet vedtog udtalelser vedrørende stabilitetsprogrammerne for Belgien, Frankrig, Tyskland, Irland, Italien og Finland samt konvergensprogrammerne for Danmark, Estland, Malta, Polen og Slovakiet.¹

I udtalelsen om det danske konvergensprogram noteres det, at Danmark fuldt ud opfylder Stabilitets- og Vækstpagtens krav, at Danmark er i en gunstig position i forhold til den langsigtede finanspolitiske holdbarhed og, at forudsætningerne vedrørende afdæmpet udvikling i det offentlige forbrug og stigningen i arbejdsudbuddet kan vise sig at være udfordrende.

Dagsordenspunkt: Stabilitets- og Vækstpagten – Kommissionens meddelelse om europæisk strategi for ledelse og ansvar vedr. statistik for offentlige finanser

Rådet vedtog konklusioner (vedlagt) på baggrund af Kommissionens meddelelse om forbedret budgetstatistik. Rådet lægger bl.a. vægt på, at de nationale statistikbureauer har tilstrækkelige ressourcer og kompetencer til at producere statistikker af høj kvalitet, og at de sikres uafhængighed. Samtidig lægger Rådet vægt på, at EU's krav til produktionen af statistik prioriteres. Der lægges desuden vægt på at styrke Eurostat og Kommissionens muligheder for overvågning af landenes økonomiske situation og analyse af kvaliteten af data. Det blev pointeret, at der ønskes adfærdskodekser på området frem for direktiver.

Dagsordenspunkt: Stabilitets- og Vækstpagten – Proceduren for uforholdsmæssigt store underskud vedr. Grækenland

Rådet vedtog et pålæg under Traktatens artikel 104.9 i proceduren for uforholdsmæssigt store underskud til Grækenland med henblik på at træffe foranstaltninger til at bringe situationen med det uforholdsmæssigt store underskud til ophør så hurtigt som muligt og senest i 2006. Rådet pointerede, at Grækenland skal fremlægge et opdateret stabilitetsprogram senest den 21. marts 2005, der redegør for planer om at efterleve anbefalin-

¹ Udtalelserne offentliggøres på Rådets hjemmeside.

gerne. Grækenland tog rådets beslutning til efterretning og udtrykte vilje til at konsolidere de offentlige finanser.

Dagsordenspunkt: Forberedelsen af Det Europæiske Råds Forårstopmøde – Kommissionens rapport vedr. Lissabonstrategien, de overordnede økonomisk-politiske retningslinier og "Key-issues" papiret

Rådet vedtog konklusioner (vedlagt) vedr. Kommissionens implementeringsrapport om de overordnede økonomisk-politiske retningslinier 2003-2005, der bl.a. opfordrer medlemslandene til at gøre en ekstra indsats i forhold til de områder, hvor Kommissionen har påpeget manglende fremskridt.

Kommissionen præsenterede kort sin meddelelse vedr. Lissabonstrategien. Der var generel støtte til Kommissionens oplæg, men bred tilslutning til at den foreslåede fokusering på vækst og beskæftigelse skal ses inden for rammerne af bæredygtig udvikling og social samhørighed.

For så vidt angår 'Key-issues' papiret var medlemslandene positive overfor formandskabets oplæg, herunder dets fokusering på vækst og beskæftigelse inden for en miljømæssig og social bæredygtig ramme samt sikring af konsistens mellem den overordnede makroøkonomiske ramme og strukturforbedringer. Papiret ventes vedtaget på det kommende ECOFIN-møde.

Dagsordenspunkt: Forberedelsen af Det Europæiske Råds Forårstopmøde – Styrkelse og bedre implementering af Stabilitets- og Vækstpagten

Ministrene drøftede i opfølgning på rådsmødet (ECOFIN) den 16. november 2004 og 18. januar 2005, hvordan implementeringen af Stabilitets- og Vækstpagten kan styrkes.

Der var blandt landene bred støtte til at styrke den forebyggende del af Pagten, bl.a. gennem retningslinier for styrket konsolidering i gode tider. I forhold til de mellemfristede målsætninger var der bred enighed om i første omgang at differentiere dem efter både gæld og potentiel vækst og på et senere tidspunkt, når det analytiske apparat er udviklet, at differentiere dem efter også den samlede finanspolitiske holdbarhed. Udgangspunktet er fortsat budgetter 'tæt på balance', og at der bør være en tilstrækkelig sikkerhedsmargin i forhold til 3-pct.grænsen. Der var endvidere bred enighed om at øge fleksibiliteten i proceduren for uforholdsmæssigt store underskud, herunder i tilfælde af lav vækst. Endvidere drøftede man en mulig klargøring af konceptet om at tage højde for 'alle andre relevante faktorer' i forbindelse med igangsættelsen af proceduren og de øvrige trin. Endelig drøftede ministrene styrket 'governance' i forhold til Pagten, herunder kommunikationen til offentligheden og mellem institutioner samt

forpligtelse af landene til at producere pålidelig statistik i samarbejde med EU-institutionerne.

Dagsordenspunkt: De finansielle perspektiver 2007-2013

Formandskabet orienterede kort om organiseringen af det hidtidige og fremtidige arbejde med de flerårige finansielle rammer for perioden 2007-2013. Formandskabet pointerede, at målsætningen for forhandlingerne er at opnå politisk enighed om de finansielle perspektiver i juni 2005.

Diverse

Kommissionen og Den Europæiske Investeringsbank (EIB) orienterede ministrene om situationen i de katastroferamte lande i Sydøstasien, herunder behov og muligheder for lånefacilitet til genopbygning.

Ministrene havde under frokosten bl.a. en drøftelse af det tysk-franske forslag om beskatning af flytransport - en såkaldt kerosin-skat - til finansiering af udviklingsbistand. Flere lande var positive overfor yderligere overvejelser af forslaget, men mange var imod at øremærke bestemte skatteprovenuier til bestemte formål. Formandskabet bad Kommissionen analysere mulighederne for forslaget.

Endvidere havde ministrene en drøftelse af et forslag til ændring af valggruppeopdelingen i EIB efter Bulgariens og Rumæniens optagelse, jf. Rådets beslutning den 2. juni 2004. Rumænien indtræder i Danmarks valggruppe som også inkluderer Grækenland og Irland.

Endelig drøftede ministrene kort EF-domstolens praksis på det skattepolitiske område, herunder et tysk ønske om at nedsætte en gruppe på højt niveau til at analysere denne praksis. Nogle medlemslande var imod forslaget, og formandskabet vil overveje om og i så fald i hvilket regi sagen skal drøftes.

Rådets konklusioner vedr. om europæisk strategi for ledelse og ansvar vedr. statistik for offentlige finanser

“On several occasions in the past months, Ecofin ministers have emphasised that reliable and timely statistics are the basis of economic policy-making and multilateral surveillance and a crucial precondition for effective Council decision-making. In line with its intentions expressed at earlier meetings, the Council therefore decided on 7 December 2004 to return to the issue of how to improve the governance of the European statistical system in early 2005.

The Council therefore welcomes the Commission Communication on “Towards a European Governance Strategy for Fiscal Statistics“, adopted on 22 December 2004, which proposes three lines of action: building up the legislative framework; improving the operational capacities of the relevant Commission services, i.e. Eurostat and the Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN); and establishing European standards on the independence of national statistical institutes. The Commission is planning to present proposals in the above areas.

The Ecofin Council emphasises that the following principles should guide future work on these issues:

- The core issue remains to ensure adequate practices, resources and capabilities to produce high quality statistics at the national level. It is the responsibility of Member States to ensure that their national statistical offices have sufficient resources to function effectively. Capacity can be further enhanced by an increased focus on sharing best practices through peer reviews. The Council welcomes the on-going work on a code of conduct for European standards for the statistical authorities. These standards should provide clear and practical guidance as regards the safeguarding of the independence, integrity and accountability of the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat when it comes to producing and disseminating statistics.
- National statistical offices' capacity to meet high statistical standards depends crucially on the ability to prioritise the burden from EU statistical requirements on authorities. Priority setting in this respect would also need to be conducive to a reduced regulatory burden on respondents. Therefore, and in line with the Ecofin Council conclusions of 2 June 2004, ministers are looking forward to discussing in June 2005 suggestions by the Economic and Financial Committee (EFC) on the rebalancing of statistical priorities.
- The Council recognises the need to enhance the capacity of the relevant Commission services to reinforce its role in multilateral fiscal surveillance. This is essentially a question of more efficient and effective allocation of resources in the Commission budget.

- While recognising that government finance data are in general of a high quality standard, the Council acknowledges that the Eurostat should be in a better position to analyse the quality of the reported public finance data. The surveillance should be able to benefit from the use of a complete set of government accounts as soon as they become available.
- Finally, the scope of the enhanced Eurostat powers, as well as the scope of the surveillance on statistical standards under the new code of conduct, should strike the right balance between the benefits in terms of improved statistical quality and the costs in terms of added administrative burden at the EU and national level.
- Independence of Eurostat should be enhanced and formally established to clarify the internal statistical governance of the relevant Commission services.
- It is vital that Eurostat/Commission services promptly inform the EFC and the Council should major statistical problems arise.

These improvements in statistics would be consistent with the on-going discussions on enhancing governance within the Stability and Growth Pact.”

Rådskonklusioner vedr. de overordnede økonomisk-politiske retningslinier (BEPG)

“The Council welcomes the Commission’s Second Implementation Report on the 2003-2005 Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, which provides a comprehensive account of progress made since the original Guidelines were adopted in June 2003 (and updated in July 2004). The Council welcomes the improved focus on policy measures, compared to the concentration on policy intentions in last year’s Implementation Report. The Council also acknowledges that the assessment of the new Member States is less conclusive as they had only limited time to respond to the country-specific challenges identified in the 2004 update of the BEPGs.

The assessment of the Second Implementation Report is broadly in line with the key messages of the Annual Report on Structural Reforms 2005, prepared by the Economic Policy Committee, and endorsed by the Council on 18 January 2005. Both Reports stress, once again, that despite progress in a number of areas - for instance, a relatively good follow-up of the country-specific recommendations has been given by Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Finland and the United Kingdom - the current pace of reform is insufficient to achieve a timely completion of the Lisbon objectives. The Commission’s Implementation Report clearly identifies weaknesses and areas with a lack of progress, as does the Annual Report on Structural Reforms, thereby providing valuable input for the upcoming Mid-Term Review of the Lisbon Strategy.

In discussing the Implementation Report on the BEPGs, Ministers fully shared the view that macroeconomic policies supportive of stability and growth are indispensable in reaping the full benefits of structural reforms in terms of growth and employment. Successful structural reforms enhance the effectiveness of macroeconomic policies, ensuring long-lasting growth and the long-term sustainability and quality of public finances.

Ministers also highlighted the following elements, which are central to the Lisbon strategy aim to enhance Europe’s growth potential:

- **Enhancing productivity.** The Council notes that the recovery was only moderate and that the budgetary position of the EU as a whole did not improve. In this context, the appreciation of the euro, the oil price increase, inflation differentials and wage developments within the euro area are relevant. The Council reiterates the need for reaching or maintaining sound budgetary positions, which are a key requirement for a macroeconomic framework supportive of growth and stability. It welcomes progress made in specific areas crucial for raising the EU’s growth potential. In this context, one should note the good progress made in providing a regulatory framework for more efficient capital markets, in making the overall business environment more favourable and enhancing the effectiveness of competition poli-

cies. However, the Council notes with concern the disappointing transposition record for Internal Market directives and the high number of infringement cases. The EU continues to lag behind the US in the transition towards a knowledge-based economy. The current pace of reform in research, innovation, education and training systems is too slow to attain the objectives set in Lisbon and Barcelona.

- **Increasing employment.** The Council notes that progress has been made in reforming European labour markets towards efficiency, but recalls with some concern that the pace is insufficient in order to achieve the employment targets (possibly with the exception of the female employment rate target). As regards Member States, the Council welcomes the measures adopted in Germany in 2004 and the good progress made in Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and Austria. Measures have generally remained focused on tax cuts, life-long learning strategies or active labour market policies. Most Member States undertook measures in 2003 and/or 2004 to make work pay by increasing work-related tax credits or reducing the marginal tax rate at the low end. Reforms to address the unemployment benefit system were also undertaken in some Member States (notably the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, France and the Netherlands). The Council notes that only few initiatives have been taken related to wage bargaining or employment protection legislation.”