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MISSCEO (2007) 6

**MUTUAL INFORMATION SYSTEM ON SOCIAL PROTECTION
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
(MISSCEO)**

9th meeting

(Istanbul, 2 and 3 July 2007)

MEETING REPORT

I. OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. MISSCEO's 9th annual meeting took place in Istanbul, Turkey. Mr Mehmet Sevim, Head of the International Organisations Department, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.

2. In his opening remarks Mr Sevim referred to the international standard-setting instruments which guided establishment of social-security systems worldwide. He referred in particular to Council of Europe social-security norms. Because demographic change was forcing countries to adjust their social-security systems, comparative tables of national legislation were of major importance as an information source about national law, hence the importance of the MISSCEO project.

3. He also referred to United Nations, ILO and Council of Europe co-ordination instruments on social-security cover for migrant workers and regretted that they had received so few ratifications. Additional efforts were needed to bring about more ratifications. Some conventions did not have very precise content, and that could give rise to interpretation problems. He cited the question put to the Council of Europe about interpretation of the European Convention on Social Security, which had yet to receive a reply.

4. He thanked the Council of Europe for the invaluable tool which publication of information through the MISSCEO network provided.

5. Ms Ana Gómez Heredero, head of the MISSCEO secretariat, told Mr Sevim that the Treaty Office had received the letter about interpretation of the European Convention on Social Security and that a reply had been sent to the Permanent Delegation of Turkey to the Council of Europe. Taking the Chair, she thanked the Turkish co-organisers and gave various practical information about the meeting and the programme of their Istanbul stay. A total of twelve European countries and three observer countries take part in preparing the MISSCEO tables. Seventeen experts, representing thirteen European countries, attended the meeting. For the list of participants, see Appendix I.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

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6. MISSCEO adopted the meeting agenda as set out in Appendix II.

III. INFORMATION FROM THE SECRETARIAT

7. Ms Gómez demonstrated the new MISSCEO information-retrieval system, which took the form of a database on the Internet site. Information searches could be made by subject matter or country at <http://www.coe.int/MISSCEO>. In 2006 and 2007 the database had replaced the paper version of the comparative tables, which was no longer being produced. It was planned to make MISSCEO data available on CD-Rom.

The participants expressed great satisfaction with the retrieval system.

IV. INFORMATION ON MISSOC AND ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Mr Claude Ewen, the MISSOC correspondent for Luxembourg, gave a presentation on how MISSOC operated, how the network linked with other European Commission activities on social protection, MISSOC changes to the comparative tables, and the latest developments on MISSOC Info.

8. For the full text of Mr Ewen's presentation, see Appendix III.

V. GENERAL COMMENTS ON COMPARABILITY

9. Mr Paul Schoukens, consultant, gave his comments on comparability. Firstly, some countries had not yet sent in their data updates, which was causing problems. It was in everyone's interests for up-to-date information to be received ahead of the meeting so that it could be discussed at the meeting. He made the following general observations:

- countries often used terms such as "minimum wage" and "minimum pension". It would be very useful if, between brackets, the actual amounts were added in the national currency;
- Table XI, "Guaranteeing sufficient resources", received few replies and perhaps needed to be simplified. The secretariat said that the simplification would use as a model the changes already adopted by MISSOC and these would be introduced into the MISSCEO tables in the second half of 2007;
- the length of the replies varied. Some countries supplied more detailed information than others. Consequently, and by virtue of what he termed "negative comparability", if one country mentioned the existence of certain benefits while another did not it would be assumed that the benefits did not exist in the second country;
- countries did not specify what they meant by "residence";
- Appendix I on social protection of the self-employed needed reviewing.
- He had more specific comments on certain tables; for example, more detail was needed in Table II ("Health care") for "choice of doctor" and "proof of incapacity", particularly with regard to the functioning of the specialist medical board responsible for declarations of incapacity.

The participants noted the proposals. It was decided to incorporate in the MISSCEO tables the latest layout changes to the MISSOC tables. Correspondents would receive a revised version identical to the MISSOC one for the January 2008 updates.

VI. COMPARATIVE EXERCISE

10. The aim was to encourage MISSCEO correspondents to consider the tables from the reader's standpoint, not the author's.

11. As decided at the 8th MISSCEO meeting (Mangalia, 6 and 7 July 2006), the participants had been asked this year to read Tables V ("Invalidity"), VI ("Old-age") and VII ("Survivors") before the meeting.

12. In the meeting the correspondents divided into three groups of two or three countries to consider the tables.

13. The findings of the different groups may be summarised as follows:

- omissions were found under some headings in the tables; some information also needed to be checked by the correspondents;

- in the section on “applicable statutory basis”, the name or number of each statute should be specified so that the statute could be identified;
- in Table V (“Invalidity”), under the heading “rehabilitation and retraining”, measures were sometimes mentioned which were not relevant;
- under the heading “Basic principles” it should always be specified whether insurance was compulsory;
- the calculation of benefits sometimes needs clarification; for the calculation of survivors’ and invalidity benefit, countries mostly referred to calculation of old-age benefits.

14. The exercise again proved very useful and should continue in the same form. The correspondents decided that at the 10th meeting, in 2008, they would look at Table VIII (“Employment injuries and occupational diseases”) and Appendix I, on social protection of the self-employed.

VII. EVOLUTION OF NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS. INFORMATION FROM THE CORRESPONDENTS ON DEVELOPMENTS

Document MISSCEO Info 2006

15. The national correspondents described many interesting developments which had occurred in their social protection systems in 2006 and the first half of 2007.

16. In Armenia, the main reforms were concerned with the system of benefits for poor families, with various measures increasing monthly benefits by 30%. In addition, measures had been introduced to implement the Employment and Social Protection Act, that law having come into force on 1 January 2006. The results had been to establish active employment policy, increase the number of people registered with local employment offices, and closer co-operation with the social partners.

17. In Serbia, following a large number of changes to the law in 2005, the year 2006 was devoted to implementing the changes, in particular the reform of old-age pension (the voluntary 3rd pillar came into force in 2006), of invalidity and survivor’s pension, of health insurance and of family benefit. The separation of Serbia and Montenegro had not had much impact in the social security field as the two countries already had separate systems. The only repercussions were that residence for child-allowance purposes had been redefined, and a social insurance agreement between the two newly independent states had been signed in December 2006 (but had not yet been ratified by Serbia). There had been a significant increase in benefit payments for 100% incapacity.

18. In Moldova, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection had split into two different ministries in January 2007, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Protection. The reform of the pensions system, begun in 1999, had continued. In agriculture, since 2007, pensions had been financed by farmers’ contributions and not from the general budget, as had previously been the case.

19. In the Russian Federation, reforms had focused on demographic strategy to meet the fall in population. Financial incentives had been used to stimulate the birth rate. Under the new legislation of 1 January 2007, child allowance was paid to all women. The allowance had been raised considerably. A new benefit, “maternity capital”, had been introduced on 1 January 2007. It consisted in a tax-free lump sum (250,000 roubles plus index-linking) payable to mothers at the

birth of the second and following children. The mother could use the money for the following purposes after the child had reached the age of three: housing, child-care, or as a supplement to her allowances. Another compensatory payment to parents had been introduced on the same date. A “child-bearing certificate” had also been introduced in January 2007 to improve medical help for pregnant women. In 2006 and 2007 a large number of regional programmes had been developed to provide support to households with children. As from 2008 aid would also be available to adoptive families. The initial results of these measures seemed very positive in the light of the increased birth rate in 2007, the number of second children born, and the fall in infant mortality.

20. In Ukraine, draft legislation on a system for collecting a single social contribution was under debate in Parliament. Parliament had approved, at first reading, the bill introducing a cumulative system of state pensions insurance. A pilot project for setting up a compulsory second pillar was running in the Lviv region. The Pensions Fund had introduced a programme to convert contributions received by employers into individual accounts for employees. As a first stage, the data concerning contributions had been transferred to a Pensions Fund data base. The next stage of the project would be to set up individual accounts. The reform of the pensions system begun in 2004 was intended to convert the system into a three-pillar one. After Cabinet approval, on 15 December 2005, of the strategy for developing the pensions system, short-term strategy (2006 to 2009) and medium-term strategy (2010 to 2016) had been prepared for implementing it.

21. In Turkey, two very important pieces of legislation had come into force in 2006: the Social Insurance and General Health Insurance Act and the law setting up a social-insurance entity. The Turkish constitutional court had annulled some sections of the former, to do with the income used as the basis for calculating contribution payments, calculation of retirement pension, the retirement age, and the size of joint payments. The Act’s entry into force had been deferred to 1 January 2008. Information was also provided about the new pensions insurance scheme aimed at introducing a single pensions scheme.

22. In “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, the main reforms concerned unemployment insurance, pension and incapacity insurance, and introducing the pensions reform. In April 2006 the Employment and Unemployment Insurance Act had been amended, the eligibility criteria clarified, and the allowances reduced. There was particular emphasis on galvanising the labour market. In 2006 Parliament had also legislated on temporary employment agencies, with the aim of introducing more flexibility and greater social protection.

23. Five national reports describing these developments had been sent to the secretariat. For publication of fuller information it was agreed that correspondents who had not yet done so would send the secretariat their contributions by 1 September 2007.

VIII. PREPARATION OF THE 2007 EDITION

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24. The participants looked at the latest technical and administrative aspects of preparation of the 2007 edition, which gave an update on national legislation as at 1 January 2007.

25. MISSCEO agreed the following schedule:

- a. MISSCEO correspondents who had not yet done so would send in their contributions by 1 September 2007.
- b. The correspondents who had received Mr Schoukens’ comments would send their revised contributions to the secretariat by 1 September 2007.
- c. The final versions of the national contributions would be ready by 31 October 2007.
- d. The 2007 MISSCEO data (English version) would be transferred to the data base in November 2007.
- e. The 2007 MISSCEO data would be translated into French in November 2007.

- f. The MISSCEO data in French would be transferred to the data base in December 2007 or January 2008.

IX. PLANNING OF THE 2008 EDITION

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- 26. The information in the tables should describe the situation as at 1 January 2007.
- 27. The secretariat presented the following timetable for preparing the 2008 edition:
 - a. The secretariat would request national contributions in January 2008.
 - b. MISSCEO correspondents would update their national contributions by 2 May 2008.
 - c. Observations on the national contributions would be ready by 1 June 2008.
 - d. The 10th MISSCEO meeting would be held on 2 and 3 July 2008.

X. OTHER BUSINESS

- 28. None.

XI. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

- 29. The 10th MISSCEO meeting would be held on 2 and 3 July 2008. The place of the meeting remained to be decided.

Appendix I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Appendix II**DRAFT AGENDA**

- I. OPENING OF THE MEETING
- II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA
- III. INFORMATION FROM THE SECRETARIAT
- IV. INFORMATION ON MISSOC AND ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
- V. GENERAL COMMENTS ON COMPARABILITY
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- VII. EVOLUTION OF NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS. INFORMATION FROM THE CORRESPONDENTS ON THESE EVOLUTIONS IN PARTICULAR ON THE MAIN CURRENT OR PLANNED REFORMS
- VIII. PREPARATION OF THE 2007 EDITION
- IX. PLANNING OF THE 2008 EDITION
- X. ANY OTHER BUSINESS
- XI. DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Appendix III

Speech by Mr Claude Ewen at the MISSCEO meeting in Istanbul (Istanbul, 2 and 3 July 2007)

Introduction

I would like to begin by saying again how glad I am to be able to act as an intermediary between the European Union's MISSOC network and the Council of Europe's MISSCEO network.

My statement will be divided into four parts.

1. The continuing saga of the new MISSOC secretariat

At the last meeting of MISSCEO in Mangalia, I told you that the European Commission, in a move which had surprised everyone, had terminated the contract under which a German institution had, for many years, provided the MISSOC secretariat. The institution in question is called the ISG, the abbreviation for its German name, "Institut für Sozial- und Gesellschaftsforschung", and, as the name indicates, it is an institution set up to conduct research in the field of social affairs. I also described the heated reaction to the Commission's announcement by the MISSOC correspondents, who made formal intervention to senior officials in the European Commission, expressing their dismay. They argued that it was inadvisable for the European Commission to change its contractor overnight. They put particular emphasis on the need for continuity and follow-up and the fact that links would have to be established between the old and the new team, at least for a transitional period.

The message was heeded by the European Commission and the idea of a transitional period was incorporated into the new invitation to tender.

The procedure to find a new contractor has continued over the last year but there have been setbacks and difficulties. For reasons which I do not wish to go into here, the tendering process was marred by procedural mistakes, with the result that there was a complete void, that it is to say no secretariat at all.

This situation was all the more unacceptable in view of the regular work that has to be done on the network, not just updating the comparative tables but also organising meetings and publishing MISSOC-Info.

To help to avoid a total deadlock, the old team, the ISG in Cologne, agreed to continue their work for MISSOC under a limited-term contract, pending a new invitation to tender and the final choice of a new contractor by the European Commission.

All of this means that the MISSOC network has been able to continue its regular day-to-day work more or less normally but that it has not been able to launch any new projects. On this basis, the ISG organised the two annual MISSOC meetings, the autumn one in Helsinki, Finland, in October 2006, and the spring one in Düsseldorf, Germany, in May 2007.

At the Düsseldorf meeting, the European Commission unequivocally confirmed that it intended to change secretariats. It reiterated its desire to issue a new call for tender shortly, so as to find a new contractor at long last. The old team run by the ISG in Cologne made it quite clear that it had no intention of applying again and that the Düsseldorf meeting was the last that it would organise.

I can assure you that the ISG did an outstanding job throughout the time it worked on the MISSOC network and that both the management and the staff were much appreciated by the MISSOC correspondents. This was clear from the standing ovation that the correspondents gave the director of the ISG after his closing speech in Düsseldorf.

You can have doubts about the question whether a change of secretariat is a good thing for MISSOC and hence for MISSCEO. However, there is at least one positive aspect to all this. During the procedure to find a new contractor, the European Commission staff who are currently in charge of MISSOC strove to pass on the message to their superiors that MISSOC was something very important and useful. They placed particular emphasis on the efficient and professional work carried out by the network. In this connection, one particular point was highlighted. The second issue of MISSOC-Info this year, on financing social security, was on a subject entirely in keeping with the work currently being done by the European Commission in preparation for the publication of its annual report on social protection in Europe. This report has considerable political influence because it is issued by the European Commission, and also accepted by the Council.

Publication of the call for tender in the EU Official Journal was scheduled for June and the deadline for bids was to be the end of July. According to the information given to the correspondents at the Düsseldorf meeting, the network's activities will be extended in the future. It will be expected to produce more analytical documents and the new secretariat will be asked to carry out a MISSOC analysis of developments in the social protection field. It was also suggested that more statistics should be used and that these should be tied in with the subjects dealt with in MISSOC-Info.

Which brings me to the second part of my statement.

2. MISSOC as an instrument of European social policy

A question which regularly comes up in the course of the discussions is whether MISSOC should continue to act as a separate network, operating in complete isolation from other European Union activities in the social field. Should MISSOC confine itself to exchanging high-quality information or is the network part of the range of social policy activities carried out at European Union level? Before answering this question, I would like to give a brief outline of the European Union's activities in the social field over the last year.

The Social Protection Committee (more generally referred to by its abbreviated title, the SPC) has been very active over the last year. Its activities cover both social protection and social inclusion policy, the main feature of which is combating poverty and social exclusion. As you know, the SPC's main working method is called the "open method of co-ordination" or "OMC". In contrast to the co-ordination activities provided for in Regulation (EC)1408/71 on social security for migrant workers, the open method of co-ordination places member states under no legal obligations. It is a more flexible form of co-operation, in which the focus is more on experiences and reflections of problems encountered by all the European Union member States. By pooling information and experience, States are better able to understand the scope of the problems they share and react more effectively to the challenges posed. OMC is intended to help states in their efforts to carry out reforms considered essential at national level. As example, you can refer to the problem of the ageing of the population and the pension reforms that this has prompted in most European Union Member States. Through the OMC, governments agree to set joint social policy goals and establish peer review systems.

It is within the SPC that the OMC is applied. It should be noted that the SPC meets very regularly, in principle once a month.

A highlight of the SPC's activities in 2006 was the presentation by the national experts of their reports on the social situation in their countries, the summary and analysis of these by the

European Commission, the discussion in the SPC of this analysis and its adoption by the Council. Thus this report on social protection in Europe has considerable influence and standing because it is a joint document of the European Commission and the Council.

To go back to the question whether MISSOC should have a more extensive role in the sphere of the OMC, it has to be said that as a result of the difficulties in finding a new secretariat, MISSOC has still not played a particularly important or prominent part this year. It has adhered to its customary role of facilitating the exchange of high-quality information through its two traditional instruments, the comparative tables and the MISSOC-Info. However, the idea that it should be given a more prominent analytical role will most certainly come up again once the new secretariat has been established.

3. MISSOC activities over the last year

I will refer to seven activities.

1) Meetings

Unlike MISSCEO meetings, MISSOC meetings are held twice a year. There was a meeting in Helsinki in September 2006 and another in Düsseldorf in May 2007. Meetings are held in the country holding the European Union presidency.

Arrangements also differ from those of MISSCEO in the sense that two correspondents per country attend MISSOC meetings at the EU's expense.

Obviously, these are two of the main factors which explain and foster the greater stability of the MISSOC network in comparison with the MISSCEO network. The fact that each country is represented by two correspondents avoids discontinuity in its activities in terms of time and human resources. The time factor is important as the MISSOC correspondents' activities take place on a regular basis throughout the year. The human resource factor is also important as it is useful to preserve continuity in the event that a correspondent is prevented from attending a meeting or leaves the network. Having two correspondents means that the person's successor does not have to cope with his or her new tasks alone, without the benefit of experience.

However, there is one feature that is common to the meetings of both networks, and that is the pleasant and supportive, and indeed congenial, atmosphere which prevails. This is a good thing, as it has to be said that a great deal of effort and work is required of national correspondents. It is a good idea to nurture the idea of efficient co-operation all round, which is rewarding for everyone. It is better to foster this positive approach rather than the notion that this is purely a professional duty. This positive and constructive basis makes it far easier to call for high standard work from national correspondents when they are making their contributions.

2) Updating the comparative tables by the fixed six-monthly time limits

MISSOC also differs fundamentally from MISSCEO when it comes to updating the comparative tables. MISSOC's comparative tables are updated twice a year; the last two deadlines were 1 July 2006 and 1 January 2007, and correspondents are currently being called on to enter their updates for 1 July 2007. According to the secretariat, there was a large number of changes in the last two updates, which tends to confirm that there is currently an acceleration in social protection reforms. The correspondents have access to a PDF version of the database for the purpose of consulting updates. CD-ROMs are also available and the tables are, of course, published on the European Commission's website. The idea of producing a paper version seems to have been dropped. Currently, the correspondents are being asked to update the tables as of 1 July 2007, and processing this update will be the current secretariat's final task for MISSOC.

3) Improving the tables

The amendments intended to improve the standard of entries in the tables have continued.

At the Helsinki meeting work focused on the amendment of table IX, on family benefits. The secretariat had decided to adopt the same working methods as it had experimented with successfully at previous meetings. To facilitate work and foster a fruitful debate, small working parties were set up at the meeting. The secretariat had prepared a list of general comments to be taken into account, relating in particular to the length of the table and the relationship with other comparative tables and categories. The countries were divided into three working parties, each of which examined the entire content of the table. The comments by the three working parties were discussed further in a plenary session and the following conclusions were reached. The family benefits table will be divided into three sections, one on family allowances, one on childcare allowances and one on other benefits relating to dependants. Each of the three sections will have to be dealt with comparably (same type of practical information as the other tables with regard to general principles, field of application, beneficiaries, entitlement conditions and amounts). Former categories 20, 21 and 22 (special cases) were transferred to a specific sub-category entitled "other benefits". In addition to these general conclusions, most of the secretariat's proposals concerning specific countries were accepted by the correspondents. To finalise the amendment of table IX, the secretariat then produced a new file with all the changes that had been accepted. This new file was available to the correspondents for the update of 1 January 2007.

In Düsseldorf, the emphasis was on table X, on unemployment. The same working method was adopted. Once again, there was a discussion with the correspondents for the purpose of drawing conclusions about improving the entries and, where appropriate, the structure of the tables. The secretariat incorporated the changes decided on into the background documents sent to the correspondents for the updates. As I do not yet have the report of the meeting, I am not in a position to describe the precise conclusions adopted in any more detail.

4) The two editions of MISSOC-Info

The subjects dealt with in the two editions of MISSOC-Info published in 2007 were as follows:

- Changes in legislation over the last year;
- Financing of social security.

For several years now, a MISSOC-Info bulletin on changes in social protection has been published annually. It contains the national reports drafted by correspondents under their own responsibility. In the introduction, there is a more general analysis of the trends observed, which is drawn up under the responsibility of an expert from the MISSOC secretariat. Nonetheless, before publication, there is some discussion of the draft analysis, and national correspondents are invited to make any comments they consider necessary. In the report on changes in legislation in 2006, particular emphasis was placed on the following points:

- many countries have reformed their family benefits or childbirth support systems. This is made all the more remarkable by the fact there has been no institutionalised work in this area under the open method of co-ordination at European level;
- secondly, incentives for a quick return to work are spreading. Incentives for welfare benefit claimants to return to work rapidly first appeared as part of policies to accompany the implementation of legislation on the minimum income, and now, having spread to policies connected with unemployment benefits, they are continuing to expand and are tending to extend to all the branches of social security schemes;

- the third trend is related to the continuing reforms of health systems. Firstly, there are the general lines of development traced out by the European Commission in the context of the open method of co-ordination and taken up by national governments. These are designed to promote social integration and guarantee lasting high standards of health care and long-term care for the elderly. In addition, member States have continued to reform their systems in the field of health care through various legislative measures;
- the fourth trend is the targeted improvement and streamlining of benefits. Many countries have made improvements, either to the scope of the rules – by extending entitlement to a benefit to one category or another – or by introducing new benefits or increasing the amounts of existing ones. Examples are the special efforts that have been made to assist persons with disabilities, or sub-categories such as children with disabilities.

The second MISSOC-Info bulletin to be published this year, on the subject of the financing of social security, is nothing new in itself. There was a MISSOC-Info bulletin on the same subject some years ago. The decision to prepare a new bulletin on the subject was prompted by the fact that there had been many changes and developments in this area since. As this is also a highly topical subject of discussion, and in particular in the context of the open method of co-ordination, it seemed essential to bring the MISSOC network's documentation on the subject up to date.

Like all the other MISSOC-Info bulletins, this issue on financing has a general analytical introduction, followed by national reports from all the participating countries.

5) Inclusion of discussion topics in meeting agendas

It is now a tradition at MISSOC meetings to place a discussion topic on the agenda. An expert is asked to introduce the subject and then there is a general discussion. The topics chosen for the last two meetings were connected with the tables to be amended.

In Helsinki, an adviser of the Ministry of Family Affairs gave a presentation on family policies in Finland, focusing in particular on the different forms of parental leave, the services to which families were entitled and the benefits available. There was also a report by an expert on the recent pension reforms in Finland, centring on changing principles and philosophies, their impact and appraisals of new developments.

In Düsseldorf a German expert described the reform of the unemployment benefit system, which is based on both insurance and assistance mechanisms.

The topics chosen were therefore related both directly to the sections of the tables to be amended during the meeting concerned and to the social issues in the country in which the meeting was being held. I leave it to you to decide whether MISSCEO could usefully consider following the same line as MISSOC and adding a topical social issue to its meeting agendas.

6) Description of changes in national legislation and submission of documents by correspondents

Practice at MISSOC meetings differs from that at MISSCEO meetings in that correspondents are not systematically asked, in turn, to describe changes in the legislation in their country. MISSOC correspondents contact the secretariat prior to the meeting to announce that there has been a major reform in their country in a particular sphere. The secretariat then groups the subjects under generic headings such as pensions, financing and health care, and this way of proceeding makes for dialogue and discussion and is more dynamic than the traditional practice of hearing each participant in turn. However, it should be remembered that there are 31 participants in the MISSOC

network and that this actually makes it difficult to go round the whole table, if only because of the limited time available.

It is also worth noting that a highly useful practice has established itself recently. Correspondents who speak at meetings provide their colleagues with written documents on the subject they are addressing. This is of course highly beneficial in terms of the quality of the exchange of information because it means that at the end of each meeting all the participants have their own document, prepared by the national expert.

7) Incorporation of Bulgaria and Romania into MISSOC's comparative tables

This is the first year since these two countries left the MISSCEO network and joined the MISSOC network.

The secretariat gave the information that incorporating Romania and Bulgaria into the network has not caused many problems. This is proof that the MISSOC and MISSCEO networks apply, if not identical, then at least broadly matching working methods.

4. The MISSOC legacy

As the former secretariat, namely the ISG, has clearly stated that it will not reapply for another contract to provide the MISSOC with secretarial services in future, it is now certain that a new team will be taking over. This is a fitting time to describe the highlights of its work over the past years (since when?) and to draw up a list of achievements and successes on which the new team can build.

It should also be recalled that this is not the first time that MISSOC has changed secretariats. Before the ISG, the University of Leuven in Belgium did this work, and its great merit is to have got the system up and running.

The ISG took over where the University of Leuven left off and expanded MISSOC's activities.

I would simply like to outline the two main points which I consider to be central to its legacy:

- the first is the quality of its work: here I am thinking in particular of its work to improve the layout of the tables and its huge effort to make national data more comparable and to computerise the data received. There is also the work of incorporating new member states into the comparative tables following the two enlargements of the European Union which occurred during this time.
- the second is MISSOC's high standard of management: this applies especially to its work in connection with the organisation of the biannual meetings and the preparation of documents.

Emphasis should also be placed on the regularity and punctuality with which the ISG updated tables and prepared information bulletins.

Conclusion

MISSOC has not yet emerged from this transitional stage brought about by the European Commission's desire to replace the secretariat, and all the resulting uncertainty. A period during which staff are waiting to see what happens is hardly conducive to embarking on great changes and launching new projects. We will have to wait for the next MISSOC meeting in Lisbon in October for things to be clearer. At all events, resuming and enhancing co-operation between MISSOC and MISSCEO should be one of the priorities as soon as the new secretariat is set up. I

promise you here and now that I will do everything in my power to ensure good relations between the two networks, for their mutual benefit.