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

12th Meeting
(Strasbourg, 8 - 9 July 2010)
Council of Europe Headquarters – Agora Building
Room G04

MEETING REPORT

I. OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. The 12th meeting of the network was opened and chaired by Ms Ana Gomez Heredero, Secretary of MISSCEO, who began by welcoming the participants. The list of participants appears in Appendix I.

2. Mr Karl-Friedrich Bopp, Head of the Division of Social Cohesion Policy and Standards, welcomed the participants and told them about the latest signatures and ratifications of the standard setting instruments on social security. The Slovak Republic signed the European Code of Social Security on the 24th of February 2010. The Netherlands was the first member state to ratify the Revised European Code of Social Security on 22 December 2009. This instrument will enter into force once it is ratified by two member states. Mr Bopp reported also on the main results of the 5th meeting of the Committee of Experts on Social Security (CS-SS) that took place from 1 to 3 June 2010 in Strasbourg. Apart from its monitoring role on the application of the European Code of Social Security, the Committee was *inter alia* given a presentation of the report on the anti-crisis measures taken by Member States and decided to publish it. The Committee also decided to work on the sustainability of the social security systems after the crisis. This activity will be done within the framework of the General Survey on Social Security which the ILO is preparing for its International Labour Conference of 2011.

3. Mr Bopp finally suggested discussing under the item “other business” whether in the future a link could be made between the work on MISSCEO and the situation in each country allowing towards a possible signature and/or ratification of the Code.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

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

III. INFORMATION FROM THE SECRETARIAT

5. Ms Gomez Heredero gave a demonstration of the system for retrieving the MISSCEO information on social protection. This information is available on the MISSCEO website (<http://www.coe.int/MISSCEO>) both under the form of database and comparative tables (pdf format). Database searches could be performed by topic or country. Also available on the site are the comparative tables and charts on social protection and the annexes on self-employed persons. The MISSCEO Info is also available in the same website.

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

6. Claude Ewen, the MISSOC correspondent for Luxembourg, informed about the main developments in the MISSOC network and at the European Union level in the field of social protection.

7. As for the developments in MISSOC, Mr Ewen divided his speech in two parts:

- The first one related to the most important work of MISSOC, namely the comparative tables. He raised 5 points:
 1. The restructuring of Table XI that is completed now and accepted without major problems. As a result, there is a mix of certain categories and the use of uniform terminology between the countries. Professor Jorens who presented the results of the reform mentioned also the need to find a balance of attempting to be exhaustive

and focus in the most important information;

2. Integration of E3 (DG on coordination of social security systems) into MISSOC. The E3 information was addressed to migrants but was not updated. MISSOC decided to take in charge the updating. The current Secretariat will do so. National Correspondents will not be responsible for drafting this information but to check it;
3. Preparation of a new Web Site more “user friendly” and directly connected to the Web Site of the New Regulation 883/2004. The home page of the coordination site will be directly linked to MISSOC;
4. Big book MISSOC. This book does not reproduce the tables but contains valuable information about the objectives of MISSOC and on how to use the Internet Web Site;
5. Common introduction to the different chapters that will be prepared by Professor Ditch, one of the members of the MISSOC Secretariat. The idea is to have a transversal introduction to make the systems more accessible with a more understandable terminology.

- The second part related to additional activities of MISSOC. Two MISSOC activities are abandoned, the MISSOC Info on the developments in legislation and the MISSOC analysis. However, in 2010 a synoptic report on the economic crisis and social security will be prepared and replace the MISSOC analysis. This will not involve the participation of National Correspondents. In addition, twice a year MISSOC will publish a Newsletter. The next Newsletter will commemorate the 20th anniversary of MISSOC and include an interview with certain correspondents who have participated at MISSOC meetings from the beginning of its creation. Finally, the tour de table on the evolution of social protection will be replaced by new forms of exchange such as la “per-review” or a presentation on specific issues.

8. Mr Claude Ewen informed also about some developments relating to Regulations 883/2004 987/2009 entered into force on 1st May 2010. The new Regulations reinforce the rights of citizens, allow a better cooperation between authorities and provide also a certain simplification. There is also an electronic exchange of information; the equality of treatment is reinforced; new branches are introduced in the coordination such as paternity benefits and different social interventions.

9. Mr Ewen speech was followed by questions and comments. Mr Bopp mentioned in relation to the Newsletter that the responsible of the Newsletter should be approached in order to include some information about MISSCEO as he mentioned at the last MISSOC meeting in Madrid. Mr Schoukens raise a point of discussion on the link between the MISSOC tables and the coordination of social security as well as with the standard setting instruments (see point X). He asked a question on the idea behind the common introduction to the chapters.

10. Mr Ewen’s report is reproduced in appendix III (available after translation).

V. GENERAL COMMENTS ON COMPARABILITY

Mr Paul Schoukens, commented on the MISSCEO tables updated in 2010. Almost all the tables have been updated at this stage. He raised the following points:

- Statutory basis: Some of the countries put basic laws and others a long list of laws and applicatory regulations. Some countries mention only last year’s legislation, although others repeat laws year by year. The advise is to put the necessary information to understand the system;

- Personal scope of application: some countries are very brief mentioning for ex. all citizens although others listed the different categories;

- Sometimes the tables are left open. Correspondents are requested to not use the wording “not information available” since it is confusing. However, Mr Schoukens recognized that the number of open tables is much less than in the past (apart from table XII);
- Under the heading “Financing: participation of public authorities” correspondents are requested to explain the reason of this participation. Ms Ana Gomez Heredero reminded that the Correspondent’s Guide contains some explanations in this regard;
- There are some specific schemes for work accident and it is much clearer explained now in the tables;
- The introduction in the tables of reform plans for the coming years made the tables difficult to understand. The advice is to describe the year in question and refer to the reform if it is an ongoing reform;

Mr Schoukens noticed also some difficulties with the quality of the language used that makes difficult to understand the system. The reason might lie in the fact that the information is collected from different sectors. Mr Schoukens asked the correspondents to have a check on the information received.

Mr Schoukens underlined also the following: some lack of information on table XII; the comparative tables have been received much more in time this year; the annex on self-employed remain an issue, some are very detailed and elaborated but other contain very limited information; the organisation of social security and charters are much better. He mentioned that these documents are not re-sent every year but he assumes that in this case there are not changes.

Finally, Mr Schoukens indicated that the quality of tables has been improved over the years and that one of the major issues concerns the reforms plans as mentioned previously.

16. Participants took note of these suggestions.

17. Ms Ana Gomez Heredero, Secretary of MISSCEO showed the procedure for the collection of information on social protection and recalled the following:

Correspondents receive at the beginning of the year the 3 following MISSCEO WORD-files for update:

- a file of the chart illustrating the structure and the description of the organisation of social protection schemes;
- a second file covering the actual entries in the twelve comparative tables;
- a third file containing the description of the social protection of self-employed (annex);

As for the first file, the organisational chart, the changes should be made directly in the original file but highlighting them in colour so they can be easily identified by the Secretariat.

The second file is a WORD-table-format with six columns. The first column contains the numbering and the second column the titles. The third column is the latest version of the text. National Correspondents should check whether changes are necessary or not. If a change is necessary, Correspondents are requested to copy **the entire cell** from the third column (original text) into the fourth column, and to make then the changes. The fifth column is reserved for questions or remarks of the contents’ coordination or the Secretariat and for the answer of the correspondents to these questions. Correspondents are nevertheless requested to put the final reply to the comments directly

in columns third or fourth. It was recalled that the database takes the information from column fourth or from column third if column fourth is empty.

The third file is the annex and the changes should be made directly in the original file but highlight them in colour so they can be easily identified by the secretariat.

18. Ms Gomez Heredero underlined that when working on the tables, Correspondents should not change the structure of the template (do not delete any column, row or cell even if they are empty) and especially the numbering and the titles columns (columns one and two) as the database would not identify the responses. Correspondents are also requested to not use the formatting and style functions (such as indent, italic, bold, justified functions, bullets and numbering etc).

VI. COMPARATIVE EXERCISE

Table XII ("Long-term care")

19. The aim of this comparative exercise was to encourage the MISSCEO correspondents to look at the tables from a reader's perspective rather than that of an author.

20. Further to the decision taken at the 11th meeting of MISSCEO (Strasbourg, 7-8 July 2009), participants had been invited, this year, to read, prior to the meeting, Table XII ("Long-term care"). This table was revised in 2009 following the changes made by MISSOC and after discussion at the MISSCEO meeting in 2009.

21. At the meeting, the correspondents split into five groups of countries (Albania and Armenia; Azerbaijan and Bosnia and Herzegovina; Georgia and Croatia; Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Moldova; the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Serbia) to examine the table.

22. Each group presented its comments. Since the table XII changed last year some questions were raised about the new terminology. Part of the new terminology is explained in the Correspondent's Guide but some other is missing, such as the signification of formal or informal providers. This information is going to be added by the Secretariat in the Guide.

23. The exercise once again proved very useful and was expected to be repeated according with the same format in 2011.

VII. TEXTS SUMMARISING THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEMS AND EVOLUTION OF NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

24. At the 11th meeting of MISSCEO in 2009, Correspondents were in favour of preparing introductions to their social protection system. The model of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" was sent as an example for this introduction.

25. Correspondents had again during the present meeting a discussion on the relevance of including such introductions. The aim will be to guide readers in the type of system countries have and also to add some information that it is not mentioned in the tables.

26. National Correspondents from Ukraine, Georgia and the Russian Federation presented the introduction to their systems.

27. It was a general support from correspondents on the opportunity and relevance to elaborate

the introduction. All correspondents agreed to do so and to follow as an example the model prepared last year by Mr Paul Schoukens in cooperation with the Aleksandra Slavkoska from “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”. The Secretariat suggested preparing a first draft **by 29 October 2010**. To help correspondents in this task, it was mentioned that within the SISP programme some introductions already existed for the following countries. All correspondents did received after the meeting these introductions.

28. The national correspondents of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Serbia, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Ukraine reported on numerous interesting developments that had occurred in their social protection systems in 2009 and the first half of 2010.

29. Four national reports describing these developments had been submitted to the secretariat to date. With a view to preparing the MISSCEO Info, it was agreed that any correspondents who had not yet done so would send their contributions to the secretariat by 29 October 2010. Correspondents supported the idea of continuing with the preparation of the document MISSCEO Info.

VIII. PREPARATION OF THE 2010 EDITION

30. Participants discussed the latest technical and administrative aspects of the 2010 tables which were based on national legislation as at 1 January of that year.

31. MISSCEO agreed the following timetable:

- The MISSCEO correspondents will revise the national contributions taking into account the discussion at the meeting in Strasbourg and the comments of the coordinator of contents, by 1st September 2010;
- The coordinator will propose a revised version of national contributions by 31 October 2010;
- The MISSCEO data 2010 (English version) will be uploaded in the Council of Europe data base by mid-November 2010;
- The 2010 MISSCEO data will be translated into French in November 2010;
- The French data of the MISSCEO 2010 will be uploaded in December 2010/January 2011.

IX. PLANNING OF THE 2011 EDITION

32. The technical and administrative aspects of the preparation of the 2011 tables (situation on 1 January 2011) were discussed.

33. The Secretariat explained that the 2011 edition would be prepared as follows:

- The Secretariat will request the national contributions in January 2011;
- The MISSCEO correspondents will update their national contributions by 1 April 2011;
- The comments on the national contributions will be prepared by 2 May 2011;
- The 13th MISSCEO meeting will take place on 30 June and 1st of July 2011;

- The MISSCEO correspondents will revise the national contributions taking into account the discussion at the meeting and the comments of the coordinator of contents, by 1 September 2011;
- The coordinator will propose a revised version of national contributions by 31 October 2011;
- The MISSCEO data 2011 (English version) will be uploaded in the Council of Europe data base by mid-November 2011;
- The 2011 MISSCEO data will be translated into French in November 2011;
- The French data of the MISSCEO 2011 will be uploaded in December 2011/January 2012.

X. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

34. Participants at the meeting hold an exchange of views on the relation between the MISSCEO tables and the coordination and standard setting instruments.

35. Ms Ana Gomez Heredero recalled that the MISSCEO comparative tables are the Council of Europe's contribution to the flow of information in the social protection field. The tables are also an important tool in relation to the legal instruments of the Council of Europe in the social security field, in particular the European Code of Social Security and its Protocol, as well as the European Convention on Social Security.

36. Mr Karl-Friedrich Bopp underlined the fact that MISSCEO Correspondents based on the technical information of the tables could advise the political level in order to support the ratification of the Code.

37. Mr Paul Schoukens indicated that, in his opinion, countries have the obligation to share the data on the social security system since at the Council of Europe states have the obligation, under certain Conventions, to have a social security system. The tables are a useful tool of information.

XI. DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING

38. The 13th meeting of MISSCEO would be held on 30 June and 1st of July 2011, although it was not yet known where. The correspondents were asked to suggest possible venues.

APPENDIX I

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APPENDIX II

AGENDA

- III. OPENING OF THE MEETING
- IV. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA
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- X. PREPARATION OF THE 2010 EDITION
- XI. PLANNING OF THE 2011 EDITION
- XII. ANY OTHER BUSINESS
- XIII. DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING

APPENDIX III

TRANSLATION OF THE PRESENTATION BY MR CLAUDE EWEN AT THE MISSCEO MEETING

This year I shall not be conducting a conceptual analysis of the functioning the MISSOC network, attempting to draw useful conclusions for the functioning of your MISSCEO network, but will instead confine myself to reporting on the MISSOC meeting held in Madrid on 21 and 22 May 2010 under the Spanish chairmanship. You might wonder why I am narrowing the scope of this year's presentation in this way.

It should be realised that MISSOC is currently undergoing consolidation of its operational status. It has reached a point which is scarcely conducive to major moves to launch new reforms or large-scale projects. There are two main reasons for this:

- first of all, the current Secretariat is now half-way through its contract with the European Commission; furthermore, for the next MISSOC meeting the terms of reference for the new contracting party to be selected will be updated for discussion with the correspondents;

- secondly, there have been staff changes in the European Commission in terms of responsibilities for MISSOC. Mr Roland BLADH, whom you know well since he did you the honour of attending the MISSCEO meeting last year, has changed jobs. He has been replaced by an Italian lady, who is unfortunately on sick leave, which means that she has not yet really been able to tackle the MISSOC activities, and someone else has been replacing her temporarily.

Clearly, under these circumstances it is understandable if I refer to the last MISSOC meeting in Madrid as a kind of "routine meeting". This does not mean that no matters of interest to you were discussed, and I will go into a number of these issues in my statement. I will break the statement down into two sections. First of all, I will deal with the subject of comparative tables, which is, after all, the main activity of MISSOC: "care business" as the Secretariat calls it.

Secondly, I will analyse other MISSOC activities which are not directly linked to the comparative tables but which are nevertheless important.

A. Comparative tables

I shall go into five points in relation to comparative tables:

1. The restructuring of Table 11 – *Guaranteeing Sufficient Resources* – has now been completed.

At the Madrid meeting, Professor Yves Jorens presented the results of the work of the national correspondents in filling in the restructured Table XI, and thanked the correspondents for sending in so much high-quality information in such good time. No major problems had been encountered, with a few exceptions concerning mixing the *domestic unit* and *family composition* categories, and the distinction between *rights in rem* and *movable goods*. These minor problems were solved by means of direct contact with the national correspondents.

The correspondents did not comment on the categories themselves, probably thanks to the in-depth discussion which took place at previous network meetings in Stockholm and Prague, when, precisely, restructuring was discussed. Another highly positive point mentioned by Professor Yves Jorens was the use of standard terminology throughout the table. Major differences among the countries concerning the amount of information supplied raised some

difficulties, and Prof. Yves Jorens stressed the need to strike a proper balance between exhaustiveness in the information provided and the need to concentrate on the main or basic information.

Prof. Yves Jorens mentioned four items on which information was too limited or even non-existent in a number of countries: the thresholds laid down in the resource conditions category, the conditions linked to job seeking, calculation of amounts for the example provided, and information on civil/administrative law (civil obligations on maintenance or investigations).

Although no observations were made on categories at the meeting, the Secretariat made a number of subsequent minor changes: category XI-21 was renamed "examination of the request", and categories XI-22 to XI-24 were merged into one category entitled "recovery of benefits". As a result, Table XI now comprises a total of 26 categories. Moreover, the Secretariat proposed deleting the example in the "amounts" category, except where the legislation of the particular country does not provide for general amounts (notably because the amount is directly linked to the income of the individual or his/her family). The national correspondents approved these minor amendments. Furthermore, we would strongly urge you also to adopt them, not only because it would bring the system into line with the MISSOC network but also because it would improve Table XI.

2. Incorporation of E3 information into MISSOC

This term refers to the major recent innovation in MISSOC activities. "E3" is the title of the General Directorate on "Co-ordination of Social Security System". This European Commission unit holds information for migrants on applicable national legislations, from the angle of mobile workers wishing to receive information on the legislation of the country in which they are residing or to which they would like to move. Such information on national legislation, which is in fact purely descriptive rather than comparative, is no longer up-to-date, and the decision had previously been taken on principle to assign this updating task to the MISSOC network.

So MISSOC will now be tackling this new assignment.

It is important to note that the national correspondents will not be required to draw up the description themselves: the Secretariat will be forwarding them proposed texts which they must verify and, if necessary, complement or correct.

During the meeting itself, news came in that the current MISSOC Secretariat had been awarded the contract and would therefore be assigned this new activity. This is good news for the future of the work of MISSOC, which will therefore be able to draw on the experience accumulated by the current Secretariat.

3. A new website is being prepared.

The new MISSOC site will be further reworked to make it more user-friendly. The main innovation is that the site will now be directly linked to the website newly created by the European Commission with a view to providing information relating to the new Regulation 883/2004 on co-ordination of social security systems. This remarkable site contains all the information and documents required by users and the professionals who deal with co-ordination. The homepage comprises a direct link to the MISSOC site.

4. The MISSOC Book

Another particularly important aspect indirectly linked to the comparative tables is the MISSOC Book. The latter does not actually include the comparative tables, but contains extremely useful information on the objectives of MISSOC, and above all on how to use the website. The book is aimed at the general public, and its objective is therefore to improve knowledge and understanding of the website and to promote its use.

At the Madrid meeting, Mr Spooren, Executive Director of MISSOC, presented the MISSOC Book, explaining that its aim was to illustrate the potential of MISSOC rather than to provide full information on legislation and updates (the user had to consult the website for that). The MISSOC national correspondents were responsible for distributing the MISSOC Book to high-level decision-makers and key operators at national level. They can provide the European Commission with a list of persons to send copies to, or else request a number of copies for themselves, to be subsequently distributed manually. Moreover, the European Commission will be directly circulating a number of copies at future meetings with the main stakeholders in the social security field, and the European Bookshop can also supply the MISSOC Book on request. As only a limited number of books have been printed (300 in English, 100 in French and 100 in German), the European Commission is already considering the idea of ascertaining whether more copies can be printed.

I have brought along an English copy of the MISSOC Book which you can consult during the meeting and which I will be leaving with Ana GOMEZ.

5. Common introductions to the various chapters in the Tables

The idea of standard introductions to the different chapters in the Comparative Tables has been under discussion for some time now, and should be finalised in the near future.

Professor Ditch, who is responsible for this work in the Secretariat, stressed that these transversal introductions would include specific information accessible to the general public. He pointed out that each of the 12 tables would be accompanied by one-and-a-half pages of information. These introductions were geared to identifying and describing social risks and their common principles by using a more accessible type of language than technical jargon, and to pinpointing a common denominator. Professor Ditch clarified the basic ideas behind these introductions. Clearly, market shortcomings could create a state of dependency and a general feeling of inequality, insecurity and instability. Prof. Ditch went on to say that the citizenship concept was meaningless unless the concept of "active citizenship" was also accepted. He stressed that the main aim of social security was to cover the costs arising from social risks, but it also served to combat poverty and reinforce social cohesion. Lastly, he concluded by stating that the standard introductions contained historical references but that, on the other hand, references to countries, jargon and statistics had been avoided.

This brings me to the second part of my presentation:

B. The accessory activities of the MISSOC network

I would like first of all to stress that “accessory” does not mean “marginal” or “less important”. On the contrary, these activities make the MISSOC highly productive and intensive and raise their standard from the merely technical to a much more conceptual level.

By way of introduction, I might point out that two MISSOC activities have been shelved:

- MISSOC-Info. As you know, this involved twice-yearly publications, one on changes to legislation over the year and the other on a specific topic selected in order to complement the necessarily succinct information set out in the comparative tables.

So these publications are no more. The question is still open whether this situation is permanent or temporary. The reason for cessation was that we had to avoid overloading the correspondents, since they will shortly have to face the task of incorporating E3 information into the network, as I mentioned under the previous item.

- For 2010, no MISSOC-Analysis will be conducted either, although this is to be offset with a synoptic report on the subject “Economic downturn and social security”.

This is a convenient transition to the activities accessory to the comparative tables. I shall deal with four separate points:

1. Synoptic report

For this year, therefore, the MISSOC-Analysis is being replaced by a synoptic report. Prof. Ditch, who is responsible for this task in the Secretariat, has presented the methodology for drafting the synoptic report on the subject of “Economic downturn and social security”. The MISSOC correspondents will not be required to draft country reports on the subject. The synoptic report will be based on public information supplied by the European Union, the Council of Europe and the International Social Security Association, as well as data on national contributions supplied in other contexts, eg the Social Protection Committee. The aim of the report was to analyse the impact of the economic downturn on social protection. The synoptic report was intended to be neutral and descriptive rather than critical in tone.

The content of the synoptic report would remain within the scope of MISSOC, viz social security and social protection. The report will break down into two parts, one analysing the impact of the economic downturn on the increased demand and need for social protection and the responses in many countries geared to combating the effects of the economic downturn, and the consequences of these measures for the financial viability of social security systems.

2. We should also note the plan for twice-yearly newsletters. The next newsletter will mark the 20th anniversary of MISSOC, including interviews with correspondents who were involved in the network right from the outset.

3. Information exchange figures high at MISSOC meetings, something which I think the correspondents greatly appreciate. We might remember that the actual exchange of information on changes and amendments to national legislations has been abandoned, something which a number of correspondents have regretted. The *tour de table* with systematic statements by correspondents has been replaced by a number of new formulae, which might be summarised as follows:

- *Peer review.* This is a kind of “presentation, discussion and appraisal” process. At the Madrid meeting the peer review dealt with the effects of the downturn on social security systems. The correspondents were split into three groups; each group heard statements from two countries, and the other participants subsequently commented on and discussed the statements.
- *Presentation on a specific subject* chosen by the country chairing the meeting, in consultation with the Secretariat. This practice has become a tradition at MISSOC meetings. In Madrid, Mr GRACIANO ALIA ALVAREZ of the Spanish National Social Security Institute spoke on the subject of *minimum resource systems as a means of combating poverty.*
- *More selective information is given on events or activities in other activities.*

Eg:

- Mr Rob CORNELISSEN, Adviser to the Director, European Commission Directorate General of Employment and Social Affairs, provided general information on the activities of the European Commission. However, he also presented the new regulations on social security co-ordination 883/2004 and 987/2009, which came into force on 1 May 2010. Among other innovations, these new co-ordinating regulations improve citizens’ rights on a number of points and provide for closer and more effective inter-institutional co-operation. The regulations also simplify matters to some extent, particularly in Titles I and II, although the regulations are still fairly complicated overall. The new elements inserted into the Title on general provisions include reinforcement of the principle of equal treatment, a new provision on transfrontier assimilation of facts and events, and extension of the personal and material scope. There are changes to the Title on applicable legislation, as well as to that on the various social security branches.
- Mr AURELIO FERNANDES LOPES of the Spanish Ministry of Labour and Immigration, the current Chair of the Social Protection Committee, outlined the “social agenda under the Spanish chairmanship”, which was a highlight in the work carried out under his chairmanship.
- Professor Yves JORENS, in his capacity as the MISSOC network academic expert, dealt with a particularly important subject, namely “social policy after the Lisbon Treaty”.

The speaker presented certain interesting practical aspects of the subject, which will certainly evolve under the Lisbon Treaty. The main question arising was whether the new Treaty had really contributed to the social dimension of the European Union, as illustrated by three main themes: 1) substantive legislative questions, 2) reinforcement of social values, and 3) reinforcement of fundamental rights.

- We might also mention the statements by International Social Security Association (ISSA) and Council of Europe officials presenting their respective activities.

The whole field of information exchange can be said to be extremely important in MISSOC meetings, with, broadly speaking, 50% of the available meeting time being devoted to this activity.

In conclusion, I shall once again refer to two small points which might also be of interest to you.

- The legal nature of the correspondents’ guide

An in-depth discussion was held on whether the correspondents’ guide is a binding instrument which correspondents must follow when updating the tables, or whether, on the contrary, it is just a support to be used in case of doubt on how to address a certain subject, and is therefore mainly intended for new correspondents, in order to ensure some degree of continuity. Without taking a formal decision

one way or the other, the Secretariat pointed out that, for the July 2010 update, the correspondents were invited to check the conformity of the information which they supply (especially for Table II) to the guidelines set out in the guide and, if necessary, to adjust this information.

- Family photo and pleasant general atmosphere

As you know, a very pleasant atmosphere invariably reigns at MISSOC meetings, which creates a climate conducive to high-quality work on the part of correspondents. There has been a new addition to this convivial tradition. A family photo is now taken at every MISSOC meeting (as in the case of actual European Councils), which is subsequently sent out to the correspondents. This new departure is greatly appreciated.

Participation in the MISSOC or MISSCEO networks necessitates commitment and serious motivation on the part of the national correspondents.

MISSOC correspondents are currently being asked for an update at 1.7.2010.

An intensive two-day working meeting is awaiting you as MISSCEO correspondents, and I hope that this event will prove highly productive.