Euro-zone inflation was unchanged in February, easing pressure on the European Central Bank to take further action to support the financial system and growth when its governing council meets next Thursday.

Consumer prices grew 0.8% in February from a year earlier in the euro zone, the European Union's statistics office Eurostat said Friday, well below the ECB's target of just below 2%. But that was higher than expected, with the consensus forecast of 24 economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal last week for a reading of 0.7%.

The ECB meets Thursday and the inflation report reduces the chances of immediate steps to convince financial markets, households and businesses that officials take the threat of deflation seriously.

Much of the weakness in the inflation measure during February was down to falling energy prices, which dropped 2.2% from January. Prices for services rose by 1.3%, while food, alcohol and tobacco prices rose by 1.5%. That suggests that weak demand wasn't the main factor behind the low headline inflation rate.

Superlow inflation isn't necessarily bad. If it is weak because energy and other commodity prices are low, households and businesses have more disposable income to spend and invest.

Those policymakers who are reluctant to provide further stimulus may also be encouraged by figures released by Germany's statistics agency Friday, which showed retail sales in the euro zone's largest member rose at the fastest pace since February 2007, jumping 2.5% from the previous month.

However, in a separate release, the European Union's statistics agency said the number of people without jobs rose by 17,000, the first increase since September and an indication that the euro zone's economic recovery remains fragile. The unemployment remained at 12% in January.

ECB policymakers have repeatedly said they don't expect outright declines in consumer prices, known as deflation. They reject comparisons with Japan, which struggled with deflation for two decades, saying the ECB has acted more decisively than Japan did in the 1990s and that European banks are stronger.

An extended period of falling prices would be highly damaging for the euro zone, as governments and households are already struggling to reduce their elevated levels of debt. When prices fall, the effective debt burden rises.

Write to Paul Hannon at paul.hannon@wsj.com