



NOTE FOR PORTUGUESE LABOUR MINISTER, MR JOSÉ VIEIRA DA SILVA

MEETING WITH BUSINESSEUROPE PRESIDENT ERNEST-ANTOINE SEILLIÈRE, AIP PRESIDENT JORGE ROCHA DE MATOS AND CIP PRESIDENT FRANCISCO VAN ZELLER

LISBON, 8 JUNE 2007

I. Flexicurity

The Council will discuss the issue of flexicurity with the aim of agreeing on a set of common principles in December 2007. For BUSINESSEUROPE, flexicurity is key to modernise the Europe's social models. European employers strongly believe that there is a need to move from job security towards employment security. In order to do this, Member States must put in place a policy mix consisting of the following components: flexible labour markets, efficient active labour market policies, effective lifelong learning systems and employment-friendly social protection systems. It is important to bear in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all model of flexicurity to be implemented across the EU.

Considering the need to reform Europe's labour markets, BUSINESSEUROPE counts on the Portuguese Presidency to promote the concept of flexicurity and keep it on top of the EU employment and social agenda. At the same time, BUSINESSEUROPE very much hopes that the European social partners' discussions on the joint labour market analysis will succeed so that we will be able to agree on the key components of flexicurity and present results that are relevant not only for social partners but also for policy-makers, both at the national and European level.

II. European employment strategy

In the run-up to the launch of the second governance cycle for growth and jobs in 2008, the Portuguese presidency will discuss a new set of integrated guidelines, including on employment. According to BUSINESSEUROPE, the employment guidelines for the period 2005-2008 covered the key issues. Their content is still relevant today. Employment guidelines advocating a life-cycle approach to work, asking for adaptation of labour legislation and a review of the level of flexibility of permanent and non-permanent contracts; and promoting employment-friendly labour costs are particularly welcome.

Nevertheless, when discussing the new set of integrated guidelines for 2008, more attention should be paid to the strategic importance of improving productivity throughout Europe.

It is important to bear in mind that the key to success lies in the ability to translate the intentions of the EU guidelines and recommendations into real action. In this respect, BUSINESSEUROPE's 2007 reform barometer indicated that initiatives to implement reforms for more growth and jobs are taking shape in virtually all Member States. However, too many reforms are still not fully implemented or have not fulfilled companies' expectations. It is vital for the future of the European social model to keep up the reform momentum.



III. Education Policy

BUSINESSEUROPE has recently presented to higher education stakeholders its views on the need to enhance the employability of graduates in Europe. Much progress has been made in the Bologna Process, but further increasing the consistency of higher education and business needs, and acknowledging the shared responsibility of all actors, are necessary steps to ensure that individuals can continually refresh their knowledge and skills in a lifelong learning perspective.

European employers also stress the importance of focusing on learning outcomes both in higher education as well as in vocational training, so that future developments in the design and accreditation of qualifications are more closely aligned to labour market needs.

BUSINESSEUROPE therefore welcomes the progress made with regard to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) which has been instrumental in stimulating National Frameworks of reference. This progress should be reinforced and needs to be underpinned by complementary activities to develop quality assurance mechanisms as well as improving efficiency and equity of education systems through partnerships, better use of indicators and sharing best practice. These are important priorities to take the education and training agenda forward, notably to reach Lisbon targets, and a lifelong learning perspective should be reinforced during the Portuguese Presidency which promotes permeability between higher education and vocational training.

IV. Working time directive

If the Portuguese Presidency wants to revive discussions within Council on the Working Time Directive, BUSINESSEUROPE stresses that any final agreement must solve the problems created by European jurisprudence on on-call time and must retain the individual opt-out which provides flexibility for both employers and employees.

V. Temporary agency work

The discussions on the proposal for a directive on working conditions for temporary workers are blocked in Council since several years. In case the Portuguese Presidency would want to find a compromise solution in this dossier, BUSINESSEUROPE would like to stress the importance for the future EU Directive, when it comes to the application of the principle of equal treatment to temporary agency workers, to keep the possibility to establish non-discrimination in comparison either with a worker of the user company, or with a temporary worker employed by the same agency.

However, should the reference to the user company nevertheless be preferred in the EU text, a certain degree a flexibility in the way the equal treatment principle is applied should be kept to respect national situations in which temporary workers have a permanent contract with the agency or in which social partners are able to derogate from the general rule by collective agreement. Moreover, BUSINESSEUROPE believes it necessary to extend the possibility not to apply the principle of non-discrimination to temporary workers with an assignment of less than 6 weeks to 18 months. Finally, we believe that the obligation on Member States to discard restrictions to temporary work should be reinforced.



VI. Reconciliation of work and family life

BUSINESSEUROPE believes that allowing men and women to combine professional and family responsibilities is one key element to tackling the challenge of insufficient labour market participation of women and demographic ageing. While acknowledging that progress has been achieved in recent years to narrow gaps between women and men in employment and education, progress is still needed on the ground.

BUSINESSEUROPE strongly believes that building a working environment which promotes balance between work and family life relies both on dialogue between employers and employees at workplace level and on the right institutional framework being put in place in each Member State.

The European social partners have tackled and continue to tackle the issue of work-life balance from different angles, in the remits of their competences, notably by negotiating the framework agreement on parental leave in 1996, by promoting flexible forms of work for example through the framework agreement on telework adopted in 2002 and lately by deciding to coordinate their activities at national, sectoral and company levels through the adoption of a framework of actions on gender equality in 2005. This work will continue in future years.

BUSINESSEUROPE will examine in detail the proposals made by the Commission in its second stage consultation of the European Social Partners on the reconciliation of work, private and family life released on 30 May. Employers will make proposals on how the existing frameworks could be further improved to promote work-life balance, reduce labour markets segregation and, hence, enhance the participation of women and men on labour markets.
