



## **Informal Meeting of Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs**

**12-13 July 2012, Nicosia, Cyprus**

### **Discussion Note for Workshop 1**

#### **Boosting Europe's employment rates: The role of social partners, NGOs and local authorities in the implementation of the employment targets of Europe 2020 Strategy at European and national level**

**Chair:** Mr Władysław Kosiniak . Kamysz, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs,  
POLAND

---

Europe is struggling with the economic crisis hindering growth and, in many countries, also causing a drop in the employment rate. Therefore approaching the objectives set out in the *Europe 2020* Strategy becomes increasingly challenging. Overcoming the difficulties requires involvement and readiness for compromise on the part of all the stakeholders of the European labour markets - governments, employers' organisations, trade unions, regional and local authorities, as well as NGOs.

The importance of including the social partners into the actions aimed at increasing economic activities of the Europeans is raised in *Europe 2020* strategy in various aspects. In this context it is worth noticing that the Strategy's ambition is not only to transform the European economies, but the potential of their communities as well. Without the active participation in the process, of - gathered in various organisations and acting on different levels - citizens, neither influencing these changes in the right direction, nor giving them the necessary impetus will be possible.

The *Europe 2020* Strategy more than once brings up the irrefutable value of the European social model. The social dialogue is a key factor of this model. It is there that the principles of democracy and civil participation, free individual choices, subsidiarity and, finally, active taking up responsibilities, are manifested.

Therefore Member States and the European Commission need to cooperate with European Social Partners in their efforts to increase the employment indicators. The authorities of the European Union and Member States need social partners to act not as critics of the launched policies but as active co-authors of real solutions; partners,

who are ready to initiate actions, implement them efficiently and bear the responsibility for consequences thereof.

Increasing the employment indicators is possible if job creation and, simultaneously, mobilisation of economically inactive persons, is in place. This, in particular, relates to the groups such as the elderly, people with disabilities, women and persons working in the *grey zone* (unregistered workers). Cooperation with social partners in these fields is vital in two fields. Firstly - as regards reaching a consensus enabling social acceptance for the actions targeted at employment growth (these are often unpopular reforms, such as raising the retirement age, changing in the disability pension systems, etc.<sup>1</sup>). Secondly - as regards delivery of vocational activation measures at regional and local levels, according to the principle of subsidiarity.

The numerous networks of NGOs along with local self-governments, constitute the effective mechanism capable of bringing the change to the level of an individual.

Due to the limitation of resources following the austerity measures brought upon many European economies, it is more important to integrate the efforts of all stakeholders of labour market. The European Commission Communication *Towards a job-rich recovery* (COM (2012) 173) recommends reinforcing the social dialogue and pooling actions of all stakeholders within effective partnerships. It is worth mentioning that, any positive message from the main social actors, even about a general consensus, makes the management of change more efficient. As the Communication recalls, Europe aims at flexicurity model. This model assumes employing social dialogue with regard to its all four pillars: flexible contractual arrangements, lifelong learning, effective active labour market policies, modern social security systems. The Commission Staff Working Document *Open, Dynamic and Inclusive Labour Markets* (SWD 2012 97) lists exemplary actions initiated by social partners in the process of implementation of the flexicurity model. The conclusions of the document read as follows:

*The current analysis shows that there is a high number of measures which include multi-stakeholder cooperation and which are characterised by an explicit definition of the flexibility and security dimensions - leading to an agreed upon and accepted combination of the two. Furthermore, the new perspective on the benefits of internal flexibility instruments places a renewed onus on a reinforced social dialogue at all levels, including firm level, that contributes to the design, implementation and monitoring of flexicurity.*

---

<sup>1</sup> The Joint Opinion of the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee together with Education Committee entitled *Examination of the 2012 National Reform Programmes and of the implementation of the 2011 Country Specific Recommendations (CSRS) SOC 499*, points to the need to include social partners and obtain social acceptance for retirement reforms.

European Social Partners acting on the European level participate in the public debate concerning the improvement of the situation on the labour market, including also specific problems of the youth. They also state their positions regarding the documents of European Union dealing with labour market issues.

In March 2012 the Confederation of European Business (BUSINESSEUROPE) announced that fighting unemployment among the youth would be one of the priorities for European social partners in 2012-2014. To this end, the Confederation of European Business will cooperate with European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), European Centre for Employers and Enterprises (CEEP) and European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (UEAPME). Together they have developed a programme document entitled *Work Programme of the European Social Partners for 2012-2014*.

The most important actions included therein are: labour market analysis in respect to the demand for specific vocational qualifications; development of proposals for actions that can be taken to counteract unemployment among the youth. The European social partners also intend to analyse the European labour market in the perspective of employment of older persons including the issue of acquiring new vocational skills in the course of lifelong learning. Moreover, European Social Partners plan to take up initiatives promoting equality between women and men on the labour market as well as economic mobility.

In April 2012 BUSINESSEUROPE emphasised the significance of the Employment Package adopted by the European Commission. At the same time, it pointed out that the attention of the European Commission should focus more on the joint actions of Member States and their impact on the European labour market, and less on individual situation of each Member State.

During the meeting of the European Social Partners with the ministers competent for labour and social affairs, within informal summit of the Troika in April 2012 in Horsens, the General Secretary of the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises (CEEP) . Ms. Valeria Ronzitti, stressed the significance of attracting the attention of the young people to seeking employment in the Public Employment Services. Ms.Ronzitti also called on a greater use of the European Social Fund to support national and local social partners' initiatives to promote youth employment.

On the occasion of the European Council meeting on 23 May 2012 in Brussels, CEEP drew the attention of the heads of states and governments to the impact of demographic changes on the labour market situation and the growing gap between the rich and the poor fractions of the European community.

The European Social Partners have at their disposal a wide range of experts who can act as advisers for the EU institutions. They possess extensive knowledge about the labour market policies, develop their own programme documents, initiate actions and act as reviewers of actions taken up at the Community level. Not being directly linked to the EU bureaucratic structures, the European social partners have a greater potential for cooperation with national social partners, organisations of entrepreneurs, NGOs, etc. This potential should be used to help implement the *Europe 2020* Strategy on European Union level as well as in the process of national employment policy-making. Integrating European social partners in the active cooperation to the aim of improving the situation on the European labour market, can pose a challenge for the upcoming Cypriot Presidency which falls on the difficult period of the second half of the year, when the negative tendencies on the labour market strengthen. However, if the involvement of European Social Partners brings measurable results, the European employment policy will gain a new, efficient tool for mitigating consequences of the negative phenomena on the labour market.

---

Issues for discussion:

1. How can a consensus and social acceptance for unpopular reforms be reached?
2. How can the balance of social partners representation be ensured in the situation of imbalance/lack of their representation?
3. Are new forms of dialogue with civil society in Europe possible?
4. How to involve more the non-profit organisations in the actions stimulating employment growth?
5. How to raise social awareness of social partners endeavours, e.g. addressed to the unemployed through information campaigns at the European and local levels?