

JOINT SEMINAR EUROFOUND – EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT 3 MARCH 2010

SESSION ONE: TOWARDS ADAPTING TO CHANGE: WORKING TIME FLEXIBILITY AND HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTICES IN COMPANIES

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR STEVEN D'HAESELEER
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- Thank the EP and Dublin Foundation for their invitation to participate in this seminar on a theme which is important for social partners and for Europe as a whole.
- The European Company Survey, the first results of which serve as a basis for our discussions today presents a nuanced picture of labour market flexibility in its multiple dimensions.
- The “European Company Survey 2009 – Flexibility practices and social dialogue” shows that more than half of all establishments in the EU27 with more than 10 employees use flexi-time arrangements of some sort, part-time work or contractual flexibility. There are obvious reasons for that.
- In order to cope with modern challenges, companies require organisational flexibility, including with respect to working time. This has become evident not least in the economic downturn. But flexible working is equally important beyond the economic crisis as a means to meet fluctuations of demand, increase productivity and boost competitiveness of companies. This is what creates sustainable employment growth in the long run.
- Among the key reasons why companies make use of flexible work arrangements are the following:
 - As a key instrument for adaptability and competitiveness.
 - To recruit and retain talent. In the light of the demographic development and global competition, this will become ever more important.
 - For productivity gains: For instance, reducing costly unscheduled absences and addressing stress and burn-out of employees strengthens their performance and thus the output of the company.
- It is important to stress that there is no contradiction between beneficial effects of flexible working for companies on the one hand, and for employees on the other.

- For employees, flexible working arrangements make it easier to seize career opportunities and cope with family responsibilities. Flexible working hours, part-time jobs or teleworking enable the employee to fit his or her work schedule better with his or her lifestyle or needs such as the availability at child care facilities.
- Over 80% of EU employees report to be happy or very happy with their work-life balance¹. The benefits are not only at the level of individuals but also in the overall development of gender equality in society. With an outspoken ambition to increase women's participation on the labour market, flexible working should be recognised by EU institutions as an important ingredient in making that happen.
- Policies need to reflect the increased demand for flexibility. Reconciling work-life balance and organisational needs for flexibility is the kind of equation that *does* add up in real life, as long as tailor-made solutions are made possible on a company-level. Flexible working arrangements come in many different forms and companies should have the freedom to put in place the instruments that are most appropriate for them.
- At the same time, one should remember that sometimes companies, in particular SMEs, might not be in a position to meet requests for flexible working from its employees. Demands from employees must be reasonable, recognising in turn requirements of customer satisfaction and demands for availability.
- At EU-level, the social partners have taken several initiatives in this area, the most important of which include:
 - The framework agreements on part-time work and fixed-term contracts aimed to facilitate the development of these forms of works on a basis which is acceptable to both employers and workers;
 - The framework agreement on telework helps companies to modernise work organisations and workers to reconcile work and private life and giving them greater autonomy in the accomplishment of their tasks.
 - The 2007 joint labour market analysis with the common understanding that flexicurity – enhancing flexibility and security – leads to win-win situations for workers and companies
 - The revision of the parental leave agreement and the 2005 Framework of Actions on gender equality aimed at improving work-life balance.

¹ European Working Conditions Observatory, 2005, Fourth European Working Conditions Survey