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EQUALITY SUMMIT 15 NOVEMBER 2010

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Introductory Session: Discrimination and Equality in the workplace

Panel on combatting discrimination with platform of social NGOs and social partners

1. Assessment ten years after the adoption of the anti discrimination directives

BUSINESSEUROPE is committed to the goal of combating discrimination. It is in the interest and the responsibility of all to combat it. BUSINESSEUROPE therefore supports the objective underlying the Directives. In addition to the moral argument, there is a clear business case for fighting discrimination. Companies look at the skills and educational background of candidates rather than external characteristics such as colour, gender, race, age, sexual orientation or religious belief.

Discrimination is a problem that all spheres of society have to deal with. Many factors of discrimination are beyond the sphere of employment. Moreover, all difficulties experienced by vulnerable individuals cannot be attributed to discrimination.

We may be 10 years after the adoption of the directives but we are only 3 years after their entry into force in January 2007. Three years of implementation does not allow to draw real lessons on the effects of the directive on labour markets. This is even more difficult because the economic shock which hit our economies in the Autumn 2008 has led to a general deterioration of the employment situation.

What is sure is that we now have a comprehensive EU legal framework to protect people against discriminations. But that we have considerable efforts to make in order to improve the overall employment situation across the European Union because it is the best way to improve labour market prospects of vulnerable groups.

2. The role of the EU 2020 strategy

We need economic growth to create jobs and provide work opportunities for all. That is what the EU 2020 strategy is about. We must double our growth potential if we want to integrate more people on the labour market and achieve the 75% employment rate target. The EU institutions must focus their work in this direction.



Current employment rates for older workers, young people and ethnic minorities are particularly low. However, focussing on measures targeted at specific groups would be a mistake. What is needed first and foremost is a better *overall* functioning of our labour markets. Critical measures to stimulate private sector job creation include improving education and vocational training; improving the employability for all groups with support and incentives to move into employment; and providing more flexible working options. Research clearly shows that flexible labour markets are benefitting disadvantaged groups.

We must also remember that these groups are not homogeneous. They are constituted by individuals faced with different obstacles. Some migrants are unemployed because they are unskilled. Others, have the skills required but do not speak the national language. Some disabled people have a problem of physical access to the workplace. Others are unskilled because the national education system is not equipped to deal with people with learning difficulties.

We need an efficient overall employment policy and a good analysis of the real problems to be addressed in order to make progress. More legislation will not help. On the contrary, it can even be counterproductive.

3. One recommendation to the Equality summit

My recommendation would be that real equality will progress if we take a positive approach to employment and support companies in their efforts to recruit and keep people in employment.

BUSINESSEUROPE and its members have worked a lot to promote equal opportunities on labour markets. Many initiatives have also been taken in the context of the EU social dialogue starting with joint declarations on racism, labour market integration of disabled people in the 1990s, a framework of actions on gender equality in 2002 and an agreement on inclusive labour markets earlier this year.

We will continue to exercise the leadership that Commissioner Reding has called for. Everybody wins when adequate anti-discrimination policies are implemented.