

EUROPE PROMOTES 'GOOD WORK'...

by Cleavon Vella – Consultation Coordinator

Europe needs more joint efforts to promote 'good work' which consists of employee rights and participation, fair wages, protection of safety and health at work as well as a family friendly work organisation.

Good and fair working conditions as well as an appropriate social protection are indispensable for the acceptance of the European Union by its citizens.

The German Presidency, together with its trio presidency partners – Portugal (second half of 2007) and Slovenia (first half of 2008) – drew these conclusions following the Informal Meeting of Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs, which was held in Berlin earlier this month (January 18 - 20).

The subject 'good work' implements the Lisbon Strategy's objective to create more and better jobs in Europe. It addresses topical European debates on the shaping of labour law in conjunction with social protection, demographic trends and equal opportunities. The issues of appropriate regulations for new and other forms of employment are also treated in the Green Paper on Modernising Labour Law which was presented by the European Commission.

The topic is also suited to continue the discussion launched under the Austrian and Finnish Presidencies on how to find the necessary balance between flexibility and security in the labour market - 'flexicurity' - with the objective of arriving at a common understanding as requested by the European Council in March 2006.

The Ministers, led by Federal Minister Franz Müntefering, are of the opinion that greater flexibility on the labour market has to be reflected in adequate employee rights. This includes that employees can defend their participation rights with the help of collective bodies representing their interests. The Member States and the social partners bear great responsibility for ensuring that greater labour market flexibility will not lead to a reduction of social protection for employees.

Fair wages are an important characteristic of what has been termed 'good work'. The Member States and the social partners are called upon to ensure that wages are set in a fair and adequate manner while safeguarding the national wage setting systems' characteristic features.

Working conditions that promote life-long learning and the chance for further occupational education, modern and staff-oriented leadership and work organisation as well as promoting and maintaining health and occupational qualifications are key to competitiveness and to the employability of older employees.

The Informal Meeting of Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs concluded that regular employment relationships are indispensable since they provide security and strengthen competitiveness in a sustainable manner. Hence Member States are called upon to strengthen standard working relationships in accordance with their national practice and to limit their circumvention by atypical employment relationships.

New forms of employment types can facilitate reintegration into the labour market. They must, however, not be abused of for the purpose of excluding employees from their rights. They must not lead to discrimination and exclusion.

The Ministers added that promoting a family friendly work organisation is an opportunity to improve equal rights, competitiveness, health protection and income security while coping with demographic



development. Young people need security in their occupational development and perspectives for their own future and the foundation of a family. They need clearly defined framework conditions for a good start in working life.

Wage replacement benefits and minimum security for job seekers are elements of a social Europe that has made the fight against poverty and social exclusion one of its central priorities. The persons concerned must receive help from a well-balanced system of support programmes within the meaning of an activating labour market policy, in particular in view of threatening or actual unemployment. This approach combines support and demands. ©

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Cleavon Vella is Consultation Coordinator at *Forum Malta fl-Ewropa*.

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