

## **Limits to labour market mobility don't help EU competitiveness, on the contrary!**

High level panel discussed the impact of transitional periods applied to free movement of workers by some Member States during round table "Free movement of workers – fundamental right of European citizens" concluding that such restrictions are of political rather than economic nature. Belgian federal minister for Employment **Joelle MILQUET** ensured the participants that Belgium is reconsidering, in close cooperation with social partners, restrictions applied towards citizens of new Member States.



The debate of policy makers, members of European parliament, diplomats and business representatives was opened by the host, Czech Ambassador **Vladimír MÜLLER**, who stressed out the bare share of Czechs on Belgian economic migration and explained the historical, legal and political background of the labour market restrictions. Belgian federal Minister for Employment **Joelle MILQUET** explained to the participants the data Belgian position is based on – increasing unemployment and difficult political situation with strong opposition in some regions. Nevertheless Minister MILQUET ensured the participants that Belgian position is in discussion with social partners and that it is too early to predict the outcome of this internal consultation process.

European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities **Vladimír ŠPIDLA** challenged the existing restrictions to worker's mobility within the EU, which the European Commission finds contra productive, in the light of the favourable results of referendum in Switzerland to open labour market to Bulgarian and Romanian citizens. "In case of Belgium, only 0.2% of migrants come from EU+8. Such numbers do not cause any negative effects to Belgian labour market and Belgian economy," ŠPIDLA said. Czech Deputy Minister for Employment and Social Affairs **Michal SEDLÁČEK** presented respective Czech Presidency priority – to remove all restrictions to labour market mobility – and shared the outcomes of the discussions of EU employment ministers during informal EPSCO meeting in Luhacovice (CZ) and during last EPSCO meeting in Brussels.

Member of the European Parliament's Employment Committee **Milan CABRNOCH** addressed the topic from yet a different angle: "How should we as politicians explain to citizens such restrictions during our parliamentary campaigns if there are no reasons in favour?" Representative of European employers, **Jørgen RØNNEST**, Chairman of BUSINESSEUROPE Social Affairs Committee, challenged the plans of most of the Member States to remain and subsidise employment in the times of economic downturn. "We have to be more ambitious: regardless the crisis, we should speak about creation of new jobs and not about retaining the existing ones only," said RØNNEST.

In the following discussion, the opinion of European Economic and Social Committee on labour mobility was introduced. Furthermore, the topic of economic migration was tackled from a broader perspective including migrants from third states, challenge of attracting qualified migrants as well as the question of flexibility and sustainability of such migration.

The round table was organised by CEBRE - Czech Business Representation to the EU and the Embassy of the Czech Republic to Belgium at the Czech Centre in Brussels on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

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