

Provisional Record 11

Ninety-second Session, Geneva, 2004

Fourth sitting

Tuesday, 8 June 2004, 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Ray Guevara, Mr. Attigbe, Mr. Maatough

11/46

Mr. BOBROWSKI (*Employers' delegate, Poland*) Since distances are no longer difficult to cover, today's world seems to be so small. One can easily travel between the continents, and we are no longer surprised that everything seems to be just the same as it is at home. The globalization process, accompanied and supported by the integration of markets and the reduction of trade barriers, is not to be stopped, and it should not be stopped. What we have to consider now, what we have to emphasize, is the social dimension of this process. Human beings should always be treated as the object, not as the subject, of those changes. Politicians should always keep in mind that market integration should never be the goal in itself. It should lead to the improvement of efficiency, economic growth and, what is more important, the welfare of societies. On 1 May, Poland and nine other countries of Central and Eastern Europe joined the European Union. I am extremely happy that our generation, after so many years of constant battles for freedom and independence, has arrived at this historical moment. It is now the responsibility of Polish employers and Polish employees to make the most of this enlargement, and social dialogue will be the prerequisite for success.

Poland's last recession was used for the restructuring of its state-owned companies. The restructuring brought with it certain costs - mainly social. Restructuring meant reduction of employment. It was necessary, however, to prepare Poland for favourable economic development, and I believe that this difficult decision has given rise to an environment that offers opportunity, growth and prosperity. In 1981, the Tripartite Commission on Social Dialogue was established. Since then, we have learned to talk to each other. We have understood that only strong employee and employer organizations will result in the achievement of our common goals that is, economic growth accompanied by social peace and well-being.

To continue the progress, it is necessary for governments to form new partnerships with business and to mobilize the support various social groups. Indeed, our social partners play a crucial part in discussing changes and negotiating new procedures. I would like to applaud the Polish example - in adopting the changes regarding the flexibility of the labour market introduced after 2002, employers and the Government consulted with the social partners. Today, more than ever, we are aware that employment growth and the reduction of unemployment are essential from a political, as well as a social, point of view, and not only in Poland. Older members of the European Union face the same challenge. The problem, however, does not only lie in the amount of new jobs that Europe can create in the short term, but also how Europe can raise its economic potential, transforming it into sustainable employment and productivity growth in the medium and longer term. In other words, Europe needs more people working, and working more productively. One of the conditions for creating a friendly environment for business and creating more jobs, however, is the introduction of more flexible regulations in the labour market. But while policies can no longer remain solely protective of the social security of workers, employers must consult with their social partners: the trade unions and the government.

Perhaps the Polish experience can become a model for other countries. Recently, a broad set of initiatives was undertaken regarding the labour market. The main aim of the legislative initiatives, approved by the members of Parliament (at least by most of them), was the lowering of labour costs and

the introduction of more flexible labour relations. Here are some of the changes already introduced: reduction in the costs of compensation for a period of illness by decreasing the period of sickness benefit paid by the employer; allowance for reduction of the costs tied to remuneration for overtime work; reduction of the right to paid days off to search for new employment, solely in the case when the employment contract is terminated by the employer; reduction of the cases which oblige the employer to pay the employee cash compensation due to unused vacation days. The regulations regarding the flexibility of labour relations may be of special interest to you. These are as follows: introduction of the possibility to sign a temporary employment contract for the purpose of replacing an absent employee; more freedom for employers in managing working time; removing the obligation to consult with a trade union on the intention to terminate an employment contract. The most difficult situation is linked to bureaucratic requirements. The Government and Parliament have come up with a few solutions, such as relieving part of the employers from the duty to set the annual plan of vacations. Yet, this is still too little.

The Polish economy is developing, but the 5 per cent economic growth, which makes us almost a European tiger, still has no impact on the reduction of the extremely high unemployment rate. We do believe that soon both employers and employees will notice the boom. We need time and we need patience; but, in a society that who was told to wait and to look forward to a better future for so many years, there is not much patience left. In my country there is still much to do. We need to fight corruption, we need to fight the withdrawal of the average citizen from the public life. The Confederation of Polish Employers aims to change this state of affairs. I know that our country has great potential. I know that together we can achieve much more, especially as we are looking in the same direction. This is the year 2010, the year when, in accordance with the Lisbon Agenda, Europe is to become the most competitive economy in the world. Together we can achieve it!
