

Economic migration

Commission still hesitant

By Manon Malhère | Tuesday 20 December 2011

Announced on several occasions, the publication of a green paper on economic immigration is still missing from the European Commission's work programme for 2012. The executive is apparently hesitant: selling such an initiative to member states during this period of severe economic and financial crisis would not be easy. The question is set to be discussed at a Commission meeting in late January, according to a European source.

Labour needs really exist, however. For example, the Union will need hundreds of thousands of workers in the field of information technologies in 2015 and two million health care workers by 2020. «Without labour migration, we will not be able to keep up our way of life or social security,» commented Home Affairs Commissioner Cecilia Malmström recently (see *Europolitics* 4301).

The green paper, drafted under the responsibility of Commissioner Malmström and Employment and Social Affairs Commissioner László Andor, is not meant to open up a wide debate on legal migration. Nor does it tackle the issue of so-called peopling migration to help remedy demographic ageing in Europe. It is based strictly on economic arguments with the aim of contributing practical solutions to labour shortages. The questions raised are expected to concern, for example, legislative changes or the use of employment policy instruments (such as the EURES network that facilitates job hunting at European level).

More generally, this initiative seeks to remove legal immigration policy from the security (home affairs) perspective and to approach it more from the perspective of employment policy, not necessarily an easy challenge. How can this debate be justified when unemployment figures continue to climb dramatically? The timing of the initiative may not be advisable, a source told *Europolitics*.

VIGILANCE

The initiative raises other questions as well, in particular related to employment and education policies. In these areas, labour shortage is a problem related closely to member states' capacity to adapt their education and vocational training systems to the employment market. Their capacity to do so is considered insufficient and the issue is particularly sensitive. A call for economic migration should not give the states a pretext not to carry out reforms, warns a European source.

There is also the question of brain drain, which requires a 'win-win' solution for the Union and third countries concerned.

Last but not least, there is the question of whether officials with responsibility for employment will agree to give greater consideration at European level to the external dimension of their policy.