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## Working time - a key element of health workers, an instrument of labor market flexibility. The situation of the health system\*

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<sup>d</sup>Academy of Economic Studies, P-ta Romana, no.6, district 1, Bucharest, Postcode 010374, Romania Abstract

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With its devastating effects and decreasing profitability, the economic crisis pushes employers to ask more from workers, for the same salary. From this derives flexibility, exemptions, waivers and national options to elude the common rules established by the European legislative act. The Directive can be both a guardian for the workers, but also a tool to streamline business through crisis conditions. This paper aims to analyze the impact of the recession, on the actual time worked by employees in the EU, with the major repercussions on the employees' health and on the other hand the labor market flexibility and competitiveness. Also, special attention is given to the working time analysis in the health sector, especially for doctors in training and those who perform excess guards. Romanian doctors have a "Soviet-style" working program mentioning that some guards exceed 30 hours. This article proposes an analysis of various member states on the following aspects: pattern of work, tendency towards a non-stop society; *relativity quantification of working time, overtime rewarding*; correlations between the conclusions of the European Commission and the economic crisis.

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### 1. Introduction

The European economy is still struggling to get out of the deepest recession that has occurred in recent decades. The recession has caused a significant economic decline, with millions of job losses and a significant pressure on public finances, causing even greater fiscal constraints among the member states. Due to its devastating effects and decreasing profitability, the economic default pushes the employer to demand more from their workers than ever before at the same salary. This generates more and more flexibilities, exemptions, waivers and national options for evading the common rules established by the European Norms. Therefore, the Directive may be both a guardian for the workers health state as well as an instrument for increasing business profitability during the crisis. Further developments of the EU labor market, which resisted pretty well during the recession in 2008 and 2009, that began to create new jobs at the end of 2010, have deteriorated significantly and differ considerably from one country to another. Many advanced economies tried to bring the out of work workers back into the labor market by creating new jobs, but they failed. The consequences of the recession are causing more and more concerns about the high

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unemployment rates. In order to get workers back into the labor market, since May 2009, EGF (European Globalization Adjustment Fund) has become a fight - back instrument against the crisis.

## 2. European labor market problems due to the economic crisis and recovery opportunities through the working time

The European Framework Directive regarding Workplace health and safety (Directive 89/391/EEC), adopted in 1989, was an important tool for improving safety and health measures. It guaranteed the minimum requirements for safety and health for employees at work all across Europe while Member States may maintain or establish more stringent measures (Böheim, René and Taylor, Mark P, 2004). The Working time directive is the legal framework meant to limit the weekly working time of the employees in the EU, while being the guardian of the workers health requirements, but also a tool to streamline the business environment through the crisis. The way the states have or have not complied to the working time rules is marked by the multiple effects of the recession over the European labor market. The impact of the financial crisis upon the real economy started to be felt in 2009, when the GDP fell at an unprecedented scale on both sides of the Atlantic. The employment rates lasted very well in Europe during the beginning of the recession, mainly due to a significant adjustment of the employees working time. However, starting with the second half of 2009, job losses and unemployment had exploded in most EU countries, although on very different stages. The recovery process accelerated in the first half of 2010, and only stabilized in the second half, reflecting on the disappearance of temporary factors such as stimulus-offs measures. The crisis also highlighted the structural problems of the European labor market that require urgent action. In line with the objectives of 2020, the structural reforms meant to stabilize the economy and stimulate economic growth have become essential to create the premises for a high employment rate, mostly regarding new permanent jobs. The effects of the recession have varied considerably from one member state to another. In some member states such as Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, and Romania employment rates started to go down since the third quarter of 2007, while in Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Netherlands and Poland it started to go down since the last quarter of 2008. Other countries such as Belgium, France, Germany, Poland and Britain for example, the employment levels hardly started to decrease, remaining quite unaffected. However others have experienced the painful growth of unemployment - such as Greece, the Baltic States, Ireland and Spain (De Beer P., Schils T, 2011).

Table 1. Unemployment rate, 2000-2011 (%)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>EU-27</b>	8.7	8.5	8.9	9.0	9.1	9.0	8.2	7.2	7.1	9.0	9.7	9.7
<b>Euro area</b>	8.5	8.1	8.4	8.8	9.0	9.1	8.5	7.6	7.6	9.6	10.1	10.2
<b>Belgium</b>	6.9	6.6	7.5	8.2	8.4	8.5	8.3	7.5	7.0	7.9	8.3	7.2
<b>Bulgaria</b>	16.4	19.5	18.2	13.7	12.1	10.1	9.0	6.9	5.6	6.8	10.2	11.2
<b>Czech Republic</b>	8.7	8.0	7.3	7.8	8.3	7.9	7.2	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.3	6.7
<b>Denmark</b>	4.3	4.5	4.6	5.4	5.5	4.8	3.9	3.8	3.3	6.0	7.4	7.6
<b>Germany</b>	7.5	7.6	8.4	9.3	9.8	11.2	10.3	8.7	7.5	7.8	7.1	5.9
<b>Estonia</b>	13.6	12.6	10.3	10.0	9.7	7.9	5.9	4.7	5.5	13.8	16.9	12.5
<b>Ireland</b>	4.2	3.9	4.5	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.6	6.3	11.9	13.7	14.4
<b>Greece</b>	11.2	10.7	10.3	9.7	10.5	9.9	8.9	8.3	7.7	9.5	12.6	17.7
<b>Spain</b>	11.1	10.3	11.1	11.1	10.6	9.2	8.5	8.3	11.3	18.0	20.1	21.7
<b>France</b>	9.0	8.3	8.6	9.0	9.3	9.3	9.2	8.4	7.8	9.5	9.7	9.7
<b>Italy</b>	10.1	9.1	8.6	8.4	8.0	7.7	6.8	6.1	6.7	7.8	8.4	8.4
<b>Cyprus</b>	4.9	3.8	3.6	4.1	4.7	5.3	4.6	4.0	3.6	5.3	6.5	7.8
<b>Latvia</b>	13.7	12.9	12.2	10.5	10.4	8.9	6.8	6.0	7.5	17.1	18.7	15.4
<b>Lithuania</b>	16.4	16.5	13.5	12.5	11.4	8.3	5.6	4.3	5.8	13.7	17.8	15.4
<b>Luxembourg</b>	2.2	1.9	2.6	3.8	5.0	4.6	4.6	4.2	4.9	5.1	4.5	4.8
<b>Hungary</b>	6.4	5.7	5.8	5.9	6.1	7.2	7.5	7.4	7.8	10.0	11.2	10.9
<b>Malta</b>	6.7	7.6	7.5	7.6	7.4	7.2	7.1	6.4	5.9	7.0	6.8	6.5
<b>Netherlands</b>	3.1	2.5	3.1	4.2	5.1	5.3	4.4	3.6	3.1	3.7	4.5	4.4
<b>Austria</b>	3.6	3.6	4.2	4.3	4.9	5.2	4.8	4.4	3.8	4.8	4.4	4.2
<b>Poland</b>	16.1	18.3	20.0	19.7	19.0	17.8	13.9	9.6	7.1	8.2	9.6	9.7
<b>Portugal</b>	4.0	4.1	5.1	6.4	6.7	7.7	7.8	8.1	7.7	9.6	11.0	12.9
<b>Romania</b>	7.3	6.8	8.6	7.0	8.1	7.2	7.3	6.4	5.8	6.9	7.3	7.4
<b>Slovenia</b>	6.7	6.2	6.3	6.7	6.3	6.5	6.0	4.9	4.4	5.9	7.3	8.2
<b>Slovakia</b>	18.8	19.3	18.7	17.6	18.2	16.3	13.4	11.1	9.5	12.0	14.4	13.5
<b>Finland</b>	9.8	9.1	9.1	9.0	8.8	8.4	7.7	6.9	6.4	8.2	8.4	7.8
<b>Sweden (1)</b>	5.6	5.8	6.0	6.6	7.4	7.7	7.1	6.1	6.2	8.3	8.4	7.5
<b>United Kingdom</b>	5.4	5.0	5.1	5.0	4.7	4.8	5.4	5.3	5.6	7.6	7.8	8.0
<b>Croatia</b>	.	.	14.8	14.2	13.7	12.7	11.2	9.6	8.4	9.1	11.8	13.2
<b>Turkey</b>	.	.	.	.	.	9.2	8.7	8.8	9.7	12.5	10.7	.
<b>Norway</b>	3.2	3.4	3.7	4.2	4.3	4.5	3.4	2.5	2.5	3.1	3.5	3.3
<b>Japan</b>	4.7	5.0	5.4	5.3	4.7	4.4	4.1	3.9	4.0	5.1	5.1	4.6
<b>United States</b>	4.0	4.8	5.8	6.0	5.5	5.1	4.6	4.6	5.8	9.3	9.6	8.9

Source: Eurostat, 2012

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