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# EVALUATION OF THE HUNGARIAN LABOR MARKET IN TERMS OF A SHORTAGE OF SKILLED LABOR IN GERMANY

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## FUNDAMENTALS OF THE ASSIGNMENT

The German labor market is changing. The changes are due to such currently discussed factors as demographic change, globalization and the general economic structure which converts into a service economy. The actors at the labor market are asked to deal with current structural developments.<sup>1</sup> The biggest problem is a projected decline in the labor force potential, which results in a potential shortage of skilled workers<sup>2</sup>. In the future, companies will need to be prepared for this situation. In the wake of EU enlargement and the associated free movement of workers<sup>3</sup> it is therefore for international acting companies nearby to examine the current and potential labor force at neighboring markets. Germany and Hungary already have a long history-charged past and maintain good economic and political relations. The aim of the scientific preparation in hand is to evaluate and take a closer look at the labor market of Hungary in terms of a shortage of skilled workers as compared to the German labor market. This study aims to point out that German companies with branches in Hungary are able to diminish the threatening shortage of skilled workers on the German labour market through corporate activities on the Hungarian market and therefore through the assignment of Hungarian skilled workers in Hungary.

The work in hand will first analyze the German labor market in general and seek possible reasons behind current developments. The objective of this work is to evaluate whether German companies can reduce the current skills shortage in Germany with appropriate activities in Hungary. Subsequently, a German-based evaluation about the Hungarian economy will be presented. An evaluation of the Hungarian labor market and the local labor force will follow which attempts

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Federal Employment Agency, January 2011: 3.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Federal Employment Agency, January 2011: 7.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. European Commission, 2011: Freizügigkeit.

to answer the question in focus. Finally, a conclusion follows with a short business outlook including the latest analyzed developments and assessments.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE GERMAN LABOR MARKET**

### **Changes in the Working Environment**

Most journalistic authors are of the opinion that today change in the labour market is more difficult than in the past. This opinion may stem from the fact that the examined external developments such as globalization and demographic change, which the media characterizes as irresistible, introduce an unprecedented level of complexity to labor market theories. The complexity of the labor market in the course of progress is ever increasing and can be influenced by several factors.

The actors on the market face external factors such as demographic change and an advancing globalization. A significant influence on these developments cannot be noticed. As the population of Germany ages, so do its potential employees. According to (the latest calculations by) the Federal State Office, the decreasing proportion of the population of working age will be perceivable for the first time in 2020.<sup>4</sup> In addition, increasing competitive pressure comes from declining state frontiers and lower entry barriers to markets. The calculations of companies which want to compete successfully on the markets are always forced to be better, more precise and further-reaching.<sup>5</sup>

Another factor is the enormous technical progress, which has adopted entirely new forms in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, especially since the dawn of the digital revolution, and which shows no sign of slowing down. In the manufacturing industry, many tasks previously carried out by employees can now be handled by machines able to work faster and more accurately than their human counterparts.<sup>6</sup> By changing the conditions there is an economic structural change toward a service economy.<sup>7</sup> Service economies are characterized by economic growth in advanced economies which is largely supported by consumption and the production of services.

<sup>8</sup> This trend is confirmed by the global clearly ascertained rise of informal work.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Federal Statistical Office, 2009: 17ff..

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Rifkin, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gramke, 2010: 5f..

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gabler Economic Dictionary: Dienstleistungsgesellschaft.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. German Parliament, 2002: 242.

Informal work is usually the production of demand-oriented, non-monetary marketed products and social or technical services.<sup>10</sup>

### **Developments of Labor Force Potentials**

Considering these new findings, it is not possible to give an easy and satisfactory reply to the question of whether a shortage of skilled workers in the labor market is likely or not. According to the demographic scenario of the Institute for Labour Market and Employment Research (IAB), the so-called labor force potential (EPP) will fall in Germany without immigration and at constant employment rate from just under 45 milliard by the year 2050 to nearly 27 milliard people.<sup>11</sup> The forecasts of the various institutes demonstrate a staffing bottleneck on the labor market, despite not quite matching results. A McKinsey study estimates a deficit of two million in the workforce by 2020. The Prognos Institute predicts a so-called „experts gap“ of 5.2 million people, consisting of 2.4 million graduates and 600,000 low-skilled workers by the year 2030.<sup>12</sup> The critical question is at what point can one talk about a lack of skilled workers. By definition, a shortage of skilled labor occurs if the macroeconomic demand exceeds the macroeconomic supply of professional skills. If companies actually find no or only a few suitable applicants for any advertised position, this may be due to a shortage of skilled workers. However, it remains important to note that staffing problems can occur even when a macroeconomic excess supply exists. This might be the case when the contracting parties cannot reach an agreement due to differing orientations.<sup>13</sup>

### **Matching of Labor Supply and Demand**

An adequate and often used indicator for the comparison of demand and supply on the labor market is vacancy time<sup>14</sup>. The economic upswing which followed the crisis in 2008<sup>15</sup> is responsible for the fact that unfilled positions remain vacant for a longer time. Thus, the Federal Employment Agency recorded a growth of three days in terms of vacancy from August 2010 to July 2011 compared to the same period in the previous

<sup>10</sup> German Parliament, 2002: 241.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Federal Employment Agency, January 2011: 6f..

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Federal Employment Agency, January 2011: 6f.; Cf. Gramke, 2010: 1.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. KfW Bankengruppe, 2011: 1.

<sup>14</sup> The average time a company needs to assign a vacant position with an adequate skilled worker. (Cf., Federal Employment Agency (July 2011): p.11.)

<sup>15</sup> Cf. DIW Konjunkturbarometer, 2011.

year.<sup>16</sup> This indicates a shortage of available professionals on the labor market - with a rising tendency. This seems paradoxical when at the same time some three million people were unemployed in July 2011 and the nationwide unemployment rate noted 7.0% in the German labor market.<sup>17</sup> This phenomenon is based on a simple explanation which occupies a crucial point in the discussion about the skills shortage. Work itself is merely the collective term for various types of activities. Finally, the qualification for the capabilities is critical. An alleged lack of skilled workers by coincidental unemployment is thus a structural phenomenon in the labor market, and increases in cyclical upturns.<sup>18</sup>

When despite existing unemployment vacant positions are left unoccupied, it is called a „mismatch“ in economics. On the one hand, this mismatch exists due to searching and information deficits. On the other hand, labor demand and supply in relation to one another do not match professional qualifications, regions and sectors. Skill gaps especially often represent problems which cannot be removed quickly, because they depend on long-term educational and investment-related decisions.<sup>19</sup>

A difficulty in covering demand on skilled workers can be derived from the combination of different key data. Suitable examples are significant changes in the vacancy time of registered jobs, the proportion of older employees (through retirement admissions of expected replacement demand), the ratio of registered unemployed to unregistered sites and monthly agency surveys by the Federal Employment Agency to supply and demand for certain occupational groups. For example, the current average vacancy period for machinery and automotive engineers in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria and Hamburg is more than 40% higher than the national average for all occupations. Nevertheless, in spite of such shortages in certain occupational groups and regions, a general shortage of skilled workers in Germany is out of the question.<sup>20</sup>

Basically it is difficult to predict mismatches and skill shortages since in market economies wages and prices, and labor demand and supply continuously adapt to the market. Persistent gaps between supply and demand can be thus observed, particularly in the areas where wages are only partly controlled by the market. The

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Federal Employment Agency, July 2011: 10f..

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Statistics Federal Employment Agency, July 2011: 10f..

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Federal Employment Agency, January 2011: 6f.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Gramke, 2010: 5f.; Cf. Wagner; Jahn, 1997: 64f..

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Eurostat, 2010: 315.

health and education sector serve as an adequate example of this situation. Gaps between labor demand and supply currently tend to occur in academic professions and here especially in occupations with a technical focus. The situation may be to a large extent cyclical, but independent of economic trends an increasingly difficult skilled worker situation has to be assumed in the medium term.<sup>21</sup>

## **EVALUATION OF THE HUNGARIAN ECONOMY**

### **Evaluation of the Hungarian Economic Situation**

The evaluation of the Hungarian economy can well be shown by the annual surveys of the German-Hungarian Chamber of Commerce. In 2011, surveys on the economic situation and economic prospects were recorded for the seventeenth time. The survey participants were mostly German companies but also foreign ones whose corporate language is German. In addition, qualitative factors such as investment conditions and the quality of location were recorded.<sup>22</sup>

Although Hungary's economic situation is assessed as relatively poor by 44% of those polled, compared to the previous year's result of 63%, a significant improvement is in place. Moreover, there are very optimistic expectations for 2011 since nearly half of the respondents expect an improvement in the economic situation, whereas only 13% await a worsening of the situation. Besides, personal development in terms of sales trends, profit expectations and the firm-specific economic situation are seen as substantially more positive than the previous year. It is noteworthy that foreign firms contribute significantly to the economic development of Hungary and the creation of new jobs. Due to the favorable economic situation, nearly 40% of the surveyed companies plan to hire new personnel, while only one in six companies arrange for personnel reductions in the near future. In addition, about one third of the companies plan to invest further into the site whereas only 19% are planning an investment loss.<sup>23</sup>

### **Role of Foreign Investments**

Foreign investment plays a particularly large role in Hungary. The total volume of foreign investments is equivalent to about 70% of Hungary's gross domestic product. By the end of 2009, foreign companies had invested around 59 billion euros in Hungary,

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Bonin et al., 2008: 3.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 5.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 5f..

of which approximately 70% came from companies in the European Union.<sup>24</sup> From all these investments around one quarter arise in German companies. In the calculation period for 2009 invested total of 14.81 billion euros was invested directly by German companies in Hungary. In addition, during the study period starting in 1998, a steady increase from initially some six billion euros of investments in Hungary by German companies can be observed up until the present.<sup>25</sup> One in three jobs in the private Hungarian economy is in a foreign company with over 50 employees. If foreign companies with fewer than 50 employees were also to be enumerated, as well as suppliers and service providers, foreign investors could be said to secure about half of all jobs in the Hungarian private sector.<sup>26</sup>

The reinvestments of profits play a decisive role, especially from the German perspective. Measured since 1995, approximately 40% of profits were not paid to owners but reinvested in Hungary. Of these reinvestments, solely 55% fall upon German firms, which shows that German companies want to invest in Hungary for reasons of sustainability and not only for short-term profit maximization.<sup>27</sup>

Particularly interesting is the origin of German direct investment. The majority of German direct investment is made basically by Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia. In percentage terms, this means that Bavaria alone accounts for 44.7%, Baden-Württemberg for 15.9% and 26.4% in North Rhine-Westphalia. The other 13 states together contribute only 13.0% of German direct investment in Hungary. Most investments are made in the vehicle construction industry, at 33.1%. The other manufacturing industries as well as energy and water supply are each 17.1% and 16.1%. The remainder is covered by services of all kinds.<sup>28</sup>

### **Further Factors for Investment Decisions**

The labor market, legal security and the tax system turned out to be particularly important factors for investment decisions. Employment-related factors, especially motivation, productivity, staff qualifications and the availability of skilled workers are the most important factors for new investments among the surveyed companies.<sup>29</sup> It is often stated that the lower personnel costs are a very important motive for

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011:7.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 8.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 7f..

<sup>27</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 7.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 8.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 5.

companies to choose Hungary for a base. However, proximity to customers and market development for the company are of great importance and should not be underestimated. Compared with these, tax benefits are irrelevant to companies.<sup>30</sup>

The improved economic situation is reflected clearly in a more positive assessment of the quality of investment and location conditions. In contrast, corruption and crime remains a big problem. Two out of three companies sense the combating of these as insufficient. It seems therefore extremely worrying that the level of legal security is assessed as progressively worsening. Already 45% of firms indicate that they are dissatisfied with this.<sup>31</sup>

## **EVALUATION OF THE HUNGARIAN LABOR MARKET**

### **Evaluation of the Hungarian Labor Force**

Basically, German investors are satisfied at a high level with the labor market in Hungary. As in previous years, the companies assign high marks particularly in terms of motivation, skills and productivity of workers. The availability of skilled workers is estimated as similar to if not better than it was in the past. However, this should be mainly attributed to the crisis conditioned state of the labor market, thus, this issue is by far not yet complete. It is expected that according to an improving economy, the availability of skilled labor will decrease. Such a development could entail a significant inhibition in the economic boom.<sup>32</sup> In terms of labor costs the companies have voted better than the year before. Although the tax burden was not reduced to the labor factor, by introducing a flat income tax rate from 16% in labor costs it should significantly reduce pressure on employers.<sup>33</sup>

### **Evaluation of the Cost-Performance Ratio on the Hungarian Labor Market**

With regard to the labor market, the new positive-minded employment plans could maybe help to reduce the currently very high level of unemployment from 11.2%<sup>34</sup> in 2010. However, the creation of new jobs will very much depend on whether companies in Hungary will find suitable employees. In recent polls, the availability of skilled

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2010: 2.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 6.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 13.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 17; Cf. BCG, 2005: 8.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. DUIHK, April 2011: 1.

workers is estimated better than previously. However, at this point there is a very strong connection to the current crisis caused by high unemployment noted.<sup>35</sup>

It is relatively difficult to obtain information about the current labor market situation from the Hungarian point of view. In principle, a lack of skilled workers in Hungary can be expected, coexistent with very high unemployment. Many potential employees on the Hungarian labor market are qualified in business areas which are not requested. Consequently, such employees have little chances of obtaining a job within the labor market. For that reason the Hungarian government is determined to counter this “disorientation” and convince young people to be trained in other and more popular disciplines.<sup>36</sup>

In terms of income distribution, according to a study by the German-Hungarian Chamber of Commerce together with Kienbaum Management Consultants, the average base salary in 2010 increased by 6.6%. For 2011, an increase in basic salaries by 4.3% is again predicted.<sup>37</sup> Professionals obtain in 2010 an average annual total compensation of 4.4 million forints<sup>38</sup> which equates round about 16.000 Euro according to current exchange rates<sup>39</sup>. Skilled workers and ordinary workers receive an approximate total of 2.4 million forints as average annual total compensation which in turn is equivalent to about 8.600 Euro. Executives, however, earn by far not as much as German officers but with an average of 38.000 Euro total annual reference they are on a relatively high level compared to the measured salary of previous years. The Hungarian wages are lower compared to other countries in the region such as Slovakia and the Czech Republic. At the same time the availability of professionals with a grade of 1.7 is assessed better than in the other countries with 1.9 in Slovakia and 2.2 in the Czech Republic.<sup>40</sup>

All the more astonishing are the survey results with regard to vocational training and academic education, which seem to offer room for improvement.. The proportion of satisfied companies in relation to the vocational training system was shrinking from 2010 with 23% to 18% in 2011. In addition, 33% of the companies are particularly dissatisfied with the training of Hungarian employees. The satisfaction with higher education has gotten similarly worse during the course of the previous year.<sup>41</sup> The

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 13.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Departement for Foreign Affairs, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2010: 1.

<sup>38</sup> The Hungarian Forint is the currency in Hungary.

<sup>39</sup> Current exchange rate: 1 Euro = 271,762248 Forint (Date: 03.08.2011)

<sup>40</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2010: 4.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 20; Cf. Departement for Foreign Affairs, 2010.



reason could be that some companies had disappointing experiences with graduates from educational institutions. Although these grievances have been detected and fundamental changes desired to be made, no clear contour of the discussion can be detected so far. In consequence, the companies are additionally unsettled and the long-term planning of their personnel and training policies is aggravated.

Not least should it be kept in mind that the eastern European expansion of the EU is going to decrease the labor supply. Therefore, the general wage level will rise and undermine the actual Outsourcing Tendencies. It remains to be seen how the connections between the German and Hungarian economy will be expanded and whether or rather how much the German economy can counteract the lack of skilled workers in Germany. But it is certainly in the short and medium term, a good and safe option for the German companies to come up against the growing competitive pressure with a simultaneous shortage of skilled labor.

### **Evaluation of the Cultural Differences**

It must again be noted that especially in the labor sector many different factors and influences need to be involved. Accordingly, the labor costs or the education level do not play a solely decisive role but their relationship to various aspects which attract employers does.<sup>42</sup> In addition to purely quantitative factors such as tax rates, labor costs or infrastructure costs, qualitative factors play a likewise important role. Above and beyond schooling and vocational education, these qualitative factors also include cultural traits and competencies. Especially in the field of corporate communication it has gained great importance.

Essentially, Hungary is more open-minded and more focused in paralinguistic communication when compared with Germany.<sup>43</sup> Hungarians basically maintain a lighter manner in business than the Germans would usually do on the professional level.<sup>44</sup> This feature runs through the whole level of communication. The only exception in this context is criticism, a kind of communication much more conservative and more “between the lines”.<sup>45</sup> The only significant difference and cultural point of

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. DUIHK, 2011: 17.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Lewis, 2000: 285; Lewis, 2000: 225.

Cf. Derjanecz, 2003: 118.

Cf. Lewis, 2000: 282.

Cf. Lewis, 2006: 291. Lewis, 2000: 282.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Lewis, 2000: 285; Lewis, 2006: 225.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Derjanecz, 2000: 118.

conflict is the handling of timing and thus compliance of plans. Although both countries aspire to punctuality, there are differences in how time is handled once a meeting has begun.<sup>46</sup> Hungarians maintain a more relaxed use of agendas and discuss apparently important tasks with greater frequency. They also discuss longer than the schedule provides for. When confronted with German punctuality and order this property holds a significant potential for conflict.<sup>47</sup> As a result, communication partners have to learn to deal with mutual communication patterns. The above-mentioned cultural differences and similarities are based on general characteristics. For reasons of simplicity individual variation will not be listed. The work in hand makes no claim to completeness.

## CONCLUSION AND FORECAST

It is obviously the case that German companies are satisfied with the Hungarian labor market and plan constant reinvestment to expand connections with Hungary in the future. The most important question is whether it is possible for German companies to compensate for the skill shortages in Germany with activities on the Hungarian market.

It is quite conceivable that the German and Hungarian economies are creating a win-win situation for both parties through increased activities of German companies in the Hungarian market. The Hungarian economy is heavily dependent on foreign investments and is struggling to its feet. The investors are largely satisfied with the education system. Nevertheless there is a very high level of unemployment which the Hungarian economy cannot reduce on its own. Through appropriate reinvestment and tax levies of the German companies the Hungarian infrastructure is strengthened, boosting the economy and reducing unemployment. Additionally, there is a strong motivation for German companies to invest in Hungary. Besides the advantages of lower costs and cultural proximity, an increasing number of other companies will expand their economical and interpersonal connections from Germany to Hungary.

However, it cannot be assumed that all work could be easily outsourced to Hungary. It should be kept in mind that firstly there are some existing cultural differences—even if they are minimal compared with other countries. Secondly, German companies are sometimes not satisfied with the education system or, thirdly, pleased with the work process.

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Lewis, 2000: 282.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Lewis, 2006: 291.

Germany and Hungary have a long shared history and strong links still seem to be maintained. The bilateral relations should be considered from two perspectives. On the one hand, both countries seem to benefit from the fact that German companies invest in Hungary. The economically strong Germany can offer less strong Hungary a helping hand and promote the welfare of the citizens by providing new jobs. However, the impression could emerge that the stronger German market is exerting certain economical and political pressures on Hungary. Consequently, the German market forces demands which would be economically useful for the German economy. Nevertheless, the existing bilateral relations are very healthy and have improved over the years. The companies and employees of both countries have converged and it seems that they have already learned to deal with each other and to bridge cultural differences. In conclusion there are good opportunities to reduce the impending shortage of skilled workers in Germany and at the same time to reduce unemployment in Hungary, accordingly promoting the national economy.

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