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Digitisation of Business – A Reality Check

On June 5th, 2018 economiesuisse in collaboration with Federation of Enterprises in Belgium organized a conference on the topic of digitization and what kind of impact it has on businesses, working conditions and the society in general. The conference also had the honor to welcome the Swiss State Secretary for economy who actively participated in the discussion.

On June 5th 2018, economiesuisse and the Federation of Enterprises in Belgium (FEB) organised a conference on the impact the digital transformation of business has on companies, working conditions and the society at large. The conference had been set up to commemorate the 120th anniversary of the Swiss Chamber of Commerce in Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. In presence of the Swiss State Secretary for economy, Marie-Gabrielle Ineichen-Fleisch, representatives of companies from Switzerland and Belgium deeply involved in the process of digitization and social partners guests had the opportunity to acquire first-hand knowledge from expert who are confronted with digitization in their everyday work.

Digitization – A reality in many companies

Set up in three successive panels different aspects of the digital transformation were discussed. In the first panel companies from various sectors demonstrated with concrete examples how digitisation is impacting their business model and the organisational structure. Rainer Müller, responsible for the digital transformation in TE Connectivity, a manufacturing company from Schaffhausen providing connectivity and sensor solutions worldwide, gave an inside view of the staggering technological changes taking place in their sector. This has however not decreased the demand for qualified employees who currently amount at 75'000 worldwide. Kelly Griffith, Head Ireland and UK of Adecco Group X, the Group's Digital Innovation and incubation business showed how digital solutions can for instance help to secure social security entitlements of employees working in different countries. According to Jorik Rombouts, founder and CEO of Rombit, an Antwerp-based IoT-company, many companies now are looking to interconnect their formally closed digital environment with the rest of the world in order to increase their productivity and streamline their processes. Dorothea Wiesmann, who is heading the department for Cognitive Computing and Industry Solutions of the IBM Research center in Zurich showed how artificial intelligence is a game changer for deep search, showing trends, finding science gaps, etc. and ultimately is transforming the way we do research.

Digitization and the impact on the labour market

The second panel started out with a presentation on a study made by economiesuisse on the dynamics of the labour market in Switzerland in 2015 (Digitisation: a real threat to the future of jobs or just a distorted perception?). The presentation triggered a lively discussion between the European Social partners. Peter Scherrer, deputy secretary general of the European Trade Union Confederation showed us the possible negative impact automatization can have on the labour force. Maxime Cerutti, director for social affairs of BusinessEurope on the other hand gave the point of view of employers. As former director general for employment, Michel Servoz, Senior Adviser of the Commission for Robotics, Artificial Intelligence and the Future of European Labour Law was well placed to contribute to the lively discussion.

In her speech which initiated the third panel, the Swiss Secretary of State recommended to refrain from any state policy for digitization, but rather to set favourable framework conditions for companies to thrive. Her speech was followed by a panel discussion between policy makers from Belgium, the European Union and Switzerland whom all presented the different approaches of

their governments to allow for a smooth transition into this “new” digital era for companies and citizens.