



NEWS

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR WORKERS' QUESTIONS • NO. 3 / 2010

OVERVIEW

30th anniversary of Solidarność



An international conference on the question of to what extent the social partners – trade unions in particular – can influence their governments' social policy in the various countries of Europe, was the prelude to the celebrations marking the 30th anniversary of the Solidarność EZA member centre. *Page 2*

Employee Financial Participation in Europe

The aim of a European Economic and Social Committee own-initiative is to make the public more aware of the issue and encourage Europe to draw up a general concept. *Page 2*

Occupational health and safety



The current EZA project co-ordination's primary focus is on studying the impact of work-related stress. Report on the IFES seminar in Sibiu, Romania. *Page 3*

Poster on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of EZA

Page 4

EDITORIAL



Dear Friends,

That EZA is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year is reason enough for us to look ahead. "More social Europe – European social dialogue – Workers are involved" – that is why we have printed these unequivocal statements of our education and training work "lastingly" on a poster as a prospect for the future – you will find it at the end of this issue. In this we will be guided in the coming years by the Europe 2020 Strategy, which we shall be helping to implement. But there is another key concept from the renewed social agenda presented two years ago, one which we definitely want to carry on into next year for our work. We are talking about access

opportunities: improved access to education, training and social protection! The focus of our work is on the little word "and". Getting this idea across is one of our aims.

What decisions do the EU member states take? Do they invest primarily in education and training to enable young people to have better chances in the job market? Or do they invest in the welfare state and not cover in the face of the neo-liberal call for a reduction in welfare benefits? A comparison of the OECD countries shows that a one-sided expenditure policy is disadvantageous for both spheres. A weak welfare state has huge problems averting hardships once they have occurred. On the other hand, poverty of education and training very quickly produces material poverty, which in turn is a burden on the welfare state. The two spheres of functions and expenditure have to be approached in equal measure – even when the public purse strings are tight.

*Yours,
Roswitha Gottbehüt
Secretary General*

EZA backs work-free Sunday in Europe

The "First European Free Sunday Alliance" comprising trade unions, church and civil society organisations is collecting signatures for a public petition on a European level. Together with the European national Sunday alliances in Poland, Austria, Germany, Italy, France and Switzerland, the aim is to document support for a work-free Sunday, demand the right of every EU citizen to a work-free Sunday and preserve work-free Sunday as European cultural property. The objective is to generally enshrine Sunday as a work-free day in legislation as part of the EU Working Time Directive. EZA backs this demand because for EZA as a network of Christian-social worker organisations work-free Sunday is a fundamental concern, because it is of paramount impor-

tance for workers' health, for work/life balance and for civil society as a whole. Another objective is not to play the common good off against economic interests. As EZA sees it, this is of crucial importance in times of the economic and employment crisis and of the creeping erosion of protected Sundays and public holidays in an increasing number of economic sectors.

For further information go to:
www.mann-europa.de

International Conference on the 30th Anniversary of Solidarność

Partnership in Social Policy



Raf Chanterie, President of EZA, and Józef Mazolewski, Member of the Board of Solidarność

If the European Union demands the rigid implementation of the Services Directive for the sake of free competition, it should also demand of the Polish government that it systematically implement European social standards – that is one of the conclusions of the International Conference on "Partnership in Social Policy – Theory and practical Experiences", which was held in Sopot on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the so-called August Agreement.

According to EZA President Raf Chanterie, the social security systems are in jeopardy, but everything has to be done to prevent those systems being dismantled. He regrets that, despite the fact that there is a common currency in 16 EU countries, there are 27 different economic policies. The conference-goers stressed that social dialogue was necessary for the smooth running of the economy. They also discussed the trade unions' reaction to the financial crisis and the Europe 2020

Strategy, as well as the acceleration of European integration, particularly in terms of social policy.

Jacek Rybicki, General Secretary of the Solidarność National Commission, emphasised that the social partners' influence on social and economic policy was a key precondition for economic development. The financial crisis, he said, had thrown up the question of social solidarity and social cohesion in the EU. The objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, with its focuses on economic growth, good jobs and cohesion policy, were not different from those of the Lisbon Strategy. It was an opportunity but had to be implemented in its entirety.

Particular thought was given to the strikers of 1980, who fought to create free trade unions and access to independent media and a family-friendly policy. The social situation and the situation of trade unions in Central and Eastern European countries vary a great deal today. The conference-goers were unanimous that the August Agreement was a model for the conducting of social dialogue.

Krzysztof Świątek, „Tygodnik Solidarność” ■

Employee Financial Participation in Europe – an Initiative of the European Economic and Social Committee

Employee Financial Participation (EFP) of Workers is another means of letting companies, workers and society have a greater share in the success of increasing Europeanization. The European Economic and Social Committee intends to make the public more aware of this issue by means of an own-initiative opinion. The aim is to encourage Europe to draw up a general concept promoting social and economic cohesion in Europe by facilitating EFP on various levels, e.g. through profit-sharing, stock options and capital-forming benefits. Now in Europe, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have developed their activity to a cross-border extent. One of the priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy is to focus on implement-

ing the Small Business Act – particularly with regard to improving the financial situation of SMEs. EFP can be one of the mechanisms for supporting this objective. Regardless of the size of the company, EFP models have to respect solutions on a corporate level and protect workers' rights to take into account the diversity of companies and countries.

The social partners should be encouraged both on European level and in the member states to discuss the issue comprehensively. Obstacles to cross-border EFP should be identified and solutions identified. The appropriate European institutions should be called upon to come up with solutions.

EFP must be voluntary. It must not replace existing remuneration. It has to

be an additional supplement to remuneration systems, must be transparent to workers and be combined with other forms of employee participation. EFP should operate outside pension systems, but can be an extra element of a pension plan on an individual basis.

Further information is available from this e-mail address:

alex@graf-vonschwerin.de

Alexander Graf von Schwerin ■

From "Physical Risks at the Workplace" to "The Impact of Work-related Stress"

Broad Range on the Issue of Occupational Health and Safety in the EZA Network

Occupational health and safety is an issue that is being tackled by EZA and many of its member centres. In 2005/2006, projects involving the *Kristelig Fagbevægelse* in Denmark, the *Centro de Formação e Tempos Livres* in Portugal and the *Institutul de Formare Economica si Sociala (IFES)* in Romania co-ordinated by the Romanian institute's Director Silviu Ispas looked into physical risks at the workplace. The primary focus of the projects being co-ordinated in 2010/2011 is on the impact of work-related stress. Following two successful seminars from the *Centre d'estudis europeu per a la formació dels treballadors* in Barcelona and the *Lëtzeburger Chrëschtliche Gewerkschafts-Bond* in Luxemburg, the most recent was a seminar of the *IFES* in Sibiu, reported on here by **Stefania Isaila**, Project Manager at *IFES*:

Work-related or occupational stress represents one of the biggest challenges Europe is confronted with. According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, approximately one in four workers is affected by stress, while other sources suggest that in Romania the percentage is higher, i.e. 36%. Stress is considered to be a cause in 50% to 60% of the cases of absenteeism. This entails huge costs, both on account of the associated diseases, and because of reduced economic performance.

The general objective of the project was both to raise awareness of the risks associated with work-related stress among the social partners from Romania and among the EZA member organizations, and to identify good practices in the prevention of occupational stress.

The topics covered during the *IFES* seminar (21 to 24 October 2010) were: work-related stress causes and effects, the role of the social partners in preventing and reducing work-related stress, best practices in the field, the main directions identified by the Social Dialogue Committee in the document *Implementation of the European Autonomous Framework Agreement on Work-Related Stress* as well as the ways this particular document was put into practice in different European countries. The discussions focused on what can be done in order to improve the respective policies and measures.



A working group at the *IFES* seminar in Sibiu, Romania

The seminar was attended by representatives of the social partners, public authorities and EZA organizations, as well as experts in the field of industrial relations and occupational health. This had greatly facilitated the exchange of experience between participants and the identification of good practices in implementing the work-related stress prevention programme.

Throughout the seminar several ideas and techniques to prevent and reduce work-related stress were presented and discussed. The participants agreed that social dialogue and the trade unions play an important part in the effort to tackle the problem. The unions can issue and promote ideas to change the legislation and are able to raise public awareness concerning the causes that often lead to stress (such as ineffective distribution of the tasks or role ambiguities).

Another key outcome of the seminar was the recognition that stress can also be triggered off by factors in the work environment: low wages that are not enough to live on (in Romania most workers do not earn more than 150 euros a month), fear of losing one's job, and unemployment also cause work-related stress. ■

IMPRINT

Published by

EZA

European Centre for Workers' Questions

Johannes-Albers-Allee 2

53639 Königswinter

Tel. +49 - 22 23 - 29 98 - 0

Fax +49 - 22 23 - 29 98 - 22

E-mail: eza@eza.org

www.eza.org

Editorial team

Roswitha Gottbehüt (editor-in-chief),

Matthias Homey, Francisco Rivas

Gómez, Michael Schwarz, Victoria

Znined

Design and composition

HellaDesign, Emmendingen

E-mail: helladesign@web.de

Photos

EZA, Solidarność, IFES

Frequency of publication

Four issues a year



This publication receives financial support from the European Community.

More social Europe



Workers are involved!