

OVERVIEW

■ The Social Partners' Capacity Building

Ellen Durst from the European Commission refers to the challenges for strengthening the social partners' capacity building and calls on the social partners themselves to play their part *Pages 1 and 2*

■ Europe 2020 Strategy



Final conference of EZA's major project on the Europe 2020 Strategy employment target in Bucharest: recommendations for workers' organisations in shaping employment and creating "good work" Topic for 2012: Combating poverty under the Europe 2020 Strategy *Page 3*

■ EZA's Education and Training Programme 2012

Focuses: Europe 2020 Strategy; the impact of massive public debt on the job market and on social security; demographic challenges for the job market, vocational training and social security systems in Europe; special project on developing the European social dialogue in the western Balkan states *Page 3*

EDITORIAL



Dear Friends,

In our view it took far too long ... Serbia is finally a candidate for the EU. This is a clear signal and a key step towards strengthening peace in Europe. Thirteen years ago the country was still being attacked by NATO forces during the Kosovo war. Since then its development has been positive – if not convincing on every level. EZA gives a warm welcome to this decision, because at long last we can offer education and training on social Dialogue "on the spot" in Serbia. Trade union representatives there have been asking EZA about it for years. They

tell us the need is great. Many of our member organisations from the Balkans and Western Europe have had good contacts with Serbian trade unions for years, and we are naturally using these contacts for our work. We are far from beginning from scratch and will also be resorting to the European Commission's studies (<http://www.energy-communitiy.org/pls/portal/docs/1362178.PDF>).

We hope that the negotiations on accession and the debate on Chapter 19, which defines key minimum requirements in social policy and employment, will begin soon. They relate to labour law, equality, health and safety at work, and anti-discrimination, which we can offer in parallel in our education and training work. We are optimistic, even though we know that negotiations on social dialogue in existing candidate countries for EU accession have been (very) low priority for years. We look forward to a new challenge.

*Yours,
Roswitha Gottbehüt
Secretary-General*

Enhancing the capacity of social partners

Irrespective of the diversity of national systems of industrial relations, strong social partner organisations, autonomous bargaining at national or sector level, social dialogue at company level and the involvement of social partners in policy-making are essential elements of economic and social governance in Europe. In the right combination with other state institutions and provided there is a trustful relationship, they contribute to competitiveness, improved working conditions and social cohesion. Although many efforts have been made to support capacity-building initiatives of social partners, there remains significant room for improvement. The following challenges have to be addressed:

1. Unequal participation of national organisations in European social dialogue mechanisms

In the context of the last enlargements, the European social partners' organisations have extended their partnership to relevant social partners in the new Member States. Actively involving all national social partners is essential to ensure that the European social dialogue process is legitimate and achieves effective outcomes and a follow-up at national level. In most of the new Member States particular efforts are still needed with regard to sectoral social dialogue, and also with regard to the organisation of the employers' side.

2. Weak administrative capacity to respond to social partner consultations

The European social partners are increasingly involved in the European policy-making process. Under Article 154 of the Treaty, they are consulted by the Commission on the principle and content of any European social policy initiative. Moreover, the European social partners are consulted on sectoral policies. Furthermore, the Commission has developed a methodology and procedure for impact assessments of its initiatives which include a specific reference to European sectoral social dialogue committees, offering them a new opportunity to contribute towards shaping European policies. If the social partners are to be effective in this role, they must have the capacity to deliver timely reactions to such consultations. However, their capacity depends on that of their national affiliates, whose strengths and resources may be limited.

3. Insufficient capacity of European and/or national social partners to ensure the full implementation of European agreements

The capacity to negotiate agreements at European level is one of the conditions for participating in a European social dialogue committee. Once such agreements are concluded, they have to be implemented at national level. Most European sectoral social partners' organisations are characterised by a low degree of centralisation and coordination. They have limited capacity to influence their national affiliates. But the follow-up at national level of dialogue held at the European level depends on the effective involvement of national social partners in the EU dialogue, and on the interaction between the EU-level social dialogue mechanisms and various national industrial relations systems. Effective follow-up at national level is also clearly linked to the representativeness of European social partners' organisations.

4. Underutilisation of available EU funding devoted to capacity-building

Most of the capacity-building activities carried out by the EU social partners are co-financed through the EU budget headings "Industrial relations and social dialogue" and "Information and training



measures for workers' organisations"¹. However, these budget headings have limited resources and they cannot support purely national capacity-building activities. National capacity-building for workers' and employers' organisations can be co-financed under the national programmes supported by the European Social Fund (ESF)². The ESF can fund activities to enable social partners to effectively play their part in support of more and better growth and jobs – the Europe 2020 strategy for a smart, inclusive and sustainable growth. This capacity-building component of the ESF includes training, networking measures, strengthening social dialogue; the ESF supports joint actions and networking of social partners in areas such as lifelong learning or the integration of people furthest away from the labour market, but also the social partners themselves for the improvement of their capacity and their cooperation. Unfortunately, knowledge of, access to and use of this ESF funding available appears to be insufficient.

In 2012, the Commission will organise a conference on "Promoting the capacity of social dialogue in the new Member States" which will inter alia also disseminate information on ESF support. But the social partner organisations at all levels – including the European Centre for Workers' Questions – must contribute to the effort to enhance the capacity of social partners.

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¹ For example the resource centre of the cross-industry social partners:
www.resourcecentre.etuc.org
 and
www.erc-online.eu

² <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/>

Putting employment and poverty under scrutiny



Caption Panel at the final conference on the topic of "Workers' organisations influencing the Europe 2020 strategy" in Bucharest

Having 75% of 20 to 64-year-olds in gainful employment by 2020 is not enough. This finding became clear during the conference on the Europe 2020 Strategy employment target from January 2012. Representatives of workers' organisations met in Bucharest to conclude the major EZA project on the issue. The topic had been addressed in ten seminars under the scientific guidance of the "Research Institute for Work and Society (HIVA)"/Belgium. The nearer employment comes to the ideal of "good work", the better the overall employment situation can be expected to become – according to a finding from

HIVA. There are plenty of indicators in different systems for rating "good work". The conference recommends using them to assess the EU employment target. A document on this will be appearing shortly. Apart from detailed presentations and analyses there will also be a catalogue with recommendations for workers' organisations in shaping employment and creating "good work".

In the new training year EZA, along with its partner organisations and once again in collaboration with HIVA, aims to scrutinise the Europe 2020 Strategy's "Combating Poverty" target. Eight events will be addressing this issue from April

make a contribution to the European year for active ageing and intergenerational solidarity from the perspective of workers' organisations. EZA intends to promote the development of the European social dialogue in the western Balkan states with a special project for workers' organisations, which is to tie in with the tradition of the special project in Central and Eastern Europe that was conducted very successfully from 2004 to 2009.

Other issues include informing and consulting workers; young workers in Europe, more and better jobs; social security; the compatibility of family and job; and mobility and migration of workers. The 67 training activities also include a course for workers' representatives. EZA's "European Social Dialogue 2012" education and training programme is available from April. For more information go to www.eza.org.

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2012 onwards. The opening event is the Solidarność seminar, which will focus on the question of winners and losers in the fight against poverty and the social exclusion of workers in light of the Europe 2020 strategy.

For workers' organisations the correlation between employment and poverty is particularly important; after all, for a long time employment was regarded as the ideal way to eliminate poverty and social exclusion. On the other hand, working conditions that produce an inadequate income, are short-term and fail to give employees any stability in life, and employment with no social security entailing the risk of poverty for the future are not suitable for combating poverty and social exclusion effectively in the long run. ■

EZA's Education and Training Programme 2012

The number of people in Europe who are poor although they have a job is increasing. The reason for the higher number of "working poor" in Europe is not only the many cases of precarious working conditions, short-term contracts and mini-jobs, but also the often poor quality of full-time jobs. In the 2012 education and training year EZA is continuing the major project on the Europe 2020 Strategy it began in 2011 (see article above).

It is becoming increasingly evident, especially in the countries of southern Europe, what impact massive public debt is having on the job market and on social security; EZA is addressing this pressing concern among workers' representatives and workers in co-ordinated projects. The aim of a second series of co-ordinated projects ("Demographic challenges for the job market, vocational training and social security systems in Europe") is to

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