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EDITORIAL



Dear Friends,

do we still recall when the first machines made work easier for workers in factory production – until sophisticated robots came to take away more and more jobs? Distracted by coping with several crises, reports on the further development of robots have been given a low profile. There was an article in early November in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)* on “where it goes from here”. The article refers to the inexpensive storing of the employee’s details on computer and measuring him. For

some time now the issue has not only been simple work processes, but also mental, creative and innovative areas of work. Moreover, increasing networking seems to make it simpler to adapt corporate structures than to change the corresponding software. Who decides what here about whom – and where is the worker in this? It’s high time that trade unions and works councils faced these challenges on a national and European level – and the issue cannot be just data protection. It is about jobs, as well as about carrying gains in worker’s efficiency and cost-cutting in the company to the extreme. I find it very thought-provoking that social partners and the government in Germany have now published a “Joint statement on mental health in the world of work”: mental illness is estimated to cost the economy about 29 billion euros.

Yours,
Roswitha Gottbehüt
Secretary-General

EZA delegation in Belgrade

Meetings with partners of the trade union confederations “Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia” (CATUS/SSSS) and “NEZAVISNOST” were the focus of discussions an EZA delegation headed by President Bartho Pronk held in Belgrade in late August. The situation of workers and their representatives in the country was discussed with President Ljubisav Orbović of CATUS and President Branislav Čanak of NEZAVISNOST as well as future co-operation between the Serb trade unions and EZA. Crass privatisations of state companies have led to the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs, the workers’ organisations complained; the erosion of protection provided under labour law also affected their own work, they said. The principal reason for the visit was to supervise the EZA special project on

strengthening social dialogue in the Western Balkans region. Partners from Serbia, as well as other workers’ organisations from Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro are involved in the project. They are carrying out projects in education and training alliances together with EZA members.

The results of education and training alliances to date were evaluated and prospects for their continuation discussed at an Evaluation and Prospects seminar in Brussels in early November 2013. The seminar was organised in conjunction with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). It set the agenda for the future work of the education and training alliances, issues were established and concrete work plans drawn up.

Norbert Klein ■

EZA project coordination: „Checking the balance between work and private life”

This year, the links between the labour market and family are one of the key topics for EZA. Why has this issue been chosen for this year? One cannot speak about labour and not talk about the family and vice versa. In times of economic difficulties in Europe, there is a strong tendency to look for possible savings and cut extra and unnecessary spending. There is a great risk that family policy will be among the first targets. Families are among the most vulnerable elements of society. In a situation where economic aspects take precedence, social, tax and other family-related policies are the ones to suffer the first cuts.

This year, four seminars were held on conciliating work and family. The first took place in Lublin, Poland (European Meeting Centre - Nowy Staw Foundation), followed by Brixen, South Tirol/Italy (Arbeiter-, Freizeit- und Bildungsverein) and Velehrad, Czech Republic (KAP), and the last one in Ohrid, Macedonia (UNASM). The participants came

from eleven countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Hungary, FYR of Macedonia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Both the seminar in Poland and in the Czech Republic showed that all new EU members states face the same problems. The presentations reported on similar issues in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Romania: low employability rate of young people, unstable situation on the labour market, precarious work contracts, high unemployment rate among women after maternity leave and difficult reintegration into the labour market are problems which affect families the most.

Macedonia is working on good legal solutions assuring equal opportunities for men and women, there are labour market reforms, including labour law. Macedonia is observing examples of best practice in other countries.

The seminar in Brixen concentrated on equal opportunities for men and women at work and in private, family and social

life. The main question was if equal opportunities can be guaranteed in times of crisis. The countries participating such as Germany, Belgium and Austria emphasized that there is no severe labour market crisis but the main conclusion was that the first symptoms always affected the most vulnerable: women (mainly those returning to the labour market after maternity leave), young people and hence families. There is a tendency to replace stable work contracts with project-related contracts, limited-term and part-time jobs. Moreover, women still earn less for the same job. The participants called for greater participation of men in family life.

Milan Toth from Slovakia summarised the challenge concisely: „Our aim mustn't be to adapt family policy to the labour market but reforming the labour market in relation to family policy needs.”

Anna Moskwa ■

4th Young Workers' Conference in Tallinn



Group photo of the participants at the 4th Young Workers' Conference in Tallinn, Estonia, last September

Organizing a biannual young workers' conference has become a good tradition and is one of the most important tasks of EZA's Platform for Young Workers (PYW).

The fourth young workers' conference was held from 19 to 22 September. The event is organized by a different member organization of the core group managing the platform each time. This year ETÖK from Estonia was so kind as to host our meeting.

The title wasn't new – “Youth Unemployment: How to fill the gap between the education system and the labour market in Europe?”; an issue that has been discussed many times but still not solved! That is why it is important for young people to use every opportunity to debate and look for solutions.

The conference programme consisted of two subtopics: vocational education and training and mobility of workers. Both seem to be a solution to the high level of

youth unemployment in many European countries.

Each topic was presented by outstanding speakers who are experts in the matter. Working groups provided participants with the possibility of having more detailed discussions.

We learned a lot about the German and Austrian VET system that is being presented as a model solution for other countries and could also compare our countries' VET with good practice in Germany and Austria.

Mobility has also become an urgent issue. The participants discussed a project inviting young Spaniards to Koblenz in Germany where they take part in the German dual system. It seems that there will be more such initiatives, which is why they need to be promoted and extended.

This conference was a great opportunity for the PYW members to meet and exchange ideas, concerns, projects and future plans of their organizations. It was also a good meeting of friends focusing on similar values and objectives. We are looking forward to the 5th young workers' conference!

Marta Jędrych ■

EZA and PODKREPA seminar in Sofia on “European Funding Schemes”

A seminar at just the right time: that was the unanimous opinion of the seminar-goers and experts who gathered in Sofia on 14 and 15 October 2013. Entitled “Developing strategies for workers’ organisations to shape social policy through European funding schemes” the seminar focused on future funding instruments that will enable issues in the world of work to be promoted in Europe.

Improving the employment situation was a special focus of future policy, Bulgaria’s Employment Minister Hasan Ademov pointed out. In order to achieve sustainable positive change in this respect, in future there would be considerable reliance on the support of the European Social Fund (ESF). The President of PODKREPA (Confederation of Labour) Konstantin Trenchev also advocated a rapid improvement in the employment situation. If this did not happen, the social and societal stability of the country would be severely jeopardised. They had to ensure that European funds available for the country were also claimed.

In her video speech Member of the European Parliament Elisabeth Morin-Chartier referred to the Europe-wide urgency and extreme importance of combating unemployment. Young people had to be brought into employment soon. This applied in particular to countries with drastically high youth unemployment figures. There was an urgent need to utilise ESF funds in the medium term, and this aim required considerable attention on both a national and European level.

Some 40 representatives of workers’ organisations met in Sofia to discuss the ESF changes for the period from 2014 to 2020 and compare notes on working with this funding instrument. This demonstrated that workers’ organisations were also treating the employment situation as a top priority. In their view, however, the employment drive also had to focus on other disadvantaged groups. For instance, consideration had to be given to elderly workers as well as people who had difficulties finding a job because of their living situation and lack of vocational skills. The quality of work also had to be considered in the job market.



EZA delegation to the President of Bulgaria Rosen Plevneliev: from left to right: Nikolay Nikolov, Socio-economic consultant of PODKREPA; Dejana Kostadinova, Secretary for Social Policy, Youth and Sport to the President of the Republic of Bulgaria; Norbert Klein, EZA Educational Consultant; Roswitha Gottbehüt, General Secretary of EZA; Bartho Pronk, President of EZA; Rosen Plevneliev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria; Konstantin Trenchev, President of PODKREPA; António Matos Cristóvão, Vice-President of EZA; Dimitar Manolov, Vice-President of PODKREPA; Vesselin Mitov, Confederation Secretary on International Policy PODKREPA

Numerous seminar-goers from Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain are themselves involved in planning and implementing ESF measures. What they called for was less red tape in the future and greater assistance in applying for projects. Education and training programmes tackling this issue and questions of financial and project management were as important as imparting knowledge of networking.

Key issues for the future that were raised included health and safety at work, especially for elderly workers, the introduction and setting of minimum wages, and the development of vocational training into an effective instrument for combating youth unemployment.

Experience from previous ESF work shows that there is a major success factor: planning and implementing measures jointly and in collaboration with the social partners has proven conducive to sustainability. However, according to Hans-Ulrich Nordhaus of the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), this required patience for the requisite understanding and trust to be built up.

The President of Bulgaria Rosen Plevneliev confirmed this finding in a conversation with the leaders of PODKREPA and EZA: ESF funds become fully effective

when they are applied in a broad consensus with the social partners. The head of state then paid tribute to the role of PODKREPA in his country: with its long-term perspective the trade union has a stabilising effect, he said.

It was extremely important that the future ESF measures were geared to the goals of the European Union’s Europe 2020 strategy, said EZA General Secretary Roswitha Gottbehüt. To enable activities in the individual countries to be better interlinked EZA will set up a permanent group of experts on a European level. Furthermore, an electronic network is to be created to enable strategies on issues and procedural aspects to be drawn up and exchanged.

To improve the international exchange of experience, Gottbehüt advocated including in the new ESF programme ways and means of promoting transnational co-operation measures.

Norbert Klein ■

EZA's networks and platforms

Interview with Marta Jędrych, European Platform for Young Workers (PYW)

Marta, until the end of September you were the person responsible for the PYW.

What are the platform's aims?

The Platform for Young Workers of EZA was created to make the voice of young workers stronger and better heard. "Together we can!" – this is totally true, together we are stronger and can do more. For this reason one of our goals is to make young workers more visible in the EZA network by increasing the number of young participants and speakers in every EZA seminar.

Moreover, the Platform gives young people the opportunity to exchange ideas, best practices, knowledge, projects and to be inspired for their professional life.

How does the Platform work?

The Platform is managed by the core group. These are eight people and the Secretary General of EZA. This group meets several times a year to decide on the activities of the Platform and to prepare them.

The most important task of the Platform is to organise the youth conference that should take place every two years. This is the moment when the whole Platform can meet. There have already been four conferences, each organised by a different PYW member. During these confer-

ences there is a General Assembly of the Platform where the new core group is elected.

Apart from this, the PYW runs seminars about young workers and some other projects, e.g. a survey about the participation of young workers in trade unions that we carried out in 2011.

Who is involved in the PYW?

The members of the Platform are representatives of EZA member organisations. Each of these organisations is invited to apply to become a part of the Platform and to nominate one or two persons who will represent the organisation in the PYW. Now we have around 30 members, which means that still more or less half of the EZA organisations are not yet members of the PYW. We would like to get more organisations involved. Membership in PYW could motivate EZA members to focus more on youth issues.

Who is your work aimed at?

Firstly, we want to address young people, young workers who, as widely known, are one of the most vulnerable groups in the labour market. Secondly, we want to reach all EZA organisations to encourage them to focus more on young workers. Thirdly, we wish to increase awareness within our organisations for the prob-

lems of young workers. Ideally we would also like to reach politicians who can influence labour market policies that concern young people, to make them more aware of young workers' problems.

Who can join in and how?

All member organisations of EZA are invited. They can nominate one or two young persons (under 36 years of age) and send an application to EZA by e-mail. After receiving confirmation, the organisation becomes a member. A simple procedure worth undertaking!

Thank you for the interview. Good luck with your work!

Victoria Znined ■

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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, Norbert Klein,

Victoria Znined

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E-mail: helladesign@web.de

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Last September there were new elections for the core group of the PYW. The members are: Maria Teresa Anselmi, EFAL-MCL, Italy • Oana Ivascu, IFES, Romania • Marta Jędrych, EDS-FNS, Poland • Mariana Lemos Martins, Fidestra, Portugal • Misaras Donatas, Solidarumas, Lithuania • Luke Musu, UHM, Malta •

Josip Nikolić, Napredak, Croatia • Mojca Perat, NSi, Slovenia



Members of the PYW core group, from left to right: Mojca Perat, Maria Teresa Anselmi, Marta Jędrych, Josip Nikolić, Oana Ivascu, Misaras Donatas, Luke Musu, Roswitha Gottbehüt