

OVERVIEW

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EDITORIAL



Dear Friends,

Europe has a great deal of tough situations to cope with at the moment. All the challenges – be it negotiating a decent political solution for the people of Ukraine, the efforts to cut the high unemployment rate in the EU or to ease austerity policies brought about by the crises and promote sustainable growth – have one single important common denominator: each and every person concerned, the Ukrainian, the unemployed youth or the worker exposed to dumping wages, wants social justice for him/herself more

than anything. They all want more opportunities for a stable outer and inner peace, founded in all matters on compliance with a solid legal basis. A lot has been implemented in recent months, for instance the urgently needed banking union or currently the Enforcement Directive still to be voted on by the European Parliament, aimed at preventing the abuse of migrant workers in Europe. There is still a great deal to be done in terms of social justice.

How will the citizens of the EU vote in the European elections in late May 2014? Will they put their trust in the parties whose representatives constructively and openly defend the European social model? The best social policy has always been a secure job. This must be the aim when politicians talk about a sustainable economy. Please cast your vote.

Yours,

*Roswitha Gottbehüt
Secretary-General*

Construction industry witnessing a social disaster

More than 30 trade union representatives from the construction and wood industries gathered on 4 and 5 February 2014 in Belgrade for a seminar within the EZA special project for workers' organisations in the Western Balkans on sectoral social dialogue. Participants came from Belgium, the Netherlands, Serbia, Croatia, FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania and Bulgaria.

One of the main topics was the impact of migration and the free movement of services on social dialogue in the European Union. The participants focused on the devastating effect of the free movement of services and the internal market on jobs, wages and working conditions in the construction sector. Workers are exploited and regular jobs are disappearing or being replaced by precarious and

informal work. Today, we are far from the original approach of the Posting of Workers Directive (PWD) that was at that time the result of a compromise between social partners on how to reconcile the equal treatment of all workers and a high level of social protection with a competitive, free market.

European trade unions point to the need for a co-ordinated campaign to stop social dumping and demand real sanctions and a social Europol. They are furious with the contempt of European institutions for worker concerns and warn that neglecting to find a solution for this challenge will give ever more voice to growing Euroscepticism.

Tom Deleu ■

EZA series of seminars on the EU Employment Package

Given the employment crisis in a number of European states the order of the day is not to make European labour markets more flexible, it is to create good jobs. This was one of the conclusions of the seminar on “New jobs in the European Union (EU): create quality, sustainable working conditions – the most urgent task in the social dialogue at present” held in Madrid in late January. The seminar, organised by the training centre of the confederation of Spanish trade unions USO jointly with EZA, was also the final event in a five-part series of seminars addressing the Employment Package under the Europe 2020 strategy. It was given academic assistance by the Catholic University of Leuven/Belgium’s Research Institute for Work and Society (HIVA). This enabled research approaches and results to be incorporated in the seminars, and developments from practice relating to the issues to be integrated in the academic appraisal. In the education and training events, HIVA gave a keynote presentation entitled “The quality of new jobs and challenges for workers’ organisations – the EU2020 Employment Package and job quality in the “green” economy, in information and communication technology (ICT) and in the care sector”. After the end of the series of seminars a research report is now being drawn up which will include the results of the seminars.

The EU Employment Package

The EU Employment Package was issued in April 2012 and consists of strategy documents presenting the interfaces of the EU employment policy with other policy areas intended to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The package points up the sectors with the biggest employment potential within the EU and the best means of enabling the EU member states to create more jobs. In the EU’s estimation this applies in particular to the sectors of “green jobs” as well as the ICT and health and care service sectors. These branches of the economy are regarded as labour-intensive and are expected to grow in the future.



Seminar-goers attending the closing event of the five-part series of seminars on the Employment Package, part of the Europe 2020 Strategy, Madrid, January 2014

The EZA series of seminars

The issues addressed in the EZA seminar series also included general labour market issues. Several seminars took a critical look at the question of whether the formulas currently applied to overcoming economic crises did not put extra pressure on the labour markets already severely hit by the crisis. Political action so far has been at quite some remove from creating good jobs in those sectors the EU feels have high workforce potential.

In the “green” economy sector it has become clear that although former health risks have often disappeared in terms of job quality, at the same time new risks have been created. Often the jobs to be done in this sector did not correlate with the image frequently propagated by the sector of the dynamism, innovation and environmental friendliness of the goods and services it produces. On the other hand this branch of the economy also thrives on the companies’ ethical claim. This could – according to one of the conclusions – also be used by workers’ organisations to improve job quality.

ICT jobs frequently featured a high level of training and considerable self-affirmation on the part of the employees, and were usually well paid. At the same time employees in this sector were subject to severe pressure of time and worked long hours.

In the care sector, job quality depended crucially on whether the employees worked in an institution with a certain

size and structure, or in domestic care, which was in fact showing strong growth. In the latter, working conditions often featured low pay, severe emotional pressure and pressure of time, as well as unfavourable working hours.

The big challenges for workers’ organisations were primarily in adapting to the new developments and transformation in these sectors regarded as labour-intensive. This necessitated abandoning worn-out approaches and developing new ones to workplace representation.

It was also important to carry on maintaining jobs and creating new ones in the manufacturing sectors in the EU and not to rely solely on the service industry.

Norbert Klein ■

EZA and ETUI joint working group



Group photo of the participants in the EZA and ETUI joint working group on Youth Unemployment in Europe, Brussels, February 2014

Youth unemployment in Europe: one of the biggest challenges for workers' organisations in the social dialogue" was the subject of the EZA working group from 18 to 19 February 2014 in Brussels organised by EZA in conjunction with the ETUI (European Trade Union Institute) and supported by the European Union. 35 EZA and ETUI representatives from Spain, Italy, Romania, Portugal, Belgium, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Bulgaria, Austria, Lithuania, Croatia and the FYR Macedonia gathered to address the issue, primarily from the viewpoint of the young workers' representatives.

The participants were agreed that although youth unemployment was not a new

problem it had mushroomed because of the crisis. The European Commission's actions were too weak and too inefficient, they said. More than anything those actions should not entail drastic austerity measures on a national level and a weakening of the social dialogue. The fundamental question was whether the EU's raft of measures to combat unemployment could counteract the consequences of the policy of austerity.

The concept of schooling and vocational training had to be more broadly defined and not limited to one specific profession. And the vocational training system had to be more practice-oriented. Moreover, the profile of in-company training had to be raised; information on it should not be random. Another impor-

tant factor is fewer barriers between vocational training measures and universities. Then again the problem was that education and training could not always be linked with jobs actually available.

In his closing words Ulisses Garrido, Director of the Department of Education and Training, ETUI, called for greater stability for young people. The prevailing feeling among workers, especially young workers, was one of fear, he said. Workers' organisations had to keep their finger on the pulse of workers' reality and speak their language.

Andreas Gjecaj, General Secretary of the FCG, Austria, spoke out against competitiveness as the sole criterion. Young people were the future, he said, not the problem. And precarious employment should not be allowed to become the norm. Education and training was more than investing in human capital. The task of workers' organisations was to incorporate values in the discussion and have a say in who was to determine these values and the hierarchy of these values.

The detailed report and the presentations can be viewed on the EZA website www.eza.org. **Victoria Znined** ■

Prospects for trade union action in Europe

Six events organised by the EZA member centres Recht&Plicht, Krifa/WOW, Eurofedop, F.N. Coresi/Cartel Alfa, KK NSZZ "Solidarność" and CFTL gave the seminar-goers the opportunity to get to grips with the issue. All in all, the seminars – sector-specific, regional or geared to trade union structures – demonstrated that the social dialogue was not always best placed as the expression of the all-encompassing search for fair working conditions.

Workers want to have their interests represented through company participation structures, company-specific opportunities to have a say, and political social dialogue. In some cases these means are critically viewed, in others restricted, by employers, companies and politicians. That is why the crux was not only a matter of descriptions of conditions but increasingly the question of how workers

could better express themselves and represent their interests.

The whole issue can also be defined in questions the seminar-goers sought to answer:

- What means can trade unions use?
- What future do they have in Europe?
- How is trade union work changing?

Although examples confirmed that the income situation of many workers is precarious, prospects for the future uncertain, and working conditions and jobs have often become worse, ultimately there is evidence that there are opportunities for having a say. Three examples: The EZA and the European level have an important part to play, for it is becoming increasingly important to network and pool experiences, as well as to build up pressure throughout Europe to co-define policy. This applies, say, in cross-border approaches to vocational qualifications

and experiences. For instance, there was a recommendation in the seminars to use more European resources for training trainers.

With regard to trade union work, one starting point is Internet-related presentation. Clips, news coverage and possibilities for contact can thus be more effectively disseminated, in the experience of individual organisations.

A special focus, however, was on the work situation and income. For example, the increasing proliferation of work experience as "traineeships" was criticised – as was its direct impact on many other working conditions. A similar case is temporary work – both must be curbed.

Volker Scharlowsky ■

EZA networks and platforms

Interview with Heidi Rabensteiner, International Platform for Equal Opportunities (IPEO)

Heidi, you are the head of the IPEO. What are the aims of the platform?

In the economic crisis women have a tough time in the labour market. That is why the International Platform for Equal Opportunities pursues the aim of increasing the employment rate of women in the labour market as one of the principles of social justice, and enabling mothers and fathers to combine family life and work through flexicurity.

How does the platform work?

On the ground we have a small group of specialists comprising five women and one man who meet three or four times a year to set out the issue and objectives for the year. As the members of this group of specialists are already engaged in their professional life with the issue of equal opportunities, this in turn has a positive influence on the entire progress of the platform.

The international platform meets once a year in Bressanone (South Tyrol/Italy). These meetings are trilingual, with the languages being German, Italian and English. Those attending are at the same time speakers, and so there is a lively exchange of ideas, experiences, stimuli, etc.

Who does what in the IPEO?

The IPEO was set up by EZA in 2003. I have been its head since 2012. Our current members are workers' organisations from Italy, Austria, Germany and the

Czech Republic. We want to gradually extend the group of members to other countries.

In 2012 we addressed the issue of "How can the creation of equal opportunities for women in the labour market be accelerated?". In 2013 we examined "The role of workers' organisations in achieving a higher employment rate among women" and in September this year we will tackle the issue of "Job and life situations of women over 50".

Who do you seek to reach with your work?

With our work we aim to raise awareness of certain issues like the compatibility of family life and work, equal opportunities in work and pay, glass ceilings, inflexible models of work, difficulties and disadvantages in returning to work. Further challenges include the sharing of family responsibility, improving the perception of upbringing and care tasks by fathers, the unilateral promotion of the dual role of women, access to bonuses to keep women at home in times of crisis, the continuation of barriers to equality, etc. These are also important issues in the field of the social partnership and the social dialogue.

Who can join in and how can people join in?

The platform can still be extended, preferably to experts from countries not represented on the platform at present. Anyone from workers' organisations

interested in joining the platform and contributing professional or voluntary experience relating to equal opportunities is welcome to approach me.

Thank you for the interview and every success with your work!

Victoria Znined ■

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