

Statement on behalf of European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker on the occasion of the General Assembly of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA)

Read out by the Head of the Commission's Representation in Hungary, Dr. Tamás Szűcs

Budapest, 29 November 2014

Dear President Pronk,
Dear members of the European Centre
for Workers' Questions,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by extending the greetings of the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, who very much regrets not being able to attend in person. President Juncker has asked me to read out to you the following message on his behalf on the topic of "The Future of Social Europe":

This European Commission is putting Europe's citizens at the top of its agenda. At the start of my mandate I said my priority is to get Europe growing again and to get people back to work. And just this week we unveiled an important pillar of our strategy to do just that: the Investment Plan for Europe.

So less than a month into the mandate of my Commission, we are taking serious, ambitious and credible steps to a better future together. I now invite others to follow suit and to show they too are ready to take their responsibilities.

Connecting Europe's people and infrastructure, allowing us to catch up and remain a competitive social market economy, that's what we want to achieve with this investment offensive. A new European Fund for Strategic Investments, with joint EU and EIB funding, will provide a basis, guaranteed with public money, to mobilise at least 315 billion euros of additional investment by the end of 2017, without creating new debt.

The Investment Plan has three pillars: 1. New investment underpinned by the new fund; 2. Support to project promoters to



Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission

structure their work and get the right source of finance; 3. The right conditions to create a dynamic business environment from which entrepreneurs and workers will benefit alike.

Public money that is already available will leverage additional capital out there that would otherwise never be mobilised. Investors have become more shy, yes, but our new European Fund for Strategic Investments will take on the greater part of financial risk so that they don't have to. And it will create jobs.

This is not money for big banks and big business. This is big money for the future of all European citizens and for the real economy. With this plan we wish to give hope to millions of Europeans demoralised after years of stagnation and a tougher labour market. Yes, Europe can still become the epicentre of a major investment drive. Yes, Europe can grow again. Yes, the European social model will persevere.

The worst of the crisis might be behind us now, but it will not be over as long as more than 25 million Europeans, many of them youngsters, cannot find a decent job. We need to give the dignity of employment back to our citizens.

For that we need to get our economies growing again, the only environment in which jobs can be created.

And it has to be real growth, not the kind that sinks countries further into debt, postponing inevitable problems to a later date.

Here in Hungary, for example, where investment has maintained healthy levels, we have identified several investment opportunities around the Trans-European Transport Network core corridors, particularly in the area of rail transport and inland navigation on the Danube.

Our plan will also help local SMEs carry out their research and development.

Our broadband network infrastructure will also grow and improve.

This new investment offensive is essential but it will only work as part of a virtuous triangle combining fiscal responsibility and structural reforms as well.

This is necessary to modernise our social market economy and to restore confidence in our public finances. This is what I call a virtuous omne trium perfectum (rule of three). After all, no tree can grow on soil and air alone, the Investment Plan we are presenting today is the water.

The needs are vast. This is the challenge of a generation. Europe will have to face it head on.

This is not the time for national, political or ideological fights. It is time for a major political and social consensus, a major initiative to put Europe back to work. We are counting on a broad political consensus in the European Parliament and the European Council to endorse the Investment Plan so we get investment moving as soon as possible.

The European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) can be instrumental in

garnering the support we need. A mobilisation of your eight million members across 26 countries could create additional momentum. I am confident that the EZA can become a driving force in our common fight for jobs and growth, in making our social market economy fit for the future, with and not against the people.

But our ambition does not stop with the Investment Plan. In more general terms, we want to rebuild the bridges that were damaged during the crisis. The social bridges, and among them social dialogue, suffered intensely. Social dialogue needs to be re-launched both at national level and at European level. I have experience doing this and as I told the European Parliament in July, I want to be the President of social dialogue.

I gave a clear first sign when I shaped my team at the European Commission. I created a new Vice-Presidency for the Euro and Social Dialogue, which is led by former Latvia Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis.

By putting both aspects under the same Vice-President, I believe economic, financial and social stability can go hand in hand. One cannot think of a European Semester of economic policy coordination that does not consider the social aspect when building an economically and financially solid Europe.

Dear friends,

I am a firm believer, as you are, of the social market economy where countries create an environment for all to evolve, to prosper, to be supported while allowing everybody – workers, business owners,

entrepreneurs, innovators – to become the figureheads for wealth generation in a free and open environment.

But to succeed in this, the social market economy needs robust and fluent social dialogue for all, a matter of urgency to me.

I know that I can count on the work of the EZA to help us achieve this and to help us achieve a European Union that can reach and maintain a social triple A rating. Let us set an example to the rest of the world.

I would like to wish you all a good General Assembly and I thank you for your trust and attention. ■

Board elections at the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA)

Tried and tested: The current president of EZA, the Dutch Bartho Pronk, was unanimously re-elected at this year's General Assembly in Budapest on 29th November 2014. Also unanimously confirmed in office were co-president Piorgiorgio Sciacqua (Italy) and Treasurer Norbert Schnedl (Austria). In addition, seven vice presidents, eleven further members and three auditors were elected.

The new board unanimously elected Sigrid Schraml as the new general secretary. They will replace the incumbent general secretary Roswitha Gottbehüt on 1st May 2015.

The next Board elections will take place in 2018.

The election results in detail:

Vice Presidents: Josep García Calvó, Spain, Bogdan Hossu, Romania, António José de Matos Cristóvão, Portugal, Herbert Metzger, Germany, Józef Mozolewski, Poland, Janina Švedienė, Lithuania, Konstantin Trenchev, Bulgaria

Further Members: Joao Paulo Branco, Portugal, Diomides Diomidous, Cyprus, Søren Fibiger Olesen, Denmark, Silviu Ispas, Romania, Anton Kokalj, Slovenia, Fritz Neugebauer, Austria, Imre Palkovics, Hungary, Sofie Put, Belgium, Robert Schadeck, Luxembourg, Joseph Thouvenel, France, Joseph Vella, Malta

Auditors: Bert van Caelenberg, Belgium, Alfonso Luzzi, Italy, Heidi Rabensteiner, Italy

Victoria Znined ■



Front row from left to right: Roswitha Gottbehüt, Sigrid Schraml

Middle row from left to right: João Paulo Branco, Josep Calvó García, Joseph Thouvenel, Fritz Neugebauer, Piorgiorgio Sciacqua, Bartho Pronk, Imre Palkovics, Bogdan Hossu, Józef Mozolewski, Norbert Schnedl

Back row from left to right: Silviu Ispas, Anton Kokalj, Søren Fibiger Olesen, Heidi Rabensteiner, Janina Švedienė, António Matos Cristóvão, Robert Schadeck, Herbert Metzger, standing in for Konstantin Trenchev: Vesselin Mitov

Interview with Bartho Pronk, President of EZA



Bartho Pronk, President of EZA

What was your first thought after being re-elected?

I naturally had several thoughts. First of all I felt grateful for having successfully ended my first term of office. I also feel a great sense of anticipation about everything to come in the near future in my work for and with EZA.

What motivates you to continue as President of EZA?

I think that the social dialogue is one of EZA's main tasks, another being to bring all our member centres and candidate members together. I think that is very important. The social dialogue is deeply rooted in our European culture, but is not properly understood and put into practice everywhere yet; it is often neglected, especially in times of crisis. It is very important that we maintain, carry forward and develop the concept of the social dialogue, especially in those countries in which that doesn't happen enough yet.

What are your aims with and for EZA in the next four years?

There are, of course, things that have to be done anyway...

But my aim will be to further improve the quality of our programmes. That is very important to me. We must go back to our roots, but with modern means. The second important aim is to orient EZA towards countries in which EZA does not yet have any members. A key project in this respect is the Special Project for the Workers' Organisations in the Western Balkans, which was begun in my first period of office. We have already been very successful with it in terms of substance, and I feel we can carry that success even further in the next four years. We have several new candidate members with which EZA can co-operate on substance in the future. And there are still some countries in Europe in which EZA does not yet have any members – admittedly very few countries, but my aim is for them to be included in the EZA network as well.

Could you characterise Co-President Piergiorgio Sciacqua in three key words?

I rate Piergiorgio very highly as a proficient and reliable partner, since as President I naturally cannot attend very EZA seminar or have the same amount of contact with every member centre. Moreover, he has in-depth knowledge of Southern and Southeast European countries, much to the benefit of the entire EZA network.

Interview with Piergiorgio Sciacqua, Co-President of EZA



Piergiorgio Sciacqua, Co-President of EZA

What was your first thought after being re-elected?

My first thought after being re-elected Co-President was naturally gratitude for the encouragement given me, which I do not take for granted, precisely because I am aware that the role entails a lot of work for the next four years.

I also think that greater commitment is required to strengthen the EZA network and the work of the various platforms.

What motivates you to continue as Co-President of EZA?

The main feature of my co-presidency with Bartho and the work with Norbert and Roswitha has been strong commitment, and I think this co-operation has proven fruitful; I myself was involved in the growth of EZA in those four years and so I feel I will carry on performing this function with a high level of responsibility to strengthen our entire network.

What are your aims with and for EZA in the next four years?

One of the main aims in my view is that EZA could contribute to the European inte-

gration of the Western Balkan states, and stimulate the social dialogue in those countries in which the consequences of the Communist lunacy are still to be seen: for it is not at all easy to speak there of free workers' participation, trade unions and co-operation!

I think that ought to be the main focus of the efforts we initiated, but all of which we will have to redouble in future.

Another priority aim in my view is to break down the mistrust that prevails between our member centres in Central and Northern Europe and our member centres in the Mediterranean: we have to learn how to co-operate better with one another, and in particular we have to get to know one another better.

Ultimately we will realise that we all face one and the same challenge: an increasingly united, stronger and more social Europe.

Together we should not lose sight of the values that are common to us European nations.

Could you characterise President Bartho Pronk in three keywords?

On a personal level I find Bartho extremely reliable, and I feel a lot of friendship towards him; on a political level he has a great deal of experience and shows pragmatic vision.

EZA Kickoff Seminar in Budapest



Participants in the EZA Kickoff Seminar in Budapest, Hungary

Defining the flashpoints of social dialogue from a European perspective and opportunities for action for workers' organisations were the focuses of the EZA Kickoff Seminar, which was held in Budapest, Hungary, from 27 to 28 November 2014 and organised in conjunction with MOSZ (Munkástanácsok Országos Szövetsége) with the support of the European Union.

120 representatives of Christian-social workers' organisations from 26 European countries gathered to discuss the EZA Education and Training Programme 2015, and called inter alia for an economic upturn only if it meant decent pay and decent work, greater involvement of SMEs in the social dialogue, a re-organisation and upgrading of vocational training to gear it more to the labour market's requirements, a dialogue on an equal footing between the social partners, an adjustment of the structures of social dialogue to the structures of today's world of work, and greater networking of workers' organisations on a European level to guarantee the success of the social dialogue and to maintain social peace in Europe.

In his speech "Strengthening the social dialogue in Europe – necessities, prospects and development", Volker Scharlowsky, Social Science Studies, Berlin, identified the following concrete opportunities for action for workers' organisations: strengthening trade union co-operation, extending the European Works Councils, demanding regular reports on the social dialogue from the European Parliament, using EU mediators when the dialogue structures permanently fail, a "blacklist" of negative devel-

opments, and greater use of social media and information of the public.

A cornerstone of the EZA Education and Training Programme 2015 is the series of seminars on the "Europe 2020" strategy, during which the focal issue of "Integration and inclusion in the labour market" will be given academic support. The series comprises ten of the total 69 projects planned.

2015 will also see projects co-ordinated on the three issues of "A successful social dialogue in Europe – criteria, values and implementation", "Successful vocational training as the key task for workers' organisations" and "New challenges facing health and safety at work".

Tamás Jáczy, a representative of the Hungarian Ministry of the Economy, described the challenges facing the Hungarian labour market and the government's measures.

Tamás Potykiewicz, mediator and expert on industrial relations, spoke about the functioning and historical development of the European social dialogue in a comparison of the national level and the ILO level, as well as from the viewpoint of Hungary and the Hungarian Postal Workers' Union.

György Lajtai presented the results of the projects co-ordinated in 2014 on "Mobility and migration: co-ordination of social security – an element of stabilisation for living and working in Europe", and called for better collaboration between workers' organisations in the countries of origin and destination.

Father Ulrich Zankanella (Order of Friars Minor) underpinned the importance of Christian-social values for the European social dialogue. From a Christian stand-

point he called for a society and economy where the human being takes centre stage. Business, trade, production and all socio-political activity must, he said, benefit every person involved. He identified problem areas of current social policy that had to be solved throughout the European Union, including high unemployment, especially youth unemployment, the common practice of outsourcing to one-person firms, migration, temporary work and the two planned transatlantic free trade agreements TTIP and CETA, and he called for a return to the principles of personality, solidarity and subsidiarity. He also called on the workers' organisations attending the Kickoff Seminar to embody these principles in their everyday work. *Victoria Znined* ■

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