

OVERVIEW

■ EZA kick-off seminar “Key areas for the European social dialogue” in Malta

73 education and training activities in the 2016 budget year. Focuses: “The digital world of work”, “Green jobs”, “Young people and the labour market”, “Working and living in the aftermath of the crisis” and “Worker migration/mobility” *Page 2*

■ The World of Work 2020

Mid-term review of the Erasmus Plus Project: results of the survey of care workers in six European countries *Page 3*

■ Co-ordination of “Health and Safety at Work” projects

Psychosocial risks as a phenomenon to be taken seriously, affecting an increasing number of workers across every sector *Page 3*

■ The state of the welfare state in EU anno 1992 and 20 years later



The fifth HIVA conference on this topic: context and conclusions *Page 4*

EDITORIAL



Dear Friends,

At the beginning of this year we reflected on 30 years of Val Duchesse. Social dialogue is now practised in every EU member state, albeit very differently depending on the tradition as well as the economic and political situation. It is therefore a mainstay of the European economic and social model – to all intents and purposes. The consequences of the crisis and the implementation of new economic governance structures have totally transformed the general conditions. Some plead for more dialogue to find joint ways out of the crisis. Others question the benefits. However, anyone asking

only about the macroscopic effect ignores a key aspect: the ethical and political dimension. For us Christian-social workers' organisations, human dignity as the likeness of God is the basis for our conviction that collective bargaining for fair pay and good working conditions benefits the individual and the common good. “An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values”, that is what Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel) calls on us to do. A core value of our European society is democracy. We should not take living in a democracy for granted. We must embrace it each and every day, in every area of society. It is therefore not evident why democratic structures should not have their place in the world of labour as well. The dialogue between the legitimate interests of employers and workers is the democratic place that enables participation. The EZA wishes you all a blessed Christmas!
Sigrid Schraml, Secretary-General

Criteria for a good social dialogue

What makes a good relationship between employers and employees?

This was the main question in a project, which was realised by the European Centre for Workers Questions (EZA) from Königswinter in cooperation with the HIVA Research Institute of the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium), and the result thereof now appeared in a book with the title “Conditions and Criteria for Social Dialogue in Europe – the Workers’ Perspective”, published by Shaker in Aachen, Germany.

For the first time in Europe, it was exactly analysed which circumstances and quality criteria have to be kept so that a social dialogue can be possible and can lead to good results. On the one side, there was the research analysis of the

environment for social dialogue in the single countries of the European Union. This analysis was complimented by practical experience of labour organisations from the EZA network.

The study confirms: Good and trustful cooperation with the social partner is a condition to find successful solutions for employees in Europe.

The book is available in bookstores:

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More information:

<http://www.shaker.de/de/content/catalogue/index.asp?lang=de&ID=8&ISBN=978-3-8440-3549-0&search=yes>

EZA kick-off seminar in Malta



Participants at the EZA kick-off seminar in Malta, December 2015

The social dialogue ensures better quality of life and work, and is a mainstay of true democracy – that was the basic thrust of the EZA kick-off seminar, which took place from 3 to 4 December 2015 in St. Julians, Malta, in co-operation with UHM (Union Haddiema Magħqudin) and with the support of the European Union.

110 representatives of Christian-social workers' organisations from 26 European countries gathered to discuss the core issues of the EZA education and training programme 2016. That President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker attaches special importance to the social dialogue was a ringing endorsement. Yet as the seminar discovered, social dialogue is under severe pressure, primarily in some Eastern European states. The seminar-goers expressed the hope that the European Commission would take the right steps towards more social peace in Europe.

That was also the tenor of numerous queries to Andreas Strohbach from the European Commission's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, who presented the Commission's policy for implementing the restart for the social dialogue declared by Juncker's Commission. A key element to strengthening the social dialogue on a national level is its incorporation in the European Semester.

A major characteristic of the EZA education and training programme 2016, presented by Matthias Homey, EZA researcher, is the further intensified thematic interlinking of the education and training activities. A cornerstone will be the series of seminars on the "Europe 2020" strategy in which the focal issue of "The digital world of work" will benefit

from academic assistance. In 2016, projects will also be co-ordinated on the topics of "Green jobs", "Young people and the labour market", "Working and living in the aftermath of the crisis" and "Worker migration/mobility".

Mons. Giampaolo Crepaldi, the Archbishop of Trieste, threw light on the encyclical *Laudato Si* as an ethical basis for workers' organisations to act in support of an eco-social market economy. With an eye on the concurrent UN Climate Conference in Paris, Crepaldi underlined both individual and collective responsibility for a climate-friendly lifestyle and sustainable business practices. The Archbishop illustrated the keyword "intergenerational justice" not only with the question "What planet are we leaving behind for the generations to come" but also with the provocative question "What children are we leaving behind?". Crepaldi defined the social dialogue as an exceptional means of creating social cohesion. In a Europe in which the gap between rich and poor is ever widening, the constant focus must be on social justice, he said.

Werner Eichhorst from the Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA), Bonn, analysed in his speech the future of the world of work against the background of the role of the social partners, politicians and society. Technological changes in the world of work, globalisation, the demographic shift and institutional reforms were, he said, the four main factors of influence on the labour market exposing the low-skilled in particular to the greatest pressure. He called on workers' organisations to champion more social investments, with vocational training and lifelong learning having to be centre stage. He said there had to be fair and sustainable

standards for all, both within the individual countries and internationally. Workers' health was a precious asset; likewise harmony had to be created between productivity and flexibility. In all these questions the social partners played an important role.

The role of social partners, politicians and society in overcoming the challenges outlined was the focus of the concluding discussion. In his introduction, moderator Bjørn van Heusden from the World Organization of Workers (WOW) emphasised that digitalisation was changing job descriptions, and precisely young people had to accept new requirements for qualifications. In the face of increasing automation, it was also important that a personal connection with work processes was not lost.

Evarist Bartolo, Minister of Education and Employment in Malta, stressed that people themselves were responsible for shaping digitalisation. In this context not only new skills had to be developed but also values. Education should not be left just to the educators, as it also took place in the family and in society.

Kristy Debono, Member of the Maltese Parliament, issued the challenge to embrace new information and communication technologies because they made work easier in many areas of our daily work. She pleaded emphatically for greater flexibility in working hours for workers, as – just like telework – this would facilitate the work-life balance.

Robert Métrailler, Head of the Communications Sector of the Transfair trade union, Switzerland, spoke in favour of promoting permanent further training and lifelong learning, for companies were constantly overhauling their work processes. He views the role of trade unions as being primarily to keep up with this transformation and also put it into effect within the trade unions. Trade unions had to anticipate developments to enable them to act promptly and not just react.

Matthias Homey and Victoria Znined ■

Prevent damage to health through education and training

The health risks for carers and nursing staff are manifold. It is common knowledge that employees in the nursing and care sector do hard physical work. What is becoming even more evident, though, is that they are exposed to major psycho-social stress. That is why an education and training concept is currently being drawn up as part of the European “World of Work 2020” project organised by the Nell-Breuning-Haus from Herzogenrath, Germany, and involving the European Centre for Workers’ Questions (EZA), to prevent such damage to health. A survey based on a questionnaire was carried out among nurses and carers from six countries to find out what the key stresses in nursing and care work were. The main finding was that pressure of time was regarded as the most significant stress factor. It was followed by the high volume of paperwork nurses and carers have to get through. Confronting “suffering and death” was also indicated

as an additional stress factor. An excessive workload was another factor quoted. One further clear finding was that from the age of 40-49 years, nurses and carers worry about their own health and fear a loss of their own physical fitness.

It was on the basis of this survey that an initial education and training concept was drawn up, which will now enter the pilot stage. The aim is for nurses and carers to learn strategies and options for preventing the stresses to which they have been exposed in their daily working routine.

Everyone involved in the project is aware that, besides the prevention based on individuals’ knowledge, working conditions as a whole in the nursing and care sector must be improved. This is a challenge for legislators and social partners alike. Hence recommendations for action will also be drawn up for these parties in the “World of Work 2020” project. Another upshot of the survey was that



Participants in the further training for qualified nurses and carers from Germany, Belgium, Estonia, Romania, Poland and Italy, organised as part of the “World of Work 2020” project and conducted in Herzogenrath from 14 to 18 December 2015

the vast majority of nurses and carers love their job and intend to carry on doing it for as long as they can. A great deal still has to change for them to do so.

Norbert Klein ■

New challenges in the promotion of safety and health at work

As part of its training programme for 2015, EZA had the commendable initiative of launching a project coordination on the major challenges for safety and health at work. This project is also part of Social Dialogue and seeks to tackle the challenges set by the European Strategy for Safety and Health at Work 2014-2020.

The project comprised four international seminars on this theme, with emphasis being placed on the prevention of psychosocial risks. The first seminar was organized by LDF Education Center (VsI Lithuanian Labor Federation Education Center) and focussed on the subjects of moral harassment and mobbing. The second seminar was organized by Krifa (Kristelig Fagbevægelse) and was dedicated to the subject of happiness at work. The third seminar was organized by NBH (Nell-Breuning-Haus), in cooperation with YHACM - UNASM - UIATUM (Union of Independent Autonomous Trade Unions of Macedonia). Finally, the fourth seminar was organized by MOSZ (Munkástanácsok Országos Szövetsége) and focussed on stress at work.

The emergence of psychosocial risks

Phenomena such as stress, moral harassment, burnout, violence and – in extreme cases – suicide are affecting an increasing number of workers in all sectors of European economy. Workers from sectors such as health care, education, military and police forces are among the most vulnerable to such phenomena.

One should keep in sight that these phenomena not only threaten the health and well-being of workers and their families but are also detrimental to firms and to the economy in general. Stress is a good example of this: 28% of European workers complain of suffering from stress and losses for national economies derived from stress originated situations are estimated in the range of 3% to 4% of GDP. Indeed, the subject of stress took centre stage in all four seminars and was dealt in depth, with lengthy discussions on questions such as: the difficulty of signalling and evaluating stress situations; the legal framework available for tackling the problem of stress; and the causes,

symptoms and consequences of stress for the health of workers and for the operation of firms.

While hard to detect, stress at work and other psychosocial risks – such as moral or sexual harassment – can and should be a major concern for firms’ structures of internal and external prevention. In accordance, priority should be given to the assessment of the impact of organizational change on the health of workers. Workers’ organizations should also play a key role in the prevention of psychosocial risks. Accordingly, they ought to train union leaders and union negotiators to participate in the prevention of such risks and thus foster the improving of well-being at work.

António Brandão Guedes ■

The state of the welfare state in the EU

For the fifth time HIVA (Research Institute for Work and Society - *Onderzoeksinstituut voor Arbeid en Samenleving*) organised a two-day conference for the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA)¹, bringing together no less than 25 dedicated researchers to report on how the welfare state evolved in their countries² in the past five years, a period that coincides with the aftermath of the great financial and economic crisis of 2008-2009.

It also happened to be the term of the former President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, who gave the opening speech at the conference. He showed how during this period the EU has been in a survival mode as a collapse of the Eurozone would have threatened the very existence of the EU. The problems the EU is confronted with, however, already existed before the financial and economic crisis: high unemployment rates despite artificial growth and unsound public finances in a number of countries. In the past five years institutions and tools have been created and implemented to ensure financial stability but also to clean up public finances afterwards. This was accompanied by increased attention for structural reforms in order to make European economies more competitive and sustainable. It confirms that social progress requires economic progress, this by increasing growth. After a period of artificial growth we are back on a track of investments, innovation, productivity gains and sustainable growth supported by better and more sound institutions and public finances. The "mixed economy" or "social market economy" – category in which we include the welfare state – was given a more modern twist by Herman Van Rompuy who used the term "eco-social market economy".

The following common conclusions can be drawn:

1. The financial crisis and the debt crisis have hit most of the countries twice.
2. This resulted in stagnation or even a substantial decrease of GDP per capita both in the old and new Member States.
3. Returning to a growth path of economic and social progress will require serious efforts to promote economic growth. Zero growth is no option.

4. The relative increase of public social spending as a percentage of GDP is the automatic result of a declining GDP and the incompressibility of public spending (pensions, care).

5. As richer economies spent more on social protection before the crisis, the cumulated negative growth has dragged down social protection despite the relative increase in the share of social spending in GDP.

6. The strong increase in public deficits and public debt in most countries illustrates a Keynesian stabilization policy. Perhaps, however, this is too little and too late.

7. The current and future sustainability of social protection systems has finally been at the heart of the European Union's economic governance policy.

8. The mechanisms for a rapid consolidation of fiscal deficits and public debt risk becoming the greatest threat for maintaining high levels of social protection in the coming years.

9. Social security contributions have increased in some countries.

10. A policy of decreasing contributions, lowering taxes, introducing flat taxes and underestimating the cost of a generous welfare state risks putting further pressure on social spending.

11. Several countries are reversing their strategy to develop a strong second pillar for pensions, based on capitalization.

12. Some countries are confronted with a strong emigration rate, not least the new member states.

13. There is an accelerated increase in the legal retirement age: by 2027 more than half of the EU countries will have a retirement age of 67 or more, and often adapted to rising life expectancy.

We are convinced that these observations could and should inspire the thinking of the workers' organisations in each member state. While in previous conferences the major observation was that the welfare state was alive and kicking, we now

heard many "horror stories" from some of the countries, and came to the conclusion that especially the increasing European governance of public finances could lead to continued austerity and further cuts in social protection. We think the lessons of those horror stories point to an alternative. It is up to the workers' organisations to guarantee that the worst is behind us and not yet to come. *Jozef Pacolet and Frederic De Wispelaere*³ ■

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² The list of national experts and their PowerPoint presentations is available on the project website: <http://hiva.kuleuven.be/nl/onderzoeksgroep-verzorgingsstaten-wonen/The-State-of-the-Welfare-State-in-EU-overview/Overviewanno1992>

³ Contact: jozef.pacolet@kuleuven.be and frederic.dewispelaere@kuleuven.be

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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

Sigrid Schraml (editor-in-chief),

Matthias Homey, Norbert Klein,

Victoria Znined

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E-mail: helladesign@web.de

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