



# MAGAZINE

## **THE WAR ON UKRAINE**

A report from the EZA network

## **STORMY TIMES IN THE UK**

How the existence of workers' organisations is being jeopardised by deregulation and Brexit

## **THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE**

Demands, hopes and the contribution of the EZA network

## **THE AMAZON SYSTEM**

How the global corporation is posing a threat to democracy

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Jozef Pacolet about the future of social security and the welfare state

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EZA's brand-new podcast

**ISSUE 1/2022**

**This is the part where you would expect the Editorial of the EZA magazine with some thoughts about workers' issues, about current EU economic and social policy. But now, nothing is normal in Europe. There is war in Ukraine. The life of our friends of the trade union Vost "Volya" in Lviv is out of joint.**

The military invasion of Ukraine has been going on for more than a month. The war came close to Lviv, where the headquarters of VOST "VOLYA" has been located for many years. On the afternoon of 26 March, powerful explosions shook Lviv. The Moscow occupiers shelled Lviv with rockets that fell and exploded 3 km from the city center. Early in the morning of 13 March, Russian invaders bombed the International Center for Peacekeeping and Security, 30 km from Lviv and 20 km from the Ukrainian-Polish border (EU and NATO border). There are 35 killed and 134 wounded. More than 260 thousand refugees arrived in Lviv and settled here. Given that the population of Lviv before the war was 718 thousand people, due to refugees the population increased by more than a third. Millions of people passed through Lviv in transit and then traveled further West, mainly to Poland and other EU countries. Lviv is cracking at the seams, but it is holding on and providing comprehensive assistance to those fleeing the war. Lviv has become a humanitarian and logistical hub for the whole of Ukraine. Our city is also important militarily. Many Lviv residents are now defending Ukraine from the hated enemy in territorial defense and at the front.

Yaroslav Kovalyshyn, member of the Presidium of VOST "VOLYA", Ksenia Tkachuk, chairwoman of the VOST "VOLYA" trade union of medical workers, and other members of the VOST "VOLYA" trade unions joined the Ukrainian army. Yaroslav is now in the East, and Ksenia is near Kyiv. Both are in the combat zone. EZA and its member organizations have provided solidarity help to VOST "VOLYA". This is helpful not only to VOST "VOLYA", it helps Lviv, it is helpful for Ukraine, but first to those people who need such help during the war.

We actively work with members of the VOST "VOLYA" trade unions, help them, refugees, and all those in need with food, warm clothes, medicines, hygiene products, pocket money for urgent small needs to preserve their human dignity, ensure the functioning of VOST "VOLYA". Almost every day we meet people from different oblasts of Ukraine. For those refugees who plan to go further to Europe, we ensure accommodation for one or two nights (if necessary) and help them reach the Ukrainian-Polish border. We help those who stay in Lviv to find housing and a job although this is very difficult. Our activists help the humanitarian aid centers in receiving and packaging aid, helping them weave camouflage nets for the army, in clearing covertures in the event of an air attack. Many of them have sheltered refugee families. We provided the office of VOST "VOLYA" free of charge to a family from Irpin which was bombed by the Moscow occupiers.

But they, like us and most Ukrainians, are optimistic and believe in our victory over the Russian aggressors. Yana and Andriy said: "After the victory, we will return home, rebuild our house, our city, and our beautiful country – Ukraine!" Ukraine, Europe, and the civilized world will win!

**Yuriy Kurylo**  
**Vice-president of VOST "VOLYA"**

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# THE WAR ON UKRAINE

A report from the EZA network

By the time this issue of the EZA magazine appears, the war in the Ukraine will have been going on for nearly two months. In view of the blind destruction, the deliberate bombing of civilians by the Russian armed forces, the incredible suffering and Moscow's constant lies, as Easter approaches it seems difficult to believe in the Easter message of resurrection and new life. It feels as if every day is Good Friday.



RELIEF SUPPLIES FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

**TEXT:** Sigríd Schraml

**PHOTOS:** Solidarność / Fundacja Nowy Staw / VOST "VOLYA"

The Russian Federation has committed a blatant breach of international law and the international order by its recognition of the Ukraine regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent territories and by its invasion of Ukraine. As a Christian-social network of workers' organisations, the EZA advocates the values of democracy and the rule of law and unreservedly condemns Russia's conduct. The EZA stands in solidarity alongside the democratically elected government of Ukraine and its people, including in particular the EZA member organisation Vost Volya in Lviv. The international community of democratic states must continue its commitment to defend and restore Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, the war of aggression against Ukraine puts the democratic international community in the dreadful dilemma of wanting to provide Ukraine with every conceivable support while trying to prevent any further conflagration. The war shows that democracy and the rule of law cannot be taken for granted. Indeed, we want and have to make every effort to defend them every single day: in the EU, in Europe and all around the world.

Given the blatant breach of international law and the terror and fear that Putin and his supporters have brought to Ukraine and Europe, the war of aggression in the Ukraine teaches us that it is simply not possible to remain neutral. It is a situation that demands not just solidarity but also resolute action and the willingness to assume responsibility. Recent weeks have seen immeasurable solidarity with Ukraine. Here we'd like to tell you about some initiatives by EZA members that have come to our notice. The report is by no means complete. Many initiatives have emerged that we cannot talk about here. The EZA is acting as a platform to bring need and aid together. The EZA and EZA Plus have provided financial support for Vost Volya in Ukraine, for EDS-FNS in Poland and for a refugee shelter in Moldavia. All these initiatives reveal some first initial moments of resurrection hope amidst even the darkest hours of Good Friday.

**„We're trying to help them feel at home“**

**Fundacja Nowy Staw - Europejski Dom Spotkan / Poland:**

Our foundation owns a holiday and training centre near Lublin: "Dom Nasutów". On 26 February, day three after the Russian invasion, we quickly made the centre ready to take the first refugees from Ukraine. It all began with contacts that our employees and their friends and families have in Ukraine. Up to now about 80 people – women, children and youngsters – have passed through our centre. Some stay with us for one, two, or three nights before moving on to family or friends in

various parts of Poland and Europe. Others have been here right from the start. Today the centre accommodates 53 people, including 32 children from different regions of the Ukraine. We try to make the people living in the centre in Nasutów feel at home. As well as satisfying the basic necessities of life, we also try to organise a wide range of legal, psychological, spiritual and educational support. We organise activities for older and younger children with entertainment, sport, art and excursions to Lublin. We are also working with a psychologist and lawyer who speaks Ukrainian.

Our foundation staff were quickly joined by a group of volunteers who help with various activities: preparing rooms for refugees, purchasing necessary items (e.g. mattresses, art materials), bringing people to health centres and Orthodox churches, organising donations. We keep a database with companies that offer free services such as healthcare or transport, and also help people to find employment. The financial and material support from many institutions and individuals makes it possible for our neighbours to stay in Nasutów. Special thanks to our friends and partner organisations of EZA. Thanks for every kind of support, for financial donations, material supplies and friendship. For us, your support is a very encouraging, humane gesture which also puts us in a financial position to continue providing aid. Many thanks for your open hearts and international solidarity. - **Aneta Szczykutowicz**



**YAROSLAV KOVALYSHYN – MEMBER OF THE PRESIDUM OF VOST "VOLYA"**

## Donation fund for Ukraine

### Nell-Breuning-Haus, Germany:

Here in Nell-Breuning-Haus, we are also horrified and saddened by the war in Ukraine. Putin's invasion in contravention of international law shows utter contempt for all the values of democracy and civilisation that we advocate in our educational work. As a member of the EZA (European Centre for Worker's Questions), we have friends and acquaintances in Ukraine and the neighbouring countries. Together with these partners, we are trying to organise the right kind of help as and when it is needed. We are supporting our Polish partner "Europejski Dom Spotkan - Fundacja Nowy Staw" with its various activities. The centre is a long-standing partner with whom we have just launched a joint Erasmus+ project. We support the refugee shelter in the Nasutów centre with various fund-raising efforts. We have already made two bank transfers of donated funds. Since 20 March, for every overnight stay in Nell-Breuning-Haus, we pay 1 euro into a donation fund which goes towards further specific aid for our partners in Eastern Europe. On 1 April, our partner and EZA member "Institutul de Formare Economica si Sociala (IFES)" will be hosting a conference in Romania. An associated IFES institute in Moldavia is looking after Ukrainian refugees and has sent an urgent list of their needs. On 29 March, NBH colleagues will not simply fly to the conference but will then take a van with aid supplies to Moldavia, accompanied by colleagues from IFES. Finally, on 30 April we will be holding devotions in our chapel followed by a (fund-raising) reception. Assisted by a former colleague who was born in Ukraine, we will invite refugees to attend the devotions which will be followed by a meal and an opportunity to enter into dialogue with invited guests. The donations made by the invited guests will go to EZA's Ukrainian partner VOST VOLYA, together with part of the donations collected during the Labour Day demonstration in Aachen. - **Rainer Rißmayer**

## „The Ukrainians are incredibly well organised and willing to help“

### KK NSZZ „Solidarność“, Poland:

Nearly 350 refugees from Ukraine have found shelter in our training centres in Spała and Jarnołówek. Most of them are women with children. This is far more than the normal capacity of these centres. But we can cope. And we have already helped altogether more than 500 people! The training centres Savoy, Żbik and Miś in Spała accommodate more than 220 people – 106 women, 101 children and 14 men. The Ziemowit centre in Jarnołówek (Opawskie mountains) has more than 115 people (approx. 60 women, 43 children, 3 men) and four dogs. The numbers change constantly, as many people continue their journey to other countries, friends, family or other places after receiving initial provisions, treatment and an opportunity to recover. "We're dealing with a high level of fluctuation but we also have a constant group who don't want to go anywhere and are waiting in our centres for the chance to go back to Ukraine", says Karol Wagner, head of Doms, the company running the Solidarność centres.

As a rule, people stay two to three days. This gives the refugees an opportunity to find their feet again and recover from their traumatic journey, while purchasing the essentials that they need so that they can then continue on their way. However, a large group will be staying here because they want to return to their own country as soon as possible, even in a tent if necessary, and will do whatever it takes to start rebuilding their country, as people tell us. Karol Wagner reports that people were a bit reserved for the first two to three days. But the refugees are amazed that the people of Poland are so open-hearted and generous, and so committed to helping, particularly where Ukrainian women and children are concerned.



**VOLUNTEERS ORGANIZE THE DISTRIBUTION OF RELIEF SUPPLIES**

### SOLIDARITY AND RELIEF SUPPLIES FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES



It is not only that the refugees feel at home here: they are also incredibly well organised, which amazed us in turn. They do their own cleaning, organise activities for the children, share the task of distributing donations, sorting things, cleaning and doing any house work. And our warehouses are full of aid supplies without us having to make explicit requests. "This is a great help for our staff, who are working practically 24/7 with great commitment and empathy", says Karol Wagner. The most important thing for the mothers is to keep their children entertained and occupied. Many of the children, particularly those who haven't been confronted with the pictures of the war, are told that this is just a holiday without their fathers. But those children who have seen the war with their own eyes are aware of the peril. They need everything to help distract them from their longing and fear, at least for a moment.

- **Marek Lewandowski (text dated 14 March 2022)**

## Commentary: Putin's fear of the European idea

The dreadful, devastating war that Putin has unleashed against Ukraine is causing immeasurable human suffering and resulting in millions of refugees

and making us reconsider the meaning and significance of the European project. After the Berlin Wall came down, countries in Central Europe wanted to join forces in Europe and become members of the EU. For years, this has been on a collision course with Putin's obsession with restoring the former Soviet Union. A reunited Europe that also includes Ukraine is less a security problem for Russia: instead, it nourishes ideological fears. The Russians are just as attracted to the European project as many other countries. The European project that began as a project for peace after the Second World War has the ambition every day to bring people together and give them the opportunity of a better life. The European Union is based on a number of values and on three pillars: human rights, including the freedom of opinion and the freedom of assembly; democracy based on free, fair elections; and the rule of law with a clear separation between parliament, government and the judiciary. This is precisely the point where we find a deep gap between our social model and Putin's model that does not respect any of these pillars. Europe is generally seen as a "soft power" that advocates connecting and uniting people, nations and cultures, rather than military power. The war in Ukraine teaches us that we have to improve our defence efforts. Our dependence on Russia for oil and gas must be reduced and brought to an end more quickly. - **Luc Van den Brande – EZA President**

# STORMY TIMES IN THE UK

How the existence of workers' organisations is being jeopardised by deregulation and Brexit



BLACKPOOL TOWER AT THE END OF THE PROMENADE

The last ESF funding in the United Kingdom came to an end in April 2022. Now, more than two years after Brexit, social organisations such as St. Antony's Centre are facing huge challenges. It does not look as if the British government can find the right answer.

**TEXT:** Lukas Fleischmann  
**PHOTOS:** Lukas Fleischmann

**B**lackpool – It is the end of February 2022 in Blackpool, Northwest England. Gusts of wind are sweeping across the promenade that attracts thousands of tourists in the summer. But there's not much going on at this time of year. One or two people are out walking despite the cold weather and a few guests are being served in restaurants. "Up to 18 million people come here on holiday in the summer. Doesn't look much like it at the moment", says Dave Flanagan, "which just goes to show how crucial seasonal tourism is for Blackpool and its jobs." Dave Flanagan works

in a street just 200 meters from the promenade, a huge contrast to the amusements, rollercoasters and piers. The street where Dave runs St. Antony's Centre in Blackpool shows all the signs of poverty. The houses are dilapidated, the shops are closed, and drugs and prostitution are the order of the day. "In Blackpool, 30 percent of all children live in poverty. Those are the official statistics of the British government. Here in this street it's even more than 50 percent", says Dave, "Blackpool comes out top in almost any ranking that deals with deprived regions".

**T**he team at St. Antony's Centre, that has its head office in Manchester, wants to do something to change this situation. The branch here in the seaside town on the Irish Sea only opened recently. The ground floor of the small building is still a construction site. Workers and tradesmen are working on conference rooms and places to meet. The first floor, on the other hand, is finished. "We began a similar project over ten years ago in Accrington. Like almost all the towns in Lancashire, Accrington is also struggling with structural change. We saw how important it is for us as an organisation to be on site in the community. This worked well in Accrington, and continues to do so. And so we took up our work here in Blackpool", says Dave, who lives here with his family. The team works closely with local authorities and other welfare organisations and offers counselling, assistance when dealing with officialdom and also mediation.

## Sources of funding are disappearing

**T**he decline of Accrington or Blackpool is symptomatic for the developments that have been felt throughout England for decades, with Brexit making them even more apparent. As industry continues to disappear from Northwest England, the former prosperity of this region is also declining, together with the jobs it provided. One symbol for Blackpool's former riches is the nearly 160 meters high Blackpool Tower, also called the Eiffel Tower of England. Industrial magnates and also workers were drawn to the city in the 19th and 20th century. The many Victorian mansions and palace-like hotels bear witness to this prosperous era. Today, many of them have fallen into disrepair. Although tourists still come to Blackpool, tourism itself has changed and with it, the image of the city: from a Victorian seaside

town to a destination for alcohol-fuelled day-trippers from Greater Manchester and Liverpool. First-rate jobs in the tourism industry have turned into precarious seasonal temporary employment. To promote sustainable tourism and also sustainable jobs, in 2010 around 14 million pounds from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) went towards the city administration's purchase of the tourist landmark Blackpool Tower, Winter Gardens and the Golden Mile Centre, at a cost of altogether 40 million pounds. The same fund also provided 3 million pounds towards the new coastal defences. Nearly 700,000 pounds went into constructing the tramway. The work done by St. Antony's Centre was paid among others with money from the European Social Fund (ESF). Brexit has put an end to such funding, thus also destroying hopes of restoring the good old times. "It doesn't look as if the British government will produce a concept to replace the funding provided by the EU", says Dave, "so we, too, of course now have to see how to finance our work in future."

## The value of workers

**M**anchester, one of the cradles of the industrial revolution and birthplace of the modern worker, lies about 50 miles south of Blackpool. Kevin Flanagan, Dave's father, sits in his office on the second floor of St. Antony's Centre at the heart of Trafford Park. This is the area that brought the city the title of Cottonopolis. The world's first planned industrial site was built here at the end of the 19th century. "Manchester had no access to the sea", says Kevin, "so they built the canal across from the Irish Sea. Processing cotton and heavy industry made the city rich. Today still there are lots of employers in Trafford Park, even if the best years are over."



DAVE FLANAGAN ON THE PROMENADE



RUN-DOWN HOUSES IN BLACKPOOL

At the heart of this huge site, which still has various brick buildings from the start of the industrial age, this is where Kevin founded St. Antony's Centre around 40 years ago. Inspired by Catholic worker priests who supported workers in Manchester during the 1960s and 1970s on the basis of Catholic social doctrine, and also driven by his own trade union work, Kevin wanted to set up an institution that would not only educate but also empower workers. Applying the guidelines of Catholic social doctrine, he and his team work in Trafford Park's former school building, offering accredited and certified training with a focus on English, maths and IT. A look at the city centre reveals the shift in Manchester's spheres of influence: numerous skyscrapers bear witness to new investment in the finance and services sector. The city also has plenty of private and public universities that attract affluent students from all over the world. Some houses of residence in exclusive office towers are reserved for Chinese students only. Most of the buildings are less than ten years old.

## Deregulating the economy

The traditional workers in Trafford Park's brick buildings seem to be a relic of the past. "Since Maggie Thatcher's day, the esteem and appreciation shown to workers and particularly to trade unions has decreased continuously", says Kevin Flanagan. "It's the mantra of the free market, and considerable deregulation is still going on here. Which of course has serious impacts on the local population. Major industry has gone. While there used to be a handful of companies with several thousand employees, today there's lots of small firms with 30 to 50 employees." Trade union membership has gone through a similar development. "In the heyday of the trade unions in the 1970s, 70 to 80 per-

cent of all workers belonged to a union", says Kevin, who is president of a branch of the GMB union. "Today we're glad to have just one or two representatives in a company."

The implications of this for the workers can be seen just two streets away: here workers of a logistics company have been on strike for twelve weeks, fighting for a 5 percent wage rise. They've made tents from wooden pallets with tarpaulins to protect them from the wind and the rain. They're persevering right next to a busy four-lane road, drinking tea and trying to keep warm around a fire basket they made themselves. Kevin visits the strikers regularly. They know him and appreciate what he does. The atmosphere is positive and friendly. "They may be from another union, but at times like these we really have to stick together across all frontiers", says Kevin. While the strikers are running out of money and resources, the employer is playing for time. "The employer offered 2 percent, that was rejected by the strikers, and now the 2 percent are off the table too", says Kevin. "It shows us that our power as a union also depends on how many members we have. In future, I think the central issue for the trade unions will be how to recruit more members, with companies getting smaller all the time while flexibilization is on the increase." Certain developments illustrate how important it is for the trade unions to become stronger again: the British government has reduced the number of workplace inspectors. The same applies to the minimum wage: although the minimum wage exists as such in the UK, there are scarcely any checks or controls. What's more, a time limit has been imposed on access to employment tribunals. If a complaint is not submitted within three months, there is very little chance of it being dealt with. "Our EU membership gave us a certain level of protection. Since Brexit, we see workers' rights are being reduced bit by bit", says Kevin.

## Uncertain future

Trade unions and workers' organisations in England are trying to combat these trends by advocating worker education. This not only makes them better qualified for their jobs but also gives them greater self-confidence in asserting their rights. Trade unions support institutions such as St. Antony's Centre in performing this task. Even so, state funding remains an important pillar in financing these activities. Paul Callaghan has been dealing with the finances and funding of St. Antony's Centre for 15 years. Looking at the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, he says: "Our greatest concern is that it's going to take too long to get the funding that's supposed to replace the ESF and that we won't be able to access the funds directly. It looks as if only sub-contractors can apply for funding. Furthermore, people-related funding is only planned for the third year. In the first two years, funds are to flow into infrastructure, buildings and capital investment. The question is whether there will still be employees around after that to use and manage the buildings and infrastructure.

## The Brexit mistake

The outlook is uncertain even after these three years. The picture of the status and development of the UK's economy shown by recent studies is not a good one. Current findings by the auditing and accounting firm KPMG indicate that the pandemic following on top of Brexit has had a disastrous effect on the country's economy. Since 2020, more than half of all British firms were dealing with major sales losses, high figures unequalled even in the pandemic. This resulted in 10 percent recession in 2020, compared to 6.3 percent in the EU. "I think people are gradually beginning to realise that Brexit has only brought us disadvantages, and that's not just referring to our work here at St. Antony's", says Paul Callaghan, "I believe we'll come back one of these days. Until then, we'll keep on looking for ways and means to keep St. Antony's Centre going. We've always found something up to now, and I'm optimistic we'll manage that this time too."



KEVIN FLANAGAN IN HIS OFFICE IN TRAFFORD PARK

WeWorkEurope

**NEW!:** This article is also featured in an English episode of "WeWorkEurope", the new podcast by EZA. We Work Europe is available wherever podcasts are available or on [www.weworkeurope.eu](http://www.weworkeurope.eu). Or simply scan this QR code.



# THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

## DEMANDS, HOPES AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE EZA NETWORK

EU citizens have the opportunity up until 9 May to make a contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe. 17,000 ideas have been received up to now and will be presented in a final report to the President of the European Parliament, the President of the Council of the EU, and the President of the European Commission in her capacity as joint chair. EZA has also been involved in the project since 2021 and has drawn up a broad catalogue of demands.



Read here EZA's 31 demands to the conference

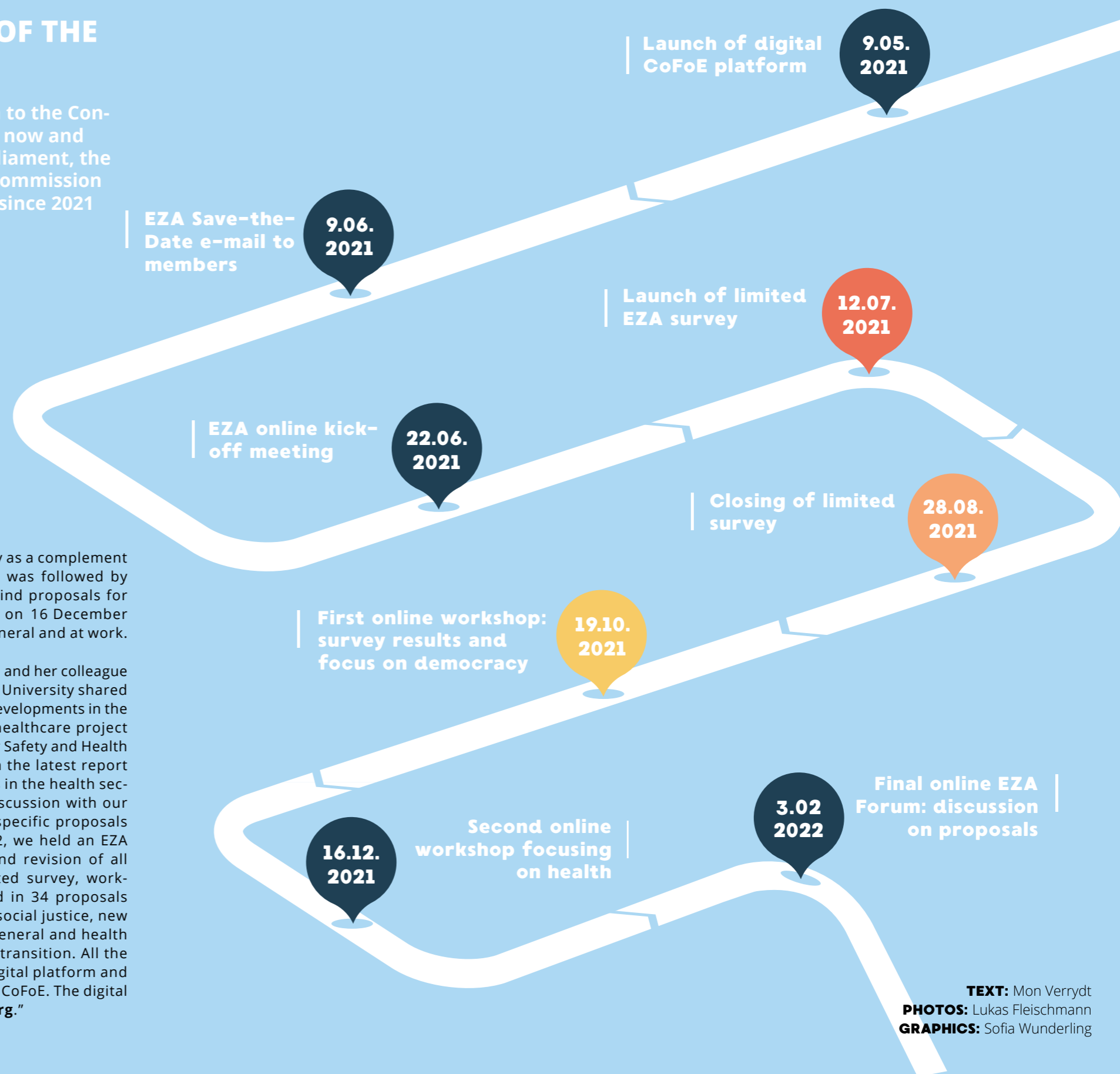
### EZA's contribution

**Comment by Mon Verrydt, Head of the EZA Office Brussels**

"From the moment the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) was started, the EZA was very interested and enthusiastic in supporting this necessary EU initiative. Our President Luc Van den Brande therefore called upon EZA and its member organisations to make an active contribution to the conference. The CoFoE digital platform was launched on 9 May 2021. About one month later, we held an online kick-off meeting for our members to inform them about the platform and the initiatives they could take and how we as EZA wanted to proceed in making a global contribution. We started a survey among our member organisations; the results were then available at the end of August 2021. Two workshops were held on the basis of these results. The first workshop on 19 October was about democracy and the rule of law. Professor Leonce Bekemans provided a very clear insight into the existing EU legislation and its development. Hannah Werner, researcher at KU Leuven, then explained her

findings on participatory democracy as a complement to representative democracy. This was followed by a debate with the participants to find proposals for the future. The second workshop on 16 December focused on the topic of health in general and at work.

Assistant Professor Sabina Stan and her colleague Roland Erne from Dublin City University shared their findings on healthcare developments in the European Union. Lorenzo Munar, healthcare project manager at the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), commented on the latest report on health problems among workers in the health sector. This was also followed by a discussion with our members and work on preparing specific proposals for the CoFoE. On 3 February 2022, we held an EZA Forum for further development and revision of all the proposals from our own limited survey, workshops and seminars. This resulted in 34 proposals on values, democracy, rule of law, social justice, new social economic model, health in general and health at work, climate change and a just transition. All the proposals were uploaded on the digital platform and shared with other key players in the CoFoE. The digital version is available on [www.eza.org](http://www.eza.org)."

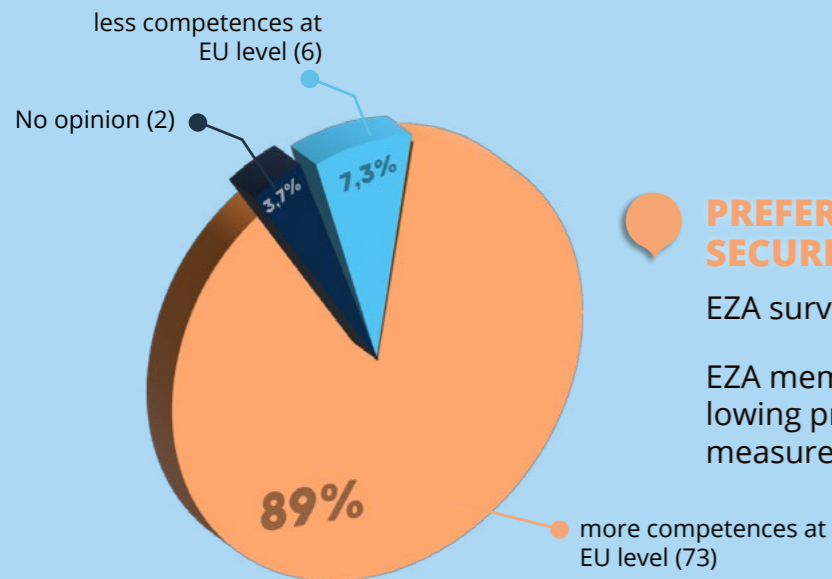
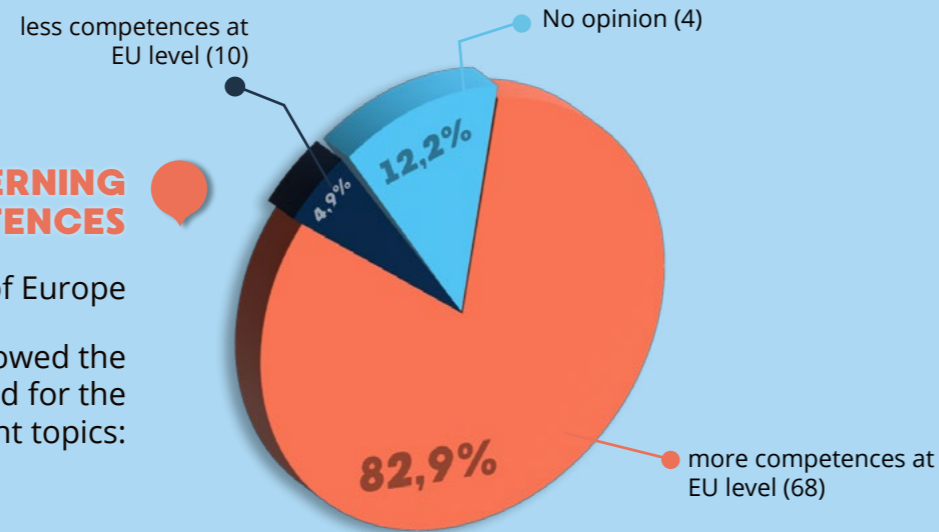


# SOME RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

## PREFERENCES CONCERNING EU COMPETENCES

EZA survey 2021 on the future of Europe

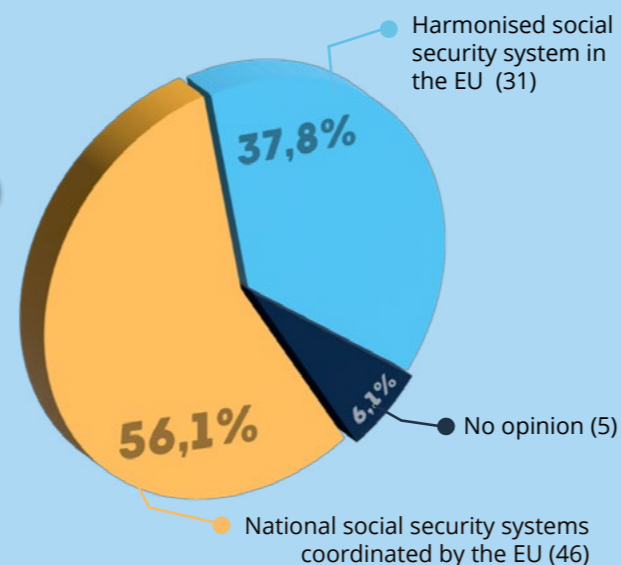
EZA member organisations showed the following preferences when asked for the three most important topics:



## PREFERENCES CONCERNING SOCIAL SECURITY IN THE EU

EZA survey 2021 on the future of Europe

EZA member organisations showed the following preferences when asked about climate measures:



## EZA 2021 SURVEY ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

EZA survey 2021 on the future of Europe

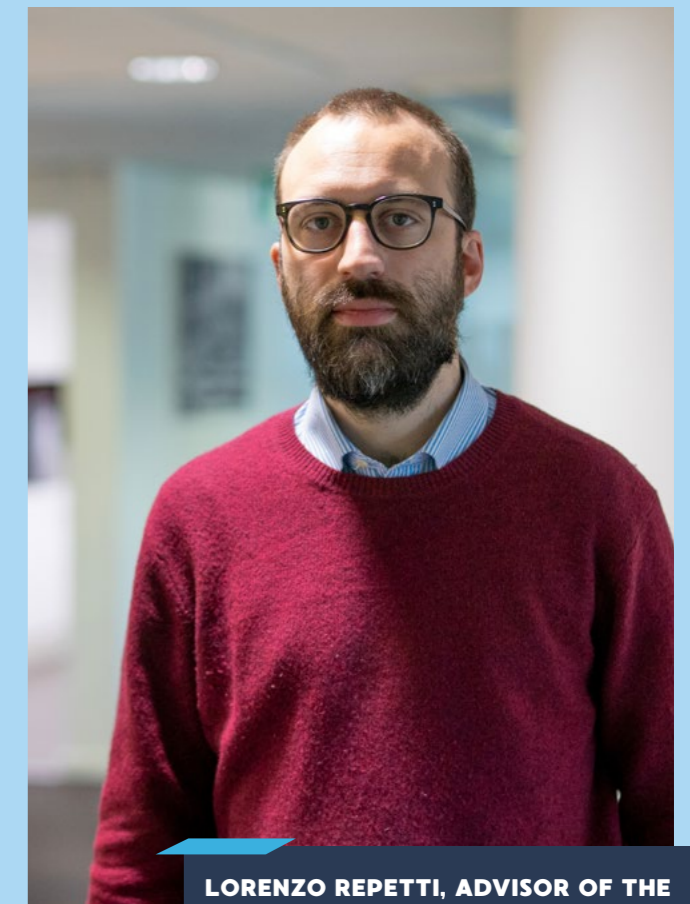
EZA member organisations showed the following preferences for:



LUC VAN DEN BRANDE, PRESIDENT OF EZA

“Great expectations often lead to great frustration. That must be avoided at all cost. There are already concerns about the outcome. But I think we have a moral duty to be optimistic. I believe we must urge the President of the conference not to waste this opportunity. EZA expects the CoFoE to deliver clear and sustainable results for the future generation of Europe. People won't be encouraged to participate in such a format if all they get is "Thank you very much for taking part". The outcome must be tangible for everyone who was involved. EZA's contribution to the conference is summarised in 34 demands which have been published on our website. We favour a bottom-up approach without any taboos, even if this leads to changes in the EU Treaties. But to get there, we want the EU to start with the existing treaties, which offer many opportunities in terms of the social dialogue or participation of citizens. This is the real issue in my opinion. Recently some people have been arguing that the EU needs more time to plan where we go from here. This is the wrong approach. We must start now if the EU doesn't want to lose its credibility.”

“Europe is currently standing at the crossroads. It's facing several significant crises. The CoFoE must look forward at where the EU is headed and ascertain which elements of the European Treaties need to be improved. In the ETUC's view, we must use this occasion to put social Europe in the centre of the discussion. The conference must not be just a talking shop. It must provide answers to the key challenges faced by workers and people in Europe today. In the framework of the conference, the ETUC has put forward 15 proposals on various issues. For instance, we want to establish a social progress protocol in the treaties to make sure that social rights take precedence over economic freedoms in any conflict of interests. This is an absolute necessity, especially as it hasn't been the case up to now. Furthermore, we want a new contract of social Europe as an outcome of the conference. It must put good, fair and decent working conditions in the centre of the debate. To accomplish all of this, decision-making processes also have to be improved. There are a number of key areas where we need qualified majority voting instead of unanimity, including issues of corporate or environmental taxation. Furthermore, we need to reinforce the role of the European Parliament on the European level. But in doing so, we also need to strengthen the role of social partners as a key element of participation and policy-making.”



LORENZO REPETTI, ADVISOR OF THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION FEDERATION (ETUC)



# THE AMAZON SYSTEM

How the global corporation is posing a threat to democracy



AMAZON LOGISTICS CENTER GERMANY IN BAD HERSFELD

**TEXT:** Ralph Würschinger  
**PHOTOS:** iStock / Lukas Fleischmann

Online giant Amazon systematically violates the rights of workers and trade unions. This not only leads to employees being exploited but also poses a threat to Europe's democratic values. Politicians are still looking for an answer.

**B**russels - 27 May 2021. The European Parliament holds a hearing on this day. Serious accusations are on the table: violations of European labour law, data privacy and data protection laws. An MEP subsequently comments on the session as an "act of inconceivable ignorance" and "contempt of democratic institutions". The hearing gives a voice among others to a representative of the ver.di trade union, a representative for the social dialogue, a professor for labour law and other "plaintiffs". Amazon as the "accused" was also invited. But Amazon failed to appear at the hearing. The company had announced that submitted questions would be given a written answer. "That's no surprise", says Jake Alimahomed-Wilson. "It's all part of the company's agenda. Amazon has a poor track record in terms of social or political corporate responsibility. It does what it wants, without any consequences." Jake Alimahomed-Wilson is professor for sociology at the University of California, Long Beach and co-author of the book "The Cost of Free Shipping – Amazon in the Global Economy". On nearly 300 pages, he and his team show the rise of Amazon, the methods used by the company and the struggle that local communities and workers are having with Amazon all over the world.

**A**mazon is growing constantly and cultivating new markets all the time. Some are literally written in the stars, such as space tourism; others have also become reality, such as cloud services for the public sector, where Amazon has a market share of 50%. But the US corporation's mainstay is still retailing respectively shipping goods. Its success is based on optimising individual work flows and minimising costs. This entails dubious methods: Amazon is said to use CCTV and

electronic surveillance systems to monitor its workers, counting how many items are processed in which period of time to keep track of individual worker performance and make sure they are constantly on the alert. These allegations are on the table during the hearing in the EU Parliament on 27 May, and simply fade away again without any comment from the company.

## Workers marked with badges

**D**ehumanising is what Norbert Faltin calls the working practices at Amazon. He worked for the company in Bad Hersfeld and Koblenz for eleven years, including seven on the works council. He speaks about his experience in the global corporation at a seminar called "The Amazon System" held early 2022 by the EZA member centre Nell-Breuning-Haus. Every single day, he and all other employees had to wear a coloured badge to indicate their status in the company. The general manager is the highest position and wears a black badge with gold edging. Others who Faltin calls "normal workers" wear orange or blue. They account for around 80% of the workforce, comprising those who accept the goods, those who put them on the shelves and the pickers who collect the goods from the shelves and hand them over to the packers. The packers sort the parcels and put them in the right delivery trucks. Uncertainty is the defining factor in the employment of these "normal" workers. Anyone who takes time off due to illness during the trial period usually won't be taken on afterwards, says the former shop steward. 40 percent of all workers in Germany have a limited contract of employment.



NORBERT FALTIN



AMAZON SUPPLIER

## A global problem

Alimahomed-Wilson also talks about similar conditions in the USA. He conducted many interviews with workers for his book. On average, they work ten hours each day. Few breaks, tight sequencing. Last year, a congressman from Wisconsin denounced Amazon for expecting its workers to urinate into plastic bottles. Initially Amazon's PR department issued a denial, but this was later retracted and the congressman was said to have told the truth. They said they would look into the problem. According to a British survey in 2020, only about 25% of the more than 1,000 workers feel they are treated fairly at Amazon. 80% think Amazon ought to pay more attention to workers' concerns about safety and the workload. The survey was conducted by Survation for Progressive International. The fact is that the rate of injuries is far higher than with other companies in the same sector, namely 80% higher. This was discovered by the Strategic Organization Center (SOC), a US trade union coalition. In 2021, Amazon conceded that in future, it would invest more money in occupational safety and health. However, in the same year the company hit the headlines in December when a tornado destroyed most of a warehouse in Edwardsville, Illinois.

Six people died, while 40 workers managed to get to safety. The question was raised about the priority given by the company to workers' safety when managers and supervisors had to go through the aisles of the huge warehouse warning staff with a megaphone because there was no central warehouse intercom system. The tornado only raged for a few minutes and had been announced in plenty of time by the local authorities. In theory, the entire workforce should have had enough time to get to safety. Perhaps they were not allowed to take such a long break from work. The news agency Bloomberg had received text messages between a de-

livery driver and her supervisor. The driver repeatedly asked for permission to get herself to safety after the local authorities gave warning of the tornado.

The supervisor answered that no announcement to stop work had been issued by Amazon and even threatened to fire her. Permission was eventually given by Amazon, but the driver was then expected to find her own place of safety. An Amazon spokesman said that the supervisor was employed by a subcontractor and had meanwhile been held to account. Amazon claims to have offered workers and families support and paid a million dollars into a local community foundation. The Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is currently investigating the incident in Illinois. The company has also faced criticism with regard to Covid-19 and has had to fines for violating regulations. Workers were not given enough information about which symptoms to look out for, how much social distancing should be heeded and how to disinfect the workstations correctly. Nor did the company provide sufficient masks.

## The price of free shipping

"Amazon promises to deliver goods conveniently to the door on the very same day and not after a week", says Ellen Reese. Together with Jake Alimahomed-Wilson, she is the author of the book "The Cost of Free Shipping" and is also a professor for sociology. She says Amazon is responsible for the way we understood goods and work. Thousands of items just one click away, sometimes arriving on the doorstep in a matter of hours. She talks of Amazon capitalism: a kind of capitalism based on technology such as automation and surveillance – of both workers and customers. Amazon uses data to place product suggestions based on logarithms. It is highly customer-oriented and offers free deliveries, but neglects worker welfare.

## "AMAZON'S BEHAVIOUR IS ERODING NOT ONLY THE EUROPEAN ECONOMY BUT SOCIETY AS WELL."

Amazon frequently uses subcontractors. It hires temporary workers and gives them a uniform and delivery trucks. In some cases, workers have to use their own vehicles for parcel deliveries. In neither case do they count as permanent Amazon employees subject to mandatory social insurance contributions. This is cheaper for the company and reduces its level of responsibility. Damage caused to private vehicles is then no longer the company's problem. Amazon's use of subcontractors also makes it harder to establish trade unions, explains Jake Alimahomed-Wilson. With this strategy, Amazon has completely revolutionised the delivery industry. Hitherto, it was normally acceptable for American companies such as FedEx and UPS to have trade unions. Amazon deliberately keeps the workforce small and undermines organising attempts, not only in the USA. Similar conditions can be found in the EU. Trade unions are not involved in decision-making processes.

Instead of accepting trade unions in the company environment, Amazon draws attention to the fact that it allows a works council. However, the company systematically limits the works council's powers, makes sure the shop stewards are kept busy in the duty rotas to make it harder for them to do their trade union work. In some cases, it even overrules their powers. Norbert Faltin remembers a situation where the German public service union ver.di had called a strike. Next morning, the local company management at one of Amazon's German sites brought in two busloads of temporary workers. According to Faltin, it was illegal to do this without the works council's consent. And the works council has rejected this right from the start. When the temporary works got off the buses, Faltin called the police. The incident really showed him how far Amazon is prepared to go, says the former works council member from the Rhineland-Palatinate. Many workers are unsatisfied with their situation. They're starting to get organised on a global scale, calling strikes, seeking to improve their working conditions and demanding payment according to the standard rate.

"Collective bargaining is more than just the relationship between workers and employers. It symbolises the direct connection to workplace democracy.

If that is jeopardised, we're in trouble", says Jake Alimahomed-Wilson. The way the workers react illustrates the fact that there has been no collective bargaining up to now. "We can see they are increasingly getting organised", says Ellen Reese. Voices are also making themselves heard outside the company. The hearing in May 2021 shows that the EU is interested in an exchange with Amazon. "That's something that is really necessary", says Jake Alimahomed-Wilson. "Amazon's behaviour is eroding not only the European economy but society as well. It is an attack on the well-being of the collective." He therefore proposes a global commission where shortcomings can be denounced and documented by employees and affected communities. The EU would then have to deal with this seriously and seek dialogue with Amazon. Up to now, the company has avoided any such dialogue. And yet social dialogue is one of the pillars of Europe's economy, bringing employers, workers and social partners together to find solutions.

This suggestion gives Norbert Faltin little reason to hope. Amazon has meanwhile grown too powerful, and what applies to one company of this calibre would then apply to other big players as well. "Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon: we're talking about billions in turnover and billions in tax rebates. In Europe we have the right of veto, and as long as Luxembourg benefits and the Netherlands and Ireland use their veto, there won't be any changes to European tax laws." But if Amazon were to enter into social dialogue, then the company would start taking responsibility at long last, says Jake Alimahomed-Wilson. The company could then be made more accountable and the situation for the workers could be improved. As long as this does not happen on the political level, it will be increasingly up to the workers, their solidarity and their ability to get organised.

**NEW!:** This article was produced with resources from the seminar "The Amazon System" held in February 2022 by the Nell-Breuning Haus in Stuttgart. This issue is also dealt with in one of the "We Work Europe" podcasts.

WeWorkEurope



# “THE WELFARE STATE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER BEFORE”

Jozef Pacolet about the future of social security and the welfare state



**JOZEF (JEF) PACOLET – EMERITUS PROFESSOR FOR ECONOMICS AT THE HIVA CENTRE AT THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LEUVEN**

Since November 2021, Jozef (Jef) Pacolet has been part of the EU Commission’s expert group on the future of the welfare state and its social protection mechanisms. The group consists of twelve different experts nominated by Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Employment and Social Rights. Despite all the crises, Jef Pacolet remains optimistic about the future.

**INTERVIEW:** Lukas Fleischmann  
**PHOTOS:** Rob Stevens KU Leuven

**EZA: Jef, what do you think is the greatest achievement ever accomplished by the EU?**

**Jef Pacolet:** If you really want the greatest achievement, in the end it has to be democracy: ensuring peace and democracy and enlarging the EU to encompass an ever growing number of people. Any progress you achieve in the EU is achieved for more than 440 million people.

**EZA: In 2021 you were nominated to be part of an expert group with the purpose of finding strategies to cope with so-called megatrends in the EU. What is the purpose of this expert group?**

**Jef Pacolet:** Our aim is to achieve progress and to enlarge the social dimension of the EU. Furthermore, we want to find strategies that will enable us to continue guaranteeing sustainable economic growth, sustainable in the sense of also being in accordance with the European Green Deal.

**EZA: Who is in this group?**

**Jef Pacolet:** The Chairperson is Anna Diamantopoulou, former Commissioner of Social Affairs at the European Commission. There are also twelve experts with a legal, economic, or social background. Furthermore, there are political analysts and demographers. The remarkable thing is that we all come from different countries and professions and even in that small group we are already seeing a huge difference in how we assess the same figures and the same trends.

**EZA: How do you conduct your work in the group?**

**Jef Pacolet:** Well, we’re just doing what the EZA has been doing all those years, bringing participants together from different countries on a European level to share their experiences. We meet on various occasions: people from different backgrounds with the same motivation. We share what we’ve experienced and what we know and then draw our conclusions. The expert group makes policy recommendations for political decisionmakers and also for all other stakeholders on the European and also national level. I suppose the dif-

“...WE WANT TO FIND STRATEGIES THAT WILL ENABLE US TO CONTINUE GUARANTEEING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, SUSTAINABLE IN THE SENSE OF ALSO BEING IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL.”

ference with EZA is that as a social movement organisation, you can put your conclusions directly in action.

**EZA: You’re the expert when it comes to the welfare state and the economic impact on a national and European level. What megatrends does the EU face in this respect?**

**Jef Pacolet:** Demographic issues and migration are the global challenges, together with climate change. Then we also have the changing worlds of industry and work, and the digital transformation. All those megatrends are discussed to see how they will influence the design and the financing of the welfare state on a European level.

**EZA: Could you maybe give us an insight into how you define the welfare state?**

**Jef Pacolet:** The welfare state is there to protect us throughout from the risks of life from the cradle to the grave, to cushion us from the risks of ageing, from economic crises or any needs of redistribution. The welfare state is needed more than ever. I was already convinced of this 30 years ago when we started a series of EZA conferences after the Maastricht Treaty was signed in 1992, and I have been ever since. It is needed as an answer to global megatrends and at the same time, it has to be continuously defended.

**EZA: To what extent is the EU welfare state system fit for future?**

**Jef Pacolet:** New risks keep emerging all the time. For instance, no-one had imagined we would be faced with a pandemic. It was a sudden global risk and, above all, a health threat.



“WHEN I STARTED MY WORK 30 YEARS AGO, I COULD NOT IMAGE ALL THE INITIATIVES AND CHANGES WHICH WE CAN SEE RIGHT NOW.”

The state in general and the welfare state in particular has been the answer. And it's not the first time, even recently speaking: before this, other risks included the financial crisis in 2008 or the debt crisis in 2011. Here again, the welfare state was the answer to both crises. You could even argue that the financial crises were triggered by deregulation by the state and the lack of public control. Following economic shocks, we can observe that it is mostly the welfare state that cushions the worst impacts. The welfare state adapts quickly and effectively and absorbs the harshest aftermaths of crises.

**EZA: How did the welfare state react to the recent pandemic which is still ongoing?**

**Jef Pacolet:** Covid-19 has taught us so much about the welfare state! For example, that we're willing to shut down our whole economy to prevent a public health risk. These lockdowns had a cost, which was a loss of GDP. But this was a cost that we were willing to accept since we value life so much. Furthermore, we knew that the loss of lives would also have an economic impact. In 2020 and 2021, the systems were given the means to compensate the effects of the crises. Financial aid was put in place for many people. Short-time working systems have been developed. The EU even went into debt for the first time with the creation of the EU Recovery Fund. All these measures by the welfare state have absorbed several kinds of damage which would have hit us otherwise. But we have also seen weaknesses: the provision of care for the elderly has suffered dramatically. In future, this sector must be further strengthened in our efforts to make the welfare state fit for future.

**EZA: Some people argue that the welfare state will be too expensive when we look at the demographic changes within the EU. Do you see this as a risk for economic competitiveness?**

**Jef Pacolet:** It has been proven several times that a well-de-

veloped welfare state is an economic advantage. Of course, there are enormous challenges. But let's compare it to social security systems which are mostly privatised. In the United States, for example, health care is far more expensive than in Europe with less coverage of the population. There are also great discussions in the USA about the competitiveness of their expenditures because of the increasing costs. The more you organise the welfare state on a public level, like on a state level, the more effective it gets at covering the entire population, and seemingly not at a higher cost. I explained it some time ago to a colleague from China. His reply was: 'That would be a nice system for our large cities'. No, it should cover the total population.

**EZA: Since 1992 you have been organising the Conference on the State of the Welfare State every five years. What is the state of the art now in 2022?**

**Jef Pacolet:** The welfare state is alive and well. When I started my work 30 years ago, I could not image all the initiatives and changes which we can see right now. I believe that the Pillar of Social Rights by the Juncker Commission in 2017 was a real milestone. It demonstrates Europe's overwhelming ambition to continue the development of Social Europe.

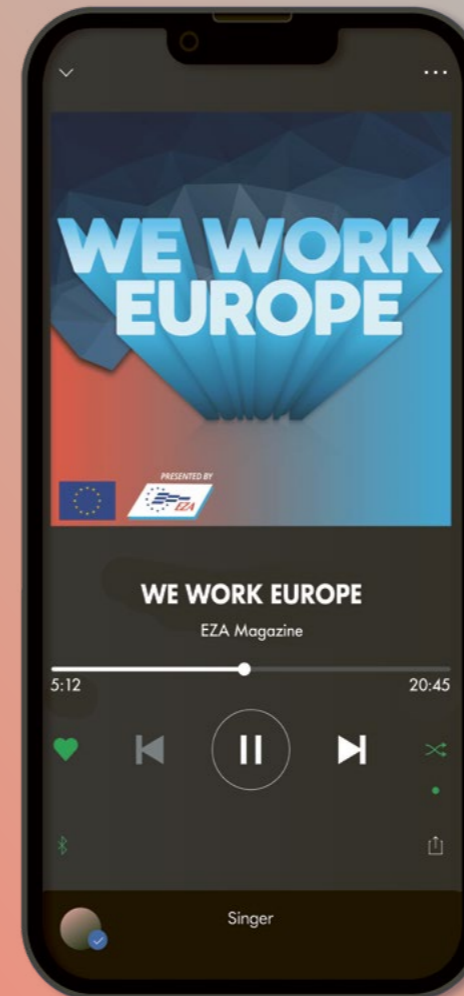
**EZA: What are your predictions for the welfare state in 2050?**

**Jef Pacolet:** By then we will be living longer than ever before. And we will be richer than before – despite the current crises. We will have a higher level of insurance and protection. Sometimes I regret that I was born too early in 1951 and not in 2050. Because for me, according to the statistics and trends that we can observe at the moment, the future looks brighter. I see the common (past) growth path of economic and social progress as a promise for the future. But social security is man-made. So, my answer is that this as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. And as a trade unionist, I say to myself, only the optimist survives.

Jozef (Jef) Pacolet is Emeritus Professor for economics at the HIVA Centre at the Catholic University of Leuven which is closely connected to the EZA. In his studies he focuses on the economic impact of the welfare state on a national and European level. His research has demonstrated the importance and robustness of the welfare state, even during several economic crises. To this end, he takes the lead in organising the conferences on “The State of the Welfare State”, which are held every five years with the participation of a network of experts from all over Europe, which he founded, as part of the EZA educational programme “European Social Dialogue”.

Podcast launch:

## WE WORK EUROPE



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From now on, you can listen to EZA's new We Work Europe podcast on your smartphone or PC free of charge. In the comfort of your own home or while you are on the move. In the future, three episodes will be published for each EZA magazine and will appear on all podcast platforms. For We Work Europe, we travel throughout Europe and meet member centers as well as experts in the field of labor issues, discuss current events and look at developments in social dialogue and European social policy.

The first episode is dedicated to Brexit and its fatal consequences for workers' rights in the UK. It is suitable as a supplement to the corresponding article in this issue. You get the chance to hear the voices of the interviewees and immerse yourself in the soundscape of Blackpool and Manchester.

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