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## EDITORIAL



*Dear Readers,*

*At the beginning of September, the President elect of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, presented her candidates for the new Commission, who are now evaluated in a hearing by the European Parliament. It did not take long for one or the other Commissioner-designate to be criticised; the European Parliament's Committee on Legal Affairs did not even allow the Hungarian Conservative László Trócsányi or the Romanian Socialist Rovana Plumb to be heard in the expert committees because of conflicts of interests. It is good that the*

*Parliament shoulders its responsibility and control function; it shows that we have a strong, effective parliament. Future Commissioners must be of integrity and able to authentically represent their portfolio in the interest of every EU member state, as there is a lot at stake if the EU wishes to regain more credibility from its citizens. Trust and confidence can also be developed by seriously promoting a social Europe. This includes a functioning, strong social dialogue. Juncker's aim was a triple social A rating. His Commission set a great deal in motion for this. The new Commission under Ursula von der Leyen must build on this and work on completing the triple A. I hope Ursula von der Leyen will keep social dialogue at the top of her agenda, as announced. At any rate, she already deserves respect and thanks for finally ensuring the first Commission – almost – equally composed of women and men!*

*Your Sigrid Schraml,  
Secretary-General*

## Populism versus economic future

**Employers fear that the strong results of the AfD in eastern Germany are scaring off skilled labour**

Available space, good infrastructure and active business promotion – offers like those of Invest-Region-Leipzig sound good. The aim is for the economy to carry on growing around the Saxony boomtown with its numerous middle-order centres. However, a look at the state election results of the middle-order centres does not give a picture of a really open region. In these areas around Leipzig, right-wing populism is buoyant, as the latest state elections in Saxony and also in Brandenburg show. The right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), at times blatantly xenophobic in its actions, achieves over

30 percent almost everywhere. That worries the employers, who like the rest of Germany are reliant on skilled workers from abroad. The fear is that many people are now afraid to move to Saxony.

The trade unionists' election results are also telling. According to the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) statistics, the election results scarcely differ from those of the general electorate. In terms of figures: 22.5 percent of trade union members voted AfD in Brandenburg, 27.5 percent in Saxony – the second strongest party both times.



Saxony's metropolis of Leipzig seen from above

Photo: City of Leipzig

For Olivier Höbel, the metalworkers' union's (IG-Metall) Regional Director of Berlin, Brandenburg and Saxony, there is an explanation: "Far too many employees have repeatedly interrupted careers with temporary work and low pay at minimum-wage level. The massive austerity policy of recent years has cut off whole regions from social infrastructure. This has an impact on people and their voting behaviour."



Olivier Höbel of the metalworkers' union IG-Metall  
Photo: Frank Schnelle

Yet the Saxons' satisfaction levels sound like a paradox: four out of five rate their economic situation as good or very good, as shown by an Infratest opinion poll.

Olivier Höbel speaks of a dangerous development, which will also affect the work of trade unions on the spot. But so far he is not aware of concrete cases in which workers have turned to the trade union out of fear of xenophobia: "We are united with the clear majority of the eastern German population in defending democratic and cosmopolitan structures and companies. In this respect, it is important to give right-wing populist slogans as little space as possible."

Yet no all-clear is to be given, as stressed by the employers' organisations. In 2016, seventy companies from Saxony joined forces in the non-profit association "Wirtschaft für ein weltoffenes Sachsen e.V." (Business for a cosmopolitan Saxony). Workers afraid to move to Saxony? "That is mentioned time and again", says the association's spokeswoman Sylvia Pfefferkorn. It shows that employers have long seen the need for action. "The feared damage to the image at home and abroad meant a risk was expected to the economic and business potential of Saxony as a business location", says spokeswoman Pfefferkorn, "Saxony must accept that it has to be a state of immigration." The statistics prove her right: since the fall of the wall, Saxony's population has dropped by three quarters of a million, whereas gross wages have tripled in the same period. So, there are jobs, just the workers are lacking. Associations like "Wirtschaft für ein weltoffenes Sachsen" are trying to counter this with seminars, workshops and campaigns.

The association does not only comprise small and medium-sized enterprises: Volkswagen Saxony and Infineon have joined, too. The problem now seems to have reached a dimension that penetrates every economic sector. Sylvia Pfefferkorn sees the upheavals of the past as another reason for the shift to the right: "They generate fears that often cannot be rationally explained." There does not seem to be a solution in the short term, though.

Lukas Fleischmann ■

# The averted risk at work

## Campaign for prevention and protecting workers presented

Millions of European workers (approx. 17%) are exposed at work to dangerous substances in the shape of liquids, gases, dusts and vapours. Exposure to these substances can give rise to a number of serious occupational illnesses, which may not manifest until several years later. They include allergies, skin diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases and reproduction disorders.

Despite all the advances in technology and prevention, especially with regard to the collective protection of workers and automation, exposure to hazardous substances is more pertinent than ever due to the fact that across the EU 100,000 people have died from the consequences of occupational illnesses or together with their families have had to experience great suffering. According to the latest reports by the International Labour Organisation, 6,550 people die from the consequences of occupational illnesses every day across the globe. In this regard the resultant costs for social systems must not be underestimated either.

In the last few decades, this issue, in particular the problem of work-related cancers affecting thousands of workers, has been repeatedly on the agenda of trade unions and the subject of the European social dialogue. Numerous EU directives have been adopted on exposure to chemical, carcinogenic and mutagenic risks as well as asbestos. Although asbestos is banned in the EU, it is still found in many public and private buildings in Europe, which is a hazard not just for the workers concerned, but also for others. It is also

worth mentioning REACH, the basic regulation on the labelling, marketing and packaging of chemical substances adopted after long negotiations.

In 2010 the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee (SLIC) supported a campaign in several countries against chemical risks, with the assistance of institutions that committed themselves to the inspection and promotion of health and safety at work. The debate, which seemed to be directed at experts, also extended subsequently to the media.

Special attention focuses on cancer, which in Europe is the main reason for fatal occupational illnesses and the subject of many resolutions, agreements and arrangements between the social partners.

In 2018/19 the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) started another information campaign on health at work. The subject of the campaign was managing hazardous substances, promoting prevention – including the practice of risk assessment in companies – supporting the exchange of ideas on good practice, and implementing existing EU legal provisions, some in need of improvement. The European Agency has many years of experience in research and information on the safety and health of workers, and its campaigns have substantially helped develop a culture of prevention in different European countries.

Two years ago, the EZA joined the EU-OSHA campaigns, as both European

institutions have been committed for a long time to promoting health and safety at work and so represented similar interests. Especially in the last two decades, time and again the EZA has included international projects on the safety and health of workers in its education programme and covered a broad spectrum from stress factors to the prevention of exposure to hazardous substances. As part of the EU-OSHA campaign, in March this year EZA organised an international seminar on this issue in Bonn, attended by trade unionists from various countries and a representative of the European Agency. These EZA projects, which are part of the European social dialogue, invariably pursue the objective of furnishing workers and their representatives with technical and political instruments for a positive approach to the qualitative improvement of work.

*António Brandão Guedes* ■

## “Change must be socially acceptable”

### MEP Dennis Radtke in the EZA interview

Dennis Radtke (CDU) has been on the European Parliament’s Committee for Employment and Social Affairs since May 2019. Born in Bochum and a former trade union secretary, there he champions a strong and social Europe. We asked him:

**Mr Radtke, why exactly the Committee for Employment? What is your motivation?**

Radtke: The labour and employment policy, as well as social issues, has always accompanied me in my political and also professional career. I worked for many years as a trade union secretary before

becoming a MEP. In the Committee for Employment and Social Affairs, I can now best contribute my professional expertise to the political debate in a meaningful way. As State Chairman of CDA North Rhine-Westphalia and Vice Federal Chairman of the CDA, I also cover these social issues in the CDU. I must mention my personal, home relationship

to this issue. The Ruhr area as a coal and steel region is very strongly affected by the structural change. I'd like to shape this change for the people in this region in a socially acceptable way, and also maintain well paid industrial jobs covered by collective agreement there.

I am motivated when I can help Europe become more social, and help working conditions improve for people throughout the European Union. I'd also like to prevent people living in poverty despite work. For this I'd like to strengthen the role of social partners in the EU and establish social partnerships and collective bargaining throughout Europe.

**EZA: What are the tasks and challenges before you in the coming legislative term?**

Radtke: One of the most important tasks is to complete unfinished projects from the last term period. We must now build on the previous work and should not start from scratch with every topic again. Primarily this includes the regulation on the co-ordination of social security systems. I'd also like to breathe new life into the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The forthcoming measures to counter climate change (e.g. the "Green New Deal" presented by the EU Commission President elect Ursula von der Leyen) must be socially acceptable. So, I see it as my task to assist the regions particularly affected by climate change.

I see a challenge in my new membership of the STOA panel, the working group for "Science and Technology Options Assessment". In it I represent the Committee for Employment and Social Affairs. This working group's aim is to advise the committees with independent and high-quality scientific studies. It is precisely the technological challenges that our society has to overcome regarding climate change which harbour the risk of societal and social aspects not being strong enough in the heart of political discussion. These topics must always be treated as one. That is why I'll champion them strongly.

For if social aspects are neglected in politics, large parts of the population are threatened with being left behind, and democracy can be damaged. In my opinion, the rise of populist and antidemocratic parties is strongly associated with the social dimension.

**EZA: What expectations do you have of the new Commission, where must key stimuli be placed?**

Radtke: Very generally speaking, my expectation of the European Commission is that the lead candidate principle is enshrined in law and can no longer be circumvented, as in the last European elec-



Radtke: I regard the existence of a pan-European representation of workers' interests, such as EZA, as very constructive. I am very impressed by standing up for Christian-social values with a particular focus on the socially disadvantaged. I also give special support to the fact that education is seen as a means of helping create better social cohesion in Europe.

tion. For the European Parliament is the only democratically legitimate voice of voters in Europe!

As for my work, I expect that the Commission or Mr Schmit as Commissioner-designate will further develop the Pillar of Social Rights. I do, however, argue against the pan-European minimum wage that is being debated. Minimum wages do not create any justice, they are only a floor. Fair wages are only achieved by collective agreements negotiated by the social partners. I want collective agreements to be introduced everywhere.

Nicolas Schmit is no longer the Minister of Employment in Luxembourg, a country that has a population about the size of that of the city of Dortmund. He must be aware that in future he'll be responsible for 500 million people, and every worker throughout the EU has to benefit from his policy.

**EZA: What role must institutions like EZA play in this environment, in your opinion?**

As a trade union secretary, I can confirm how important the EZA's work is. So, I welcome the EZA helping with its capacity building to strengthen the representatives of workers' organisations for their mission and network them across Europe.

**EZA: Many thanks for the interview!**

# Inspiration for the country of birth of the Arab Spring

A delegation from Tunis visits us in Königswinter



Ghayda Thabet of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation  
Photo: EZA / Fleischmann

In early September, a delegation of ESSECT (Ecole Supérieure des Sciences Economiques et Commerciales de Tunis, University of Economic and Trade Sciences) from Tunisia visited us at the Königswinter Workers' Centre. The aim of the trip: getting to know the social dialogue in Germany. There is still a lot in a state of upheaval in the country in which the Arab Spring began in 2011. Ghayda Thabet accompanied the delegation. She works for the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which co-ordinated the trip. EZA assisted with the programme design.

**EZA: You came to Germany with a large group of representatives. What is your objective?**

Thabet: We at ESSECT are an academic group from the University of Tunis. Our objective is to develop studies and statistics. We aim to be able to measure and compare the progress of social dialogue in Tunisia. In our country we asked more than 500 companies how they see social dialogue. The outcome is that it is predominantly perceived positively. We feel the dialogue is fundamental for improving the situation and economy in Tunisia. We aim to gain the requisite inspiration for this from trips like this one.

**EZA: How come you chose Germany of all countries?**

Thabet: We wanted to know exactly how and why the social dialogue works here, and why it is so successful. The same applies, of course, just as much to the social dialogue on the European level.

How do the models work? What institutions exist? How does mediation work here? All these points are essential for us. But we didn't want to talk about this just in theory. That's because in addition to the very interesting presentations and seminars we were able to visit companies to find specific examples on the spot.

**EZA: What surprised you the most?**

Thabet: I think it was precisely with the works councils that we found out a few things. We noticed that most of the success of social dialogue in Germany is due to this participation. This showed us that there are many differences between the Tunisian and the German model. Of course, owing to our history we are inspired very much by the French model. Unfortunately, we also realised that after the numerous strikes and the crisis of the past years we need new input. Then the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Tunis, which has contacts with Germany, became involved.

**EZA: How satisfied are you with the results?**

Thabet: Very satisfied. It was essential for us to become familiar with the characteristics here in Germany. We now have an impression of the working conditions and collective bargaining opportunities here. The seminars also provided us with a European angle on social dialogue.

**EZA: What is the status quo of the social dialogue in Tunisia?**

Thabet: In 2018 we had the constituent meeting of the National Council on the Social Dialogue. It's a good initiative and shows that something is going on. But there are still a lot of stalemate in the different regions of Tunisia. This is also down to the political situation, of course. The mood is tense. We had a Big Bang here. After the Arab Spring there are suddenly freedoms, democratic rights and strikes. The problem is there is often a lack of understanding what strikes actually mean, for instance.

**EZA: What exactly do you mean by that?**

Thabet: Sometimes I have the impression that it has become an obsession in Tunisia to strike. Under what conditions and with what limits, though? Obviously striking is an appropriate means of exerting pressure. But we simply strike in order to strike. You must understand, though, that after the Arab Spring we have been in a process of upheaval that is sometimes not so easy. That's why we need strong social dialogue in Tunisia, and for that we have to gain impressions from outside our country.

**EZA: Many thanks for the interview!**

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