



# NEWS

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## EDITORIAL



*Dear Friends,*

*Social dialogue can rightly be described as an instrument which in the past made a substantial contribution to social peace in Europe. Yet workers' representatives are constantly called upon to demand social rights. So they can be proud their work has been recognised by the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU. That is one side of the coin ... The other side of the coin is rather different: it has a bitter aftertaste, for in*

*view of the measures to overcome the crisis in some European countries the picture is a different one of perplexity with an uncertain outcome for social peace.*

*Romania, for instance, is particularly hard hit. There economic development is not accompanied by enough social security and monitoring of legislation. The government's reforms with regard to curtailing labour law and the right to social dialogue are creating a considerable degree of uncertainty in collective bargaining, not to mention cuts that impact on the population as a whole.*

*A workers' representative must be able to rely on universally applicable standards of Community labour law. In seeking support for their rights, trade unions are turning to European institutions – so far without any recognisable success, unfortunately.*

*Yours,  
Roswitha Gottbehüt  
Secretary-General*

## EZA in the financial year 2011/2012

I became president of EZA in 2011. That was in the middle of the activities of the financial year 2011/2012. Our annual report appeared in July. It can be found on the [EZA website](#).

The overall aim of the EZA activities is to give information and to promote social dialogue in the European Union.

In the educational programme 2011/2012, 67 activities were carried out with nearly 4,000 participants. More than 50 of our member organisations were involved in the activities, which were spread all over the EU. All our members faced huge challenges because of the economic crises. Nevertheless, EZA organisations used the activities to seek solutions for the enormous problems caused by the crises.

In some countries the concept of social dialogue itself seemed to be at stake. Free-

dom of negotiation guaranteed by the ILO and the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights was limited in some member states. Social dialogue is not possible without freedom of negotiation. Another essential prerequisite for social dialogue is mutual respect. Governments often have no respect for social partners, and sometimes social partners have no respect for each other. EZA was and is involved in helping our members to cope with those new challenges for the European social dialogue.

*Bartho Pronk, President of EZA* ■

## EZA special project for employee organizations in countries from the Western Balkans has started



*Seminar-goers at the starting seminar of the special project for workers' organisations in the Western Balkans held in Trieste in September 2012*

The social dialogue in countries from the Western Balkans leaves room for further improvements in many areas. This was one of the main insights of the EZA start seminar that goes on until February for the [special project](#) of employee organizations in countries from the Western Balkans ("Strengthening the Social Dialogue – Shaping European Integration"), hosted in cooperation with MCL (Movimento Cristiano Lavoratori) / EFAL (Ente Nazionale per la Formazione e l'Addestramento dei Lavoratori) and with financial support from the European Union on 18 and 19 September 2012 in the Italian city of Trieste.

About 35 representatives from employee organizations in Croatia, Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Austria had come to the meeting in order to analyze the state of social dialogue in the region, to discuss recent developments as well as future perspectives and to exchange their experiences in dealing with the current challenges.

The seminars aimed to strengthen the resolve of the regional partners to continue and develop their cooperation and to promote further joint ventures between trade unions and other employee organi-

zations. On top of that, several educational events presented information about topics of current relevance for employees in the region. They are coordinated by the EZA member centres BIE International, ÖZA, WOW, EUROFEDOP, MCL/EFAL and UNASM.

Joachim Hülsmann from the Association for Social Security Policy and Research (GVG), author of the "Study about the Social Dialogue in the Countries of the Western Balkans" that had been commissioned by the EU Commission, outlined the current situation of the trade unions in the region and their different levels of conflict. It was important, he said, for trade union confederations to restructure and to develop a sharper programmatic and political profile. Trade unions had to position themselves more clearly, even if this meant opposing government policies.

Improving the social dialogue in the countries of the Western Balkans promises to be a long and hard process.

The discussions demonstrated that, inasmuch as the countries from the region were concerned, "social monologues" had a far longer tradition. The participants from the region expressed their wish for the strict enforcement of a rule of law and a society where everyone stuck by the rules. One problem was, they criticized,

that government representatives were frequently insufficiently familiar with their own laws. Employees who pursued their rights in a court of law faced the prospect of an inappropriately long battle. A "culture of confrontation" led many to put undue emphasis on differences between people and groups rather than on their common interests. Employer federations were often quite weak and regarded with scepticism by the trade unions. The trade unions in Serbia were nevertheless in the process of compiling a White Paper on cooperation.

Multinational corporations played a largely negative role, it was asserted: many of them tried to cut down the rights of their employees to the bare minimum. There was a clear wish for better platforms of exchanging information and better networks of contacts between the individual countries of the region to benefit from each other's experiences, also for better facilities to train trade union representatives and to familiarize them with the rules of the social dialogue. Employee organizations were all too rarely sufficiently well equipped to manage social dialogue in an active and efficient way.

The discussions also made clear that employee organizations are currently losing strength: their membership numbers are falling, not least because it is difficult to recruit new members at a time of crisis and high unemployment.

There was a clear wish for an improved dialogue and more joint venture projects between employee organizations and the institutions of civil society. The Serbian government was criticized for sponsoring non-government organizations and for encouraging them to compete with trade unions.

There was broad agreement that the social dialogue could make major contributions to resolving many of the region's most pressing issues, including occupational health and safety, collective bargaining, the integration of young people into the labour market and the fight against poverty, clandestine employment and unemployment. ■

## EZA member centre USO on the precarious situation in the Spanish labour market: demands and suggested solutions

What the **Unión Sindical Obrera (USO)** sees is a scenario of recession and constant destruction of jobs in which neither the Spanish government nor the governments of the different EU member states are taking effective measures to put a stop to the ongoing destruction of employment and the general impoverishment of the working class, standing by and watching instead of playing an active part and taking effective measures to alleviate this drastic situation.

The unemployment rate in Spain is now 25.02%, with the youth unemployment level being a particularly catastrophic 52%. The total unemployment figure is high on 6 million workers, with 10% of households not having anyone in work. In the last year, the economic recession we are still in the grip of has resulted in a daily rate of 2,290 people losing their job - that is 835,900 people in one year. The labour market continues to suffer from the effects of a Labour Reform that has failed to achieve the stated aims.

Against this background of the bases of social protection and the welfare state in Europe being questioned and in some cases dismantled, a seminar focusing on this issue was indispensable. In June the head office of the USO hosted the "Analysis of and new challenges facing social protection in the EU" seminar attended by 18 organisations from seven EU countries. The presentations tackled the development of the welfare state in the various European countries and its ongoing decline. They analysed Spanish labour reform and compared it to similar laws and measures adopted in other EU countries, the increase in poverty, public pension schemes in Europe and Spain following the social security reform. They highlighted the performances of rating agencies, the existence of tax havens, the Spanish and European tax system, the development of the euro-zone economies, and how to create jobs in times of crisis. The main conclusions of the seminar were the necessity of maintaining the welfare state with high-quality public services guaranteeing a more social, more cohesive and fairer Europe. We social organisations must conduct an exercise of reflection and study to come up with joint strategies aiming at the defence of



USO during the general strike in Madrid on 29 March 2012

social protection and a system of solidarity guaranteeing the rights of the most vulnerable groups in our society. We must demand, propose and ensure that the European governments implement policies of growth, social protection and dignity at work, geared to a distribution of wealth and economic balance to put an end to the polarisation of society into the rich and the poor.



Seminar-goers at the USO seminar on the "Challenges facing social protection in the EU" held in Madrid in June 2012

That is why USO has responded by organising many a mass meeting and demonstration since 2010, including three general strikes. In the last few days USO has organised demonstrations in all the provinces which, besides demanding an end to adjustment policies, called for the World Day for Decent Work. Under the motto "Young people without a job, society without a future", USO has condemned the situation of 75 million young people the world over currently without work; many more millions are trapped in

casual or precarious employment; and tens of millions of new jobseekers have no chance at all of finding a job.

We at USO call on the Spanish government and governments of the other EU countries to abolish their current policies, which they mistakenly continue to apply in the shape of curtailing rights and services, stagnating and bleeding employment, the economy, industrial rights and conditions, social benefits and services, the wages and salaries of the majority of the working population, and which are causing unacceptable levels of poverty and social inequality, at the same time as they are stifling the real economy and loans to families and companies - exactly the opposite of doing what is needed urgently, which is getting out of the current crisis by reviving economic growth and employment.

Joaquín Pérez da Silva, USO ■

## Cross-border co-operation in vocational training

In late August 2012 the Belgian ACW and EZA held a seminar in Berlin to address inter alia the role of the social partners in promoting vocational training systems. It is proven that youth unemployment is lower in those European countries that operate a dual training system. Hermann Nehls of the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) said the principal focus of **dual vocational training** was the employability of the individual. When they complete their training, the newly qualified skilled workers have the ability to practise the trade

they learnt in accordance with stipulated qualifications. The underlying principle is the concept that every profession has to be learnt with a “hands-on” component of at least 50%: reflective work experience is the key principle of the vocational training scheme. Trainees have a contractually regulated status in the company and are paid at least one third of what the skilled workforce earns. It is proven that in-company vocational training as a part of the dual training is a self-financing system. Social partners, business organisations, vocational colleges and science present in

their dialogue a co-ordinated plural control system that formulates skills and interests on a national, regional and local level. Their work is based on the Vocational Training Act. The seminar-goers were all agreed that vocational training must be geared more to global requirements. The development of European core professions could be a major step in this direction. ■

## Intergenerational solidarity as an opportunity for more and better jobs

71 participants from 14 countries participated in the “Intergenerational cooperation: Possible ways out of the crisis – The influence of austerity measures on work, family and generations” seminar organised by ZD NSi (Združenje delavcev Nove Slovenije) in Ankaran, Slovenia, from 28 to 30 October 2012.

In times of global crises, intergenerational solidarity has a dual role. On the one hand, austerity measures and tendencies to dismantle the welfare state threaten it more than ever. Social measures adopted by some EU member states’ governments are often accepted with too little understanding of the situations of different generations. Social dialogue should be conducted very carefully, especially in times of budget cuts. If this is not the case, one generation might have to bear a much greater burden of crises than the others.

On the other hand, however, serious demographic shifts not only threaten but also bring new possibilities for the development of intergenerational solidarity. Social innovations in the field of active ageing and the promotion of synergy among generations promise new services and even new jobs. In the modern Western world, technological innovations are at least two generations ahead of social innovations. In the next ten years, it will be necessary to renew our social structures, otherwise the crisis will deepen. The best level to start on seems to be the regional level, and the best strategy seems to be to engage various stakeholders (trade unions, companies, NGOs, local governments, scientific institutions etc.) in the process.

Intergenerational solidarity is not only about going back to our roots but much more. It is a bridge between past, present and future. It is not only a “necessary

evil”, much more than that is a great opportunity. *Matej Cepin, SAK* ■

## Three new candidate members and a new observer for EZA

At a meeting of the EZA Management Board in Ankaran, Slovenia, on 28 September 2012, three new candidate members and one new observer were admitted to the EZA network.

The new candidates are the Lithuanian trade union **Solidarumas**, the Maltese **Union Haddiema Maghqudin (UHM)**

trade union, and the Greek trade union **Dimokratiki Agonistiki Kinisi Ergazomenon (DAKE)**.

The Slovenian **Socialna akademija (SAK)** is the new observer. ■

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