

OVERVIEW

■ EZA start seminar in Milan



59 seminars making up the EZA Education and Training Programme have been scheduled for the 2013 budget year: structural challenges in the labour market, the European Commission's Employment Package as part of the Europe 2020 Strategy, prospects of trade union activity in Europe during and after the crisis, and work/life balance under review

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■ End of the first series of EZA courses for leaders of trade unions and workers organisations relating to social dialogue

How do workers' representatives become and remain interesting negotiators in the social dialogue – and how do they remain convincing in defending the interests of their members? EZA saw its task as offering possible solutions and came up with a new, modern, lastingly effective model of education and training for workers' representatives, focusing on basic knowledge in the organisations. Workers' organisations from Portugal, Spain, Italy and Poland cooperated with universities to co-teach trade unionists. The first cycle, comprising four one-week courses, an online course and the presentation of the concluding assignments, came to a successful conclusion in December

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EDITORIAL



Dear Friends,

There was a time when the differences in the unemployment figures between the Eurozone countries of Northern and Southern Europe were almost levelled out. That was 2007. They have since diverged hugely owing to the impact of the financial crisis and debt crisis. In early January Lászlo Andor presented the Social and Employment Report 2012, and the picture he painted was bleak – a gloomy picture with few prospects of improvement in 2013. The job market situation has deteriorated considerably, and with it the social situation of many Europeans. Will the next EU summit herald in

the turnaround – towards clever investments in Southern Europe, to allow jobs and competition to be created there? It is high time people were given prospects of transforming their current hopelessness back into commitment, to playing a part in shaping the future. That is why the boosts to growth that need to be decided on urgently and their implementation must lay a modern, fair foundation for the workers. This is now the duty of the social partners and governments alike. Every man and woman in Europe has learnt and is constantly reminded that the economy is a law unto itself. Yet no society can do away with an economy that serves the people if it values the upholding of democratic structures – whether it be in Southern, Eastern or Northern Europe. Europe is a continent in which tendencies towards division must be countered effectively – this could happen more promptly in the future.

Yours,
Roswitha Gottbehüt
Secretary-General

The Europe 2020 Strategy as part of the European Union's response to the crisis

1 As President Barroso said in his "State of the Union 2012 Address", the European Union continues to be in crisis. These are difficult times for everybody. It is not only a financial and economic crisis and a social crisis, but also a crisis of confidence. The reaction to the crisis has shown that there was – and still is – a problem of governance, the response of the European Union (European institutions and Member States together) did not seem to be sufficiently effective. And there seems to be a contradiction with regard to the political message. On the one hand, the Europe 2020 Strategy gives a clear and coherent mes-

sage on the overall objective of achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth: the Europe 2020 strategy is about delivering growth that is: smart, through more effective investments in education, research and innovation; sustainable, thanks to a decisive move towards a low-carbon economy; and inclusive, with a strong emphasis on job creation and poverty reduction. On the other hand, the short-term preoccupations of political leaders seem to deviate somewhat from these strategic goals: growth yes, but is it the right time to be ambitious with regard to the environment? Employment yes, but is it the right time to also call for the quality of

jobs? Inclusion yes, but is it possible to protect the poorest from the consequences of austerity programmes? The main messages we hear here and there are: one should focus on jobs – in times of crisis and massive unemployment no one should complain about the quality of jobs – having a job should be enough! Or put another way, one should not bother our companies – especially the small and medium-sized ones – with unnecessary burden such as health and safety regulation or other social legislation. In other words, the objectives of promotion of employment and improved living and working conditions (Article 151 TFEU) seem to be put on hold until the crisis is over.



2 But there are also some positive developments. The coordination of economic, budgetary and fiscal policies has been strengthened. The Commission has proposed measures to restore sustainable growth by better regulating the banking sector, enhancing industrial policy, proposing an appropriate Multiannual Financial Framework (the EU long term budget for 2014-2020), supporting the tax on financial transactions and adopting an ambitious employment package. These proposals show that the liberal credo according to which every objective can best be achieved by deregulation has lost some support. The message is more “better regulation” than “less regulation”.

European Commission EUROPE 2020

3 There have also been some changes in public opinion. Since the start of the crisis, we have seen that interconnected global markets are quicker and therefore more powerful than fragmented national political systems. This undermines the trust of citizens in political decision-making. Public opinion is not necessarily convinced that on-going structural reforms are fair and equitable. In some parts of Europe, there is rising poverty and massive levels of unemployment, especially among young people. What is new and difficult with this crisis is the fact that it is employment in collective structures that has been largely hit by the crisis. This time it is mainly skilled male industrial workers, the core of our working class, who are affected. This has an impact on a large number of households who worry about their future and their role in society. They call for stronger protection and solidarity. People are also sceptical about the capacity of the EU to decide and to protect them. In times of crisis, the EU decision process appears as too distant, too complex, and too slow – and certainly also the EU appears to be putting more emphasis on austerity than on growth and employment, and asking for more efforts from the poor than from the rich. The question therefore is what kind of “social” message Europe can give in response to the current challenge. How can Europeans regain confidence in the future?

Outlook/Conclusion

We need to return to sustainable growth and jobs, to more competitiveness but also more social cohesion in Europe. Amongst other things, targeted investment at European level needs to be made in areas with a high potential for growth and jobs. This is precisely also the main purpose of the Commission’s proposal for the future European budget between 2014 and 2020. Unfortunately we see little willingness from some of our governments to ensure appropriate funding for key instruments to help to off-set the negative social impact of the crisis (European Social Fund, European Globalisation Adjust-

ment Fund or aid for deprived persons). The Europe that has been awarded – and deserved – the Nobel Peace Prize must tackle the social consequences of this crisis with ambition and determination. It will do so if citizens put pressure on EU leaders in support of fair and ambitious reforms.

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Disclaimer:

Any views expressed in this speech are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission. ■

EZA Initial Seminar in Milan

Priorities of the European social dialogue” – this was the topic of the EZA initial seminar that took place on 22 and 23 November 2012 in Milan (Italy). The event was organized by EZA (European Centre for Workers’ Questions) in cooperation with Federazione Nazionale per lo Sviluppo dell’Agricoltura (FEDER.AGRI.) and was supported by the European Union. 120 representatives of Christian-social employee organizations from 25 European countries had come to Milan to discuss EZA’s educational programme for the coming year.

As in the previous year, the programme will draw particular attention to the “Structural challenges on the labour market” – 17 out of a total of 59 projects will be dedicated to this issue. The employment package of the European Commission, part of the Europe 2020 strategy, will provide the key focus for the discussions.

Two project coordinations are also planned for 2013: one under the title “Perspectives for trade union activities in Europe during and after the crisis: challenges, strategies, identity and positions”, the other dedicated to the issue “Reconciliation of family and career – A concept on trial”.

The presentation of Barbara Gerstenberger from the Dublin-based European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) about “The Europe 2020 strategy and the EU Employment Package: Employee organizations help to design more and better jobs” was well received by the seminar’s participants. 20 percent of all European employees, Ms. Gerstenberger asserted on the basis of Eurofound’s statistics, had low-quality jobs and were therefore specifically affected by stress and irregular working hours. She also criticized that insufficient progress had been made in the field of occupational health and safety: significant efforts of the European Commission to improve the situation had only yielded disappointing results.

It remained to be seen, Ms Gerstenberger continued, whether “green jobs” could ever serve as the driving force for a recovery of the labour market. A greener labour market would not, she contended, necessarily be a larger labour market, since existing jobs would disappear



Opening of the start seminar with words of welcome from Carlo Costalli, President of MCL, Alfonso Luzzi, Secretary General of Feder.Agri. and Bartho Pronk, President of EZA (right to left)

where new jobs were created. Neither would this enjoy a high priority in the talks between the social partners, not least because the “Social Dialogue” would very likely be of subordinate importance in the newly emerging companies. “White jobs”, conversely, jobs in the care of the sick and elderly, could make a larger contribution to the employment market, but she introduced a note of caution by pointing out that many of these jobs provided work of a fairly low quality.

The EZA educational programme was presented in the form of a lively and open discussion between a panel of representatives from employee organizations in many European regions, Barbara Gerstenberger and the audience.

Ellen Durst, who is in charge of the dossier on sectoral Social Dialogue in the Unit for Social Dialogue and Industrial Relations of the EU Commission’s Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, used her presentation to provide a “Provisional assessment of social and employee policy elements of the Europe 2020 strategy from the perspective of the European Commission”. Ms Durst largely referred to the report on the “Implementation of the Compact for Growth and Jobs” that had been submitted by the European Commission to the European Council on 18/19 October 2012, pointing out which results had been so far achieved – “progress to date” – as well as which “next steps” needed to be undertaken.

In their contributions to the discussion, the participants of the seminar emphasized that the Social Dialogue provided

an important path to social peace in Europe. Employee organizations, they criticized, were losing power and influence through the crisis. A regular Social Dialogue was necessary not least because the social partners in employee organizations and employer federations knew better than anybody else which skills and qualifications were required by the labour market.

The participants also discussed the shift on the labour market from industrial employment to jobs in the services industries – mainly domestic services and the healthcare sector – where organized labour had been traditionally weak. Employee organizations would still need to find their feet in this area and have their work cut out for them. This was not simply all about the mere introduction of minimum standards. Since these industries were in general highly “individualized” and employed a disproportionately high number of migrants (who were often at best vaguely familiar with their rights), employee organizations had a key role to play in implementing labour laws. Other subjects of the discussions included the “brain drain”, job security as an important factor in family planning, the problems of the “work experience generation”, the high youth unemployment rates in Europe, the demand for a 40-percent-quota of skilled workers with a vocational degree in analogy to the 40-percent target of college graduates in the Europe 2020 strategy, the demographic changes in Europe and the dual vocational training system. ■

End of first series of EZA courses for leaders of trade union and workers organisations relating to the social dialogue



Participants in the Europejski Dom Spotkań - Fundacja Nowy Staw course in Lublin in October 2011

Learning is like rowing against the current. As soon as you stop rowing you drift backwards (Laotse, Chinese philosopher, 3rd - 4th century BC).

This quotation can be understood by anyone from the trade union movement who has championed workers for decades and realises that the world of work develops at an increasingly rapid pace. Hardly any other organisation has had to make a more radical change in its structures to be able to meet the challenges thrown up by globalisation.

Strong representation for workers is more important now than ever before because more and more workers are affected by insecurity of employment, have lost their job or have to offer their skills in return for very poor working conditions. On top of that is the great concern about the dwindling number of members. European workers' representatives, works councils and staff committees oppose this development and know that to be successful they have to undergo permanent further training.

How do workers' representatives become and remain interesting negotiators in the social dialogue – and how do they remain convincing in the struggle for their members?

This is where EZA came in, to offer possible solutions. What EZA felt was needed was a new, modern, lastingly effective model of education and training for workers' representatives. The focus was to be on basic knowledge in the organisations. EZA aimed to achieve this with a series of courses: workers' organisations from different countries co-operated with universities to co-teach trade unionists. The first cycle, comprising four one-week courses, an online course and the presen-

tation of the concluding assignments, came to a successful end in December.

In interactive learning units, highly qualified professors of the ISCET institute from Portugal, the universities of Bicocca from Milan and San Pablo CEU from Madrid, as well as the Akademia Ignatianum from Cracow together with the EZA member centres FIDESTRA (Associação para a Formação, Investigação e Desenvolvimento Social dos Trabalhadores), FLC (Fondazione Luigi Clerici), USO - CCFAS (Unión Sindical Obrera - Centro Confederal de Formación y Acción Social) and Europejski Dom Spotkań - Fundacja Nowy Staw taught the course participants working methods on various topics: for instance basic management skills, the importance of good leadership and management in trade unions and their financing or how research results come about and are used for trade union purposes. The professors explained key elements of labour law, the importance of macroeconomic correlations and their impact on workers, as well as negotiation methods in the social partnership on current issues so as to achieve better industrial relations. Other topics included the functioning of European works councils and acquiring communication techniques for avoiding conflicts.

The trainers all used very different working methods. There were only a few lectures and the vast majority of the training was carried out using creative and innovative methods which stimulated the trainees to engage in a host of discussions. The courses lasted five days on average, enabling specialisation of topics and curriculum in every aspect. The courses ended with an evaluation meeting at which the participants were also

called upon to come up with new topics for future courses.

For the concluding online course the universities made the topics being dealt with available on EZA's website, from which the participants could select one of the topics for their concluding assignment. These assignments were presented at a final seminar.

The next series of courses has already begun and is being carried out in conjunction with Europejski Dom Spotkań - Fundacja Nowy Staw in Poland, LDF Education Center (VsI Lithuanian Labor Federation Education Center) in Lithuania, IFES (Institutul de Formare Economică și Socială) in Romania and partner universities from those countries. ■

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