

## OVERVIEW

### ■ EZA start seminar “Focuses of the European social dialogue”



Sixty seven projects in the 2014 budget year. Focuses: the situation of young workers in the labour market; trade union strategies for promoting good working conditions in a changing industrial landscape; co-ordinating social security as a stabilising element for life and work in Europe; criteria for good-quality social dialogue *Page 2*

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## EDITORIAL



Dear Friends,

*the planned transatlantic free trade agreement between the EU and the USA is a big project. With the partial abolition of trade barriers, they are expecting a bigger volume of trade, stronger economic growth and consequently higher employment: the talk is of roughly two million new jobs on both sides of the Atlantic, the lion's share of which being more than a million in the USA alone. But cheaper imports from the USA could also mean that the crisis-hit southern European countries also benefit from a better*

*balance of trade and as a result a reduction in unemployment. This is substantiated by an Ifo institute study commissioned by the Bertelsmann Foundation.*

*So, with the prospect of a reduction in the high unemployment rate, from our perspective this planned free trade agreement should be implemented soon – if there were not considerable doubts about it as well. The doubts stem firstly from concern that regulations for protecting people in Europe will be dropped. With regard to workers, these regulations are based primarily on evolved structures and values with which we in Europe identify. What foments the doubts and mistrust to a considerable degree is the fact that negotiations are being held behind closed doors. Is it really in keeping with the times that there is no constructive public debate in Europe?*

Yours,  
Roswitha Gottbehüt  
Secretary-General

## Social dialogue in the public service

Responsibility has a future” was the title of a Eurofedop (European Federation of Public Service Employees) seminar held in Madrid from 26 to 28 September 2013. The necessity for everyone to assume his/her share of responsibility in the present crisis and the Eurofedop trade unions' commitment to initiating this process was a recurring theme throughout the seminar activities. The issues addressed were companies' social responsibility, the social market economy, the modernisation of administration (e-government), and statutes and pay in the public service.

It became evident that the delegates believed in the sense and value of consultations between the social partners, even if the social dialogue was suffering under the strain of the economic crisis. They stressed the importance of the social part-

nership and made an appeal to the governments of Europe: even though austerity measures seem inevitable, governments should never lose sight of the social impact of such measures on their own citizens and especially on the workers. *Bert Van Caelenberg* ■

## EZA Start Seminar in Wieliczka



Underground in the Wieliczka salt mine, Poland: those attending the EZA start seminar "Focuses of the European social dialogue"

The need for wholesale reform in vocational training was a major focus of the discussions at the EZA Start Seminar from 28 November to 1 December 2013 in Wieliczka, Poland, organised together with KK NSZZ "Solidarność" (Komisja Krajowa NSZZ "Solidarność") and funded by the European Union. 120 representatives of Christian-social workers' organisations from 25 European countries met to discuss the EZA Education and Training Programme 2014, one of its conclusions being that the issue of how education and training could be designed for young people in a future-oriented way and what labour market instruments could create sustainable jobs was of key importance. Primary consideration had to be given to disadvantaged groups, the seminar agreed. Appreciation had to be more important than value creation. And society as a whole had to be involved in the social dialogue. This had to be clear and transparent for everyone concerned. Social security was a right, not a privilege. A cornerstone of the EZA Education and Training Programme 2014 is the series of seminars on the "Europe 2020" strategy, during which the focal issue of the "situation of young workers in the labour market" will be subject to academic scrutiny and will encompass about 20 of the 67 planned projects in total.

In addition, there will be two series of co-ordinated projects in 2014 on "trade union strategies for promoting good working conditions in a changing industrial landscape" and "co-ordinating social

security – a stabilising element for living and working in Europe".

Furthermore, EZA will carry out a study on "criteria for quality social dialogue" together with HIVA, and the results should be included in the seminars in the second half of 2014 and in the 2015 budget year.

In their speeches, Piotr Duda, President of the National Commission of NSZZ "Solidarność", Jadwiga Staniszkis, University of Warsaw, Stéphane Portet, Syndex Europe, and the Deputy General Secretary of the ETUC, Józef Niemiec, addressed the problem areas of social dialogue from a European and Polish perspective.

Duda accused the Polish government of having introduced regulations in contravention of European directives, with the intention of faking social dialogue in Poland for it not to produce results. He called for the revival of social dialogue based on mutual understanding and a genuine social market economy. Workers' rights should not be regarded as privileges. A secure environment had to be created for young people to overcome the demographic problems caused in Poland by the very low birth rate. Maximum flexibility, as demanded by the government, was not conducive to this, he said. Duda criticised a lack of dialogue on both a national and a European level. The interests of workers' organisations in Europe were often different, with regard to the Working Time Directive or climate negotiations, for instance. The protection of workers should develop on at least simi-

lar lines in the old and the new EU member states. Pay in international companies had to be aligned to prevent companies relocating to countries with low wages.

Jadwiga Staniszkis analysed the current pension crisis in Poland and pointed to low pay as the main reason. The decline in wages in Poland is so drastic, she said, that it was bordering on exploitation. This applied in particular to limited-term jobs in which sometimes not even the statutory minimum wage was paid. The demographic problems in Poland were exacerbated by many young people emigrating to countries where they often worked in jobs for which they were over-qualified, but did not return to Poland to start a family. She accused the government of political calculation in deferring solutions as the responsibility of future generations.

Class hatred was the driving force for social dialogue in Poland, according to Stéphane Portet's provocative thesis. The employer wanted to dispose freely of his private assets but forgot that the employee was not his property. There was no democracy in companies, and the worker was conceded no freedom of decision when it came to the future of the firm.

From the viewpoint of the European Trade Union Confederation, Józef Niemiec emphasised that the employers in Poland did not want any dialogue with workers' representatives. Their main aim was to increase productivity and gain a competitive edge by wage dumping. The only way he saw for initiating real social dialogue in Poland was mass protests and strikes, with the intention of influencing public opinion. Victoria Znined ■

## After joining the EU: high unemployment, low wages and little social dialogue in Croatia

Workers' representatives and trade unions face huge challenges

On 1 July 2013, Croatia became the 28th EU member state, assuming all of the rights and obligations arising from membership. This historic day for Croatia was a big event and the end of a success story, but the truth is that most Croatian citizens felt little reason to celebrate. Most of them feel they deserved to become EU citizens much sooner. Hopes that membership would bring economic benefits may have been true when Croatia first applied for membership ten years ago, but they are now long forgotten.

Unfortunately Croatia joined the EU at the worst time possible – in an economic crisis that hit all the EU countries, and that is one of the reasons why ordinary people do not see and feel any benefits from EU membership. Croatia is still not showing any signs of economic recovery, especially in terms of employment and job growth. Registered unemployment is over 20%, with over 50% of young people without any job or any hope that the situation will change in the near future. Prices are rising while wages are stagnating or decreasing, and often they are paid late, sometimes months late. What about the workers? For years they heard that social dialogue was the best way to build a prosperous society where social partners were recognized and respected by the government. Six months after Croatia became the 28th star in the European sky the situation is completely different. There is no social dialogue at the moment, especially with the current government. All trade union confederations decided not to participate in the national Economic and Social Council any more, collective agreements are violated and



cancelled, and the preparations for a general strike are underway.

Labour law, and especially its enforcement in practice, should have been strengthened by the process of harmonisation with European standards, but in reality the workers' rights are currently under attack since the social-democratic government decided to change almost every piece of labour legislation in Croatia in order to make it more flexible as if it alone would decrease unemployment. The liberalisation and privatisation of public services and goods are also high on the agenda of the Croatian government in order to relieve the budget.

When faced with constant austerity measures it is difficult for the workers but also other citizens to enjoy EU membership and think of the benefits the EU brought them, especially when young

people are leaving Croatia not because they are using the right of free movement but because they are forced to find any job that would secure them some prospects of a better future and restore their confidence and dignity.

*Marija Hanževački* ■

## EZA President Bartho Pronk to visit Cyprus

EZA President Bartho Pronk will be visiting the Republic of Cyprus from 16 to 18 February 2014 at the invitation of the Cypriot EZA member centre KIKEA-DEOK (Cypriot Institute of Training/Education and Employment).

During his stay, besides the DEOK Board, he will be meeting the President of the Cypriot House of Representatives Yianakis Omirou, the Minister of Work and Social Security Zeta Aimilianidou, the Head of the European Commission Rep-

resentation in Cyprus Giorgos Markopoulitis, and the Ambassador of the Netherlands Brechje Schwachöfer, among others.

*Victoria Znined* ■

## EZA networks and platforms

### Interview with Józef Mozolewski, Platform for Education (PED)

**Józef, you are the head of the PED. What are the platform's aims?**

The main aim of the platform has always been to spur the regular debate on the role of education in society, focusing especially on the importance of intercultural and interreligious dialogue on the values in education, and the links between education and employment.

The education platform is a structure that operates under the umbrella of EZA. The political responsibility for the platform lies with EZA.

**Who does what in the PED?**

In January 2008, NKOS (Nezávislé kresťanské odbory Slovenska, Slovakia), CSDR (Confederația Sindicatelor Democratice din România) and Cartel Alfa (Romania), LDF (Vsi Lithuanian Labor Federation, Lithuania), GÖD (Gewerkschaft öffentlicher Dienst, Austria), CNV (Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond, the Netherlands), USO (Unión Sindical Obrera, Spain) and initially Belgian trade unions expressed their wish in Brussels to join a platform which started its work under the umbrella of EZA as the "Teacher's Open Platform". Experts like Gaston de la Haye and Evert de Jong were responsible for co-ordination at the time. The founding members have since been joined by new members that make their

contribution to the platform's work: KK NSZZ "Solidarność" (Komisja Krajowa NSZZ "Solidarność", Poland), PODKREPA (Confederation of Labour PODKREPA, Bulgaria), and MOSZ (Munkástanácsok Országos Szövetsége, Hungary).

In 2011 EZA conferred on me responsibility for the platform's activities. Since then we have held three meetings, at which major and organising resolutions were passed including one to change the name of the platform to "Platform for Education".

The platform's target groups are teachers' unions and their representatives.

**How does the platform work?**

We meet twice a year in Poland.

**What issues does the platform address?**

The issues are multifaceted, such as the employment situation in the education sector, the compatibility of family life and work, experiences with regard to values in pedagogical work, weighting in teachers' work with regard to the changing world of work and new technologies, ensuring educational work, the consequences of the crisis in the education sector, the demographic shift. We are also trying to develop new concepts of education and of the different societal, social and pedagogical challenges in Europe.

The issues we address are a mirror image of the problems education has to overcome throughout Europe. The wide range of issues that are the platform's work has helped create great interest in the platform's activities. The number of people attending the meetings and of topics discussed is growing.

**Thank you for the interview and every success with your work!**

Victoria Znined ■

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