



NEWS

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OVERVIEW

■ Healthy workplaces for all ages



The guiding principle of the 2016/2017 campaign run by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) as the focus of a conference in Belgrade, organised by WOW, BOFOS and the EZA. The EZA is the official campaign partner
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■ European Pillar of Social Rights

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EDITORIAL



Dear Friends of the EZA,

I had actually wanted to write this editorial on a very different topic: the EZA is the partner of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work's current campaign (see Matthias Homey's article on this). But since last Friday I have been unable to get out of my head a song I had heard at a concert by songwriter Hannes Wader: in his song "Das Bürgerlied" (Civic song), Wader says: "Whether we create something new in the world or just gawk at it, it does make a difference...whether we always boldly get a grip, lustily and industriously, when it's all about acting effectively...or we sleepily think God will give it to us in

our sleep, it does make a difference ...". Waders' appeal from the 70s is at least just as topical now. The EU has just commemorated the signing of the Treaty of Rome sixty years ago. All the achievements were recalled, new future scenarios outlined...and at the same time Europe fears for its future in the face of various crises, Brexit and anti-European movements. The leading EU representatives committed themselves in Rome to an EU of peace, freedom, democracy and human rights, as well as to a socially responsible Europe. They promised to listen to their citizens. To make sure they hear not only the latest particularly loud anti-European voices, it is high time that the unfortunately too often silent pro-Europe camp "played their part"! We are all, each and every one of us, responsible for our Europe! No excuses! All over Europe, grassroots movements are springing up and taking to the streets for Europe. "Pulse of Europe" is one such movement. Down with fear! Up with hope!

And what are you doing for the future of Europe?
Sigrid Schraml, Secretary-General

Key focus areas of the EZA educational programme for 2017

The 2017 educational programme of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) will be comprised of the issues "Digital World of Work", "European Pillar of Social Rights" and "Integration of migrants and refugees in the labour market". Other topics include "Youth and labour market", "Posting of workers: New forms of work and combating social dumping", "Including the unemployed, long-time unemployed and sick and disabled workers", "Workplace conditions", "Strengthening social dialogue structures" and "Healthy workplaces - for all ages". The extensive educational pro-

gramme will be available from April 2017 on the EZA website.

The programme is kicked off by the CNV (Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond) seminar on "Cross-border work: the effects of free movement of workers in the EU" being held in Croatia from 26 to 28 April 2017.

Victoria Zined ■

Major challenge for workers' organisations: age-appropriate jobs

Healthy workplaces for all ages" – this guiding principle of the campaign run by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in Bilbao (EU-OSHA) was the focus of speeches and discussions of a conference held by the World Organisation of Workers (WOW) in conjunction with the Serbian trade union BOFOS and the EZA in Belgrade on 17 and 18 March 2017.

Representatives of workers' organisations from Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria and Germany discussed the questions of how health and safety of workers could be improved and the employment of elderly workers encouraged.

At the beginning of the seminar, Tsvetomir Tsanev, EU-OSHA Project Manager, presented key elements of the 2016/2017 campaign and the main findings of an analysis report which the agency drew up on the initiative of the European Parliament in a three-year pilot project. An upshot of demographic change and an ageing working population is that more people with health problems and chronic conditions are in work, and this entails new demands on age-appropriate jobs. According to Tsvetomir Tsanev, EU-OSHA findings show that large companies are already investing in better health and safety at work for elderly workers; the problem is the situation in smaller and medium-sized enterprises and in the countries hardest hit by the financial and economic crisis.

As part of the EU-OSHA campaign, the Rudnik mine, 110 kilometres south of Belgrade, was singled out as an example of good practice. Company representatives presented the measures taken: worker training in safety, information brochures and training courses for workers, noise protection, paid leave, life insurance, free on-site catering, protective clothing, and free transport from home to work and back. The overall outcome has been a marked reduction in the number of injuries. The Rudnik mine is also one of the few that has had a positive balance sheet and a growing workforce for years. Chris Walsh, Director of Wise Age Ltd. and member of AGE Platform Europe,

pointed out in his speech how elderly workers benefited companies, and stressed the importance of on-the-job training and flexible systems of transition into retirement. Today the 50+ generation makes up a higher percentage of the actively employed, yet currently only 30% of the 60+ generation in Europe is

they should create greater awareness in the workplace, among employers, in social dialogue and among the general public of the importance of health promotion and disease prevention at work. The EZA is the official campaign partner of the EU-OSHA in 2016/2017 and will address this issue further in four projects



Logo of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), Bilbao, "Healthy workplaces for all ages" campaign 2016/2017

still in employment. The biggest problem is that a worker who loses his job at the age of 50-plus scarcely has a chance of finding a new one.

Helen Korren, psychologist at the Croatian Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, emphasised that psychosocial risks were as significant today as physical risks at the workplace. The rise in precarious employment increased stress, the workers affected saw themselves in a situation of uncertainty threatening their livelihood similar to that of the unemployed. The occupations particularly affected by psychosocial risks were those directly in contact with people (such as hospital nursing staff).

The national reports made it clear that there was no lack of legislation governing health and safety at work in the countries of Europe, but implementing it was often problematical. Particularly in small and medium-sized companies (especially in micro-enterprises with between two and nine employees), in which the representation of the workers' interests is weaker, the issue is not given enough attention; and multinationals are also trying in countries like Serbia and Portugal to circumvent legal provisions they felt absolutely bound by in their home countries.

At the end of the conference the participants identified as a key task for trade unions and workers' representatives that

of its education and training programme 2017.

Matthias Homey ■

The European Pillar of Social Rights: part 2



President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker at the "The European Pillar of Social Rights: going forward together" conference, January 2017 in Brussels

As reported in the EZA News 3/2016, EZA member organisations took part in the public consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). The consultation closed on 31 December 2016 and stakeholders were invited to attend a high-level conference on "The European Pillar of Social Rights: going forward together" on 23 January 2017. This article provides an overview of the demands submitted by the EZA members.

Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

With regard to the first chapter of the proposal, EZA members highlighted the following concerns. According to the Centre Européen du Travail (CET), the Youth Guarantee is a very important initiative which needs to be strengthened and better applied in all member states. To increase access to the labour market, education should be matched to labour market needs by establishing structural partnerships between schools, training organisations, companies, civil society and social partners. Particular importance should be given to the social and technical skills of individuals. The need for higher flexibility inherent to the changing world of work risks excluding workers who are not responding to the new needs of the labour market. It is therefore even more important that the European societies organise training and outreach activities for these workers. Beweging.net

underlines that European Union (EU) authorities and the national governments should recognise that inequality puts economic and social rights at risk by seriously hampering the progressive realisation of those rights. Furthermore, inequality limits the access to an adequate floor of social protection for those at the lower end of the scale. Equality must be a priority goal of the EPSR.

Fair working conditions

In its contribution, EUROFEDOP (Europese Federatie van het Overheidspersoneel) highlights the impact of outsourcing public service functions on public service employees as a new trend in the world of work. In several cases, employees are confronted with a change in their employment status, including new forms of atypical employment. It is important that the workers concerned enjoy the same benefits obtained through collective bargaining or other regulations under their previous employment status or that they are able to negotiate their benefits through effective social dialogue.

Adequate and sustainable social protection

With regard to social protection, CET deems it necessary to put in place tools to combat discrimination and inequality, which are linked to increasing poverty. According to Beweging.net, the EC must seize the opportunity provided by the EPSR to promote a universal social pro-

tection floor, which is sufficient to ensure an adequate standard of living for all throughout the EU. Given the persistent high levels of poverty and social exclusion in the EU, the Pillar should provide for the establishment of a highly visible and integrated EU anti-poverty strategy.

Proposals for implementation

According to CFTC (Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens), the EPSR should aim at maximum upwards social convergence and not at equalizing social standards. According to CFTC and Beweging.net, the EPSR should apply to the whole EU and not just to the Eurozone. According to CET and Beweging.net, the EPSR must show a clear commitment to the highest economic and social rights standards of international human rights law, such as the European Social Charter and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These human rights should be fully implemented in EU secondary law and national law, enabling individuals to seek enforcement of their rights before national courts and tribunals.

According to Beweging.net, other options for the necessary enforceability could include:

- a) A clear statement that the principles in the Pillar will be at the heart of the European Semester process.
- b) Clearly defined accountability mechanisms and sanctions for those not delivering on the Pillar's principles.

CNV (Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond) submitted a very distinct response to the EPSR. CNV regards the initiative for a Social Pillar as undesirable at the moment on account of the risk of downward adjustment of Dutch standards. Better enforcement of existing rules and laws in the European labour market was now a first priority.

The way forward

The Commission's proposal on the European Pillar of Social Rights is expected to be presented in March 2017.

Esmeralda Van den Bosch ■

Trade unionists from the Western Balkans region: act together and concertedly in a legally watertight framework

Workers need legal certainty. The rule of law and the representativeness of trade unions are important bases for successful social dialogue. Trade unions must act together and concertedly to enable them to achieve their aims in a better way.

These were the main findings of the evaluation and prospects seminar in the EZA special project to strengthen the social dialogue in the Western Balkans, held in conjunction with the Austrian Centre for Workers' Training (Österreichisches Zentrum für Arbeitnehmerbildung - ÖZA). From 20 to 22 February 2017, 40 representatives of workers' organisations from Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Hungary, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria and Italy gathered in Podgorica/Montenegro. The President of ÖZA and the Public Services Union (Gewerkschaft Öffentlicher Dienst - GÖD), Dr. Norbert Schnedl, recalled that strategies are to be developed in this special project by means of education and training work in order to give the social dialogue a sustainable structure, thus allowing an active contribution to be made to shaping prospects of accession to the EU.

Srdja Kekovic, General Secretary of the Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro, criticised the neoliberal labour law prevailing in the country that gives employers too many rights, which is why they often regard social dialogue as superfluous. What was particularly worrying was that workers frequently had to sign an undated termination by mutual consent even before they were given a contract of employment.

Norbert Beckmann-Dierkes, Head of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Foreign Office of Serbia/Montenegro, reported on the political and economic development in Serbia and Montenegro. He said that politicians and trade unions had to take the reality of people's lives as the starting point: people longed for economic certainty, good education for their children, and career-starting opportunities.

In the discussion the participants stressed that trust in the social partners and among the social partners themselves, as well as mutual respect, the unity of trade unions and representativeness in



Participants at the evaluation and prospects seminar in the EZA special project to strengthen the social dialogue in the Western Balkans, February 2017 in Podgorica/Montenegro

the region's pluralistic societies were vital for good trade union work and good social dialogue. For this a binding legal framework, good training of trade unionists and honesty were indispensable. The call was for measures from policy-makers to support social dialogue, e.g. tax rises for companies which had no social dialogue, or preferential treatment in public contracts of firms with social dialogue.

Obstacles to trade union work and social dialogue in the region identified in the seminar were the frequent discord among the trade unions, a difficult political situation with changing governments, in Serbia and the FYR Macedonia for example, and the often inadmissible intervention of governments in the social dialogue. In addition, the legal framework was generally inadequate for enabling good, successful social dialogue to be conducted.

Specific challenges to trade union work highlighted were minimum wages threatening livelihoods, long-term unemployment, dwindling numbers of members, problems recruiting new members, and media hostility to trade unions. The complaint reiterated was that foreign employers, although their behaviour in their countries of origin was often exemplary, exploited the legal situation in the Western Balkans to the detriment of workers.

It became clear that the trade unions in the region had to find ways of positioning themselves in relation to the other social partners, their own members, and the new challenges in the world of work, for instance with regard to digitisation or migration.

The participants proposed a seminar on the Social Charter and its application and on the experiences of, say, Slovenia in the accession process and on the current sta-

tus of trade union work and the social dialogue in this country. There were also deliberations on a code of ethics for all trade unions.

Victoria Znined / Norbert Klein ■

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