

A decent life for everyone

For many centuries, Europe has been a meeting place for numerous nations and cultures which in the last century instilled values such as peace, co-operation, solidarity and democracy. These ever vulnerable values, which require special attention, are based on family and work, the concept of man as an individual and communal being, and on the idea of the responsible citizen willing to make compromises. These are precisely the realities that have been questioned recently by a “deadly” economy (Pope Francis: *Evangelii Gaudium* No. 53) that kills people, family, civic participation, small companies, the environment and democracy. This economy puts money, technology and power above the interests of citizens, especially precarious,

flexible and replaceable workers who are regarded as objects of use as long as they produce. It is an economy that introduces individualism into labour relations, rejects collective wage and work contracts, creates competition even among employees, and is only about achieving targets.

Workers as humans should not resign themselves to unemployment being a weapon, to not being able to either love or be fulfilled by their work, not being paid enough to start and feed families, already huge inequalities still increasing, the poorest not being allowed to sit at a table big enough for everyone, peace and democracy being threatened. On these premises, the Europe of citizens has no future.

As a Christian workers' movement, we have set ourselves the task of protecting the dignity of work and humans whatever happens. For us, the human being is holy because he/she is an image of God and was created to be happy through work, and not to be reduced to an object. In this we follow the methodology of Joseph Cardijn: SEE, JUDGE and ACT, to assess, share and live the experiences of workers. Our aim is to encourage the involvement of citizens and co-operation with trade unions and other organisations. We try to integrate church, politicians and civil society in the debate on the life of workers, migrants, the poor and disadvantaged. On a European level, we develop this thinking during the EZA seminars we organise or take part in. As part of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the ILO, we also wish to express our ideas to the other Christian workers' movements in Europe, the European episcopate and the ILO, and to contribute to the debate. We believe in the abilities and sense of responsibility of every human being and in the representative structures of workers, to enable work in Europe to become a foundation of decent life in future. This is also the reason we do not shut ourselves away



José Augusto Paixão,

Portuguese, 73 years old, married, was already involved in very different activities when he was eleven. At the age of 18 he started his military service and signed on for four years in the Portuguese navy. When he was 22, he began working in a textile factory, where he ended his active professional career as head of the administration. Other activities: 18 years as a trade union leader and head of a co-operative; 20 years active in local government; member of various clubs and associations. Career as an activist: 1960 to 1963 member of the JAC (Catholic agricultural and rural youth movement), 1963 to 1967 member of the Catholic Seafarers' Federation, 1968 to 1971 member of the JOC (Catholic young workers), since 1971 member of the LOC/CWM (Christian workers' movement), including as group co-ordinator and regional representative on a national level, co-ordinator of the dioceses, national treasurer and member of the national management, since June 2013 national co-ordinator.

from immigration and see it only as a threat to our prosperity. In the end, the values we treasure today arose from the encounter with other nations and cultures.



EZA
wishes you a
Merry Christmas
and a
Happy 2019

November saw the international Web Summit Conference in Portugal on the topics of technology, digitisation and trade. However, it was only rarely that the focus was on the consequences for work and workers. The conference participants forgot that without work a human being

cannot realise himself/herself, does not contribute to social development, and has no economic means to survive.

It is the view of LOC/MTC that society has to re-evaluate the principles it trusts in order to focus on a new humanism and

a new culture of encounter and responsibility, and to give work in the digital age the dignity that enables a fair aspiration for happiness. *José Augusto Paixão* ■

Elections for the EZA Council Luc Van den Brande new EZA President

At their General Assembly in Bucharest on 24 November 2018, the members of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) unanimously elected as the new EZA President the former Belgian Minister for Employment and Work and former Prime Minister of Flanders, Luc Van den Brande. Luc Van den Brande, who had also presided over the Committee of the Regions and the EPP/CD group of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, followed Bartho Pronk, former MEP, who had led EZA for seven years as President and was no longer candidate for personal reasons. Bartho Pronk was appointed EZA Honorary President for his achievements.

Likewise re-elected unanimously in their offices were Co-President Piergiorgio Sciacqua (Italy) and Treasurer Dr Norbert Schnedl (Austria). Seven Vice-Presidents, six further members and three Auditors were also elected.

EZA Secretary-General Sigrid Schraml was likewise confirmed by the new Council for another four years in office. At its constituting meeting, the Council co-opted Prof. Dr Franjo Topic (Croatia) into the body.

The individual members of the new Council:



Honorary Presidents:

Leo Pauwels, Belgium; Bartho Pronk, Netherlands

President:

Luc Van den Brande, Belgium
Co-President: Piergiorgio Sciacqua, Italy

Treasurer:

Dr Norbert Schnedl, Austria

Secretary-General:

Sigrid Schraml, Germany

Vice-Presidents:

Bogdan Hossu, Romania; Maria Reina Martin, Portugal; Herbert Metzger, Germany; Veselin Mitov, Bulgaria; Józef Mozolewski, Poland; Janina Švedienė, Lithuania; Joseph Thouvenel, France

Further members:

João Paulo Branco, Portugal; David Cervera Olivares, Spain; Paolo Cesana, Italy; Panagiotis Gkolfis, Greece; Bjørn van Heusden, Netherlands; Fritz Neugebauer, Austria; Carien Neven, Belgium; Prof. Dr Franjo Topic, Croatia

Auditors:

Bert van Caelenberg, Belgium; Alfonso Luzzi, Italy; Heidi Rabensteiner, Italy

Victoria Znined ■

Thanks to Bartho Pronk



Piergiorgio Sciacqua, Co-President of EZA, thanks Bartho Pronk for his commitment as EZA President

On behalf of the whole EZA network at the General Assembly, Co-President Piergiorgio Sciacqua expressed his thanks to Bartho Pronk for his two terms of office as President. For seven years, Bartho Pronk had been a prudent President of EZA who had tirelessly attended countless seminars put on by EZA members and stood for the unity of the network in all its enriching diversity. In Bartho Pronk's period of office, EZA had admitted 15 new members from six countries into its network. The smooth transition of the position of Secretary-General also occurred during his term of office.

Bartho Pronk thanked the members for the seven years he was able to give to EZA and also promised to carry on contributing to the network as Honorary President.

The General Assembly also thanked the Council members who will no longer be represented in the new Council for their many years of commitment to EZA: Josep

Calvo, António Matos Cristovão, Diomides Diomidous, Søren Filbiger, Silviu Ispas, Dr. Gabriele Stauner, Josef Vella, Imre Palkovics and Roby Schadeck.

Sigrid Schraml ■



Standing ovations for Bartho Pronk, who handed his office as EZA President over to Luc Van den Brande after two terms of office. Pronk will still be closely associated with EZA as Honorary President

The new EZA President: Luc Van den Brande

The graduate lawyer, born on 13 October 1945 in Mechelen/Belgium, practised law for many years and was Associate Professor (Professor extraordinarius) at the Catholic University of Leuven/Belgium. From 1977 to 2009, he held various political offices: as a member of the Belgian House of Representatives, the Flemish Parliament and the Belgian Senate. From 1988 to 1992, he served in the Belgian government of Martens as Minister of Employment and Labour. From 1992 to 1999, he was Prime Minister of the government of the Flanders Region.

At present he is inter alia a member of the EU Committee of the Regions and Special Adviser to the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, for outreach to the citizens.

In his inaugural speech, the Christian Democrat (CV&D) emphasised “I am



The new EZA President Luc Van den Brande during his inaugural speech at the EZA General Assembly

happy to come home to a network where workers' rights are key”. For him as a Christian, the gospel is the constant source of inspiration and the human being at the core of all action: “all different, all equal, all unique in an inclusive society”. We are challenged as democrats to move in an open, pluralistic society in

which the “ethics of conviction” and “ethics of responsibility” challenge each other.

Van den Brande referred to the pending challenges relating to the European elections 2019, the new Multiannual Financial Framework, Brexit and the creation of a social Europe, challenges he would like to face together with the EZA members and members of the elected bodies. “Europe shall be social or shall not be”, Luc Van den Brande warned. Sigrid Schraml ■

Welcoming address by the Romanian President Klaus Werner Iohannis

at the General Assembly of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA)
on 24 November 2018 in Bucharest, Romania

Thank you for the invitation and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on all the work you are doing to strengthen democracy in the European Union by helping to solve or alleviate the problems faced by European workers.

Today, the European Union is at a crossroads. The European agenda is marked by multiple challenges and uncertainties, some of which have roots in the past, and others that are the fruit of recent developments. In both cases, solutions can only be reached by consensus, by European institutions and civil society organisations working together to address the challenges posed by the current socio-political climate. A strong Europe means a prosperous, secure Europe – a Europe that is close to its citizens, that is economically competitive, and that is grounded in its shared values of solidarity and social justice, in its respect for democratic principles and for fundamental human rights and freedoms. If we all embrace these principles, I am convinced that the everyday crises that now seem complicated will be resolved.

As you well know, Romania is in the final stretch of its preparations for taking over the presidency of the Council of the European Union. This is a defining period for the future of the European project, which cannot be conceived of in the absence of common values and shared interests. Your presence in Bucharest today not only proves that this project is an important one and that it is being followed with great interest, but also provides us with the optimism needed in order to fulfil this mandate.

For the first time since joining the Union in 2007, Romania, in the framework of its Presidency of the Council of the EU, will have to manage several major challenges: Brexit, the negotiation of the Multiannual Financial Framework post-2020, and the issue of migration. Moreover, the next elections to the European Parliament will



also be held in the first semester of next year. These are only a few of the most important issues that I hope we will be able to address with seriousness and efficiency, in order to contribute to the strengthening of the European project. A successful Romanian Presidency means, at the end of the day, concrete results for European citizens. However, beyond concrete projects and approaches, my hope is to restore European citizens' optimism.

This ambitious goal, however, requires a collective effort to find solutions for a strong European Union that can adapt and change to meet the aspirations of future generations. That is why, in its difficult mission for 2019, Romania attaches special importance to European social dialogue. Through our seriousness and professionalism, we must set an example for others – an example coming from a young, modern, developed EU Member State, which is aware of its rights and responsibilities with regard to the management of the European labour market.

One of Romania's priorities is to strengthen the cohesion of the EU by promoting solidarity, competitiveness and connectivity. In order to achieve this key objective, actions related to employment and to the

strengthening of social rights will play an important role. The development of the digital sector is also fundamental to economic progress and efforts must be made to turn the European Union into a world leader in this area. I believe that your involvement in all these projects, and throughout the upcoming period, is crucial. That is why I rely on your expertise, which I hereby wish to emphasise and recognise today.

The event you are attending today takes place only a few days before the 100th anniversary of the unification of all Romania's provinces, a day of great celebration for us Romanians and for our country. In these 100 years, Romanians fought, and sometimes laid down their lives, for a modern and democratic Romania, while European integration was one of the most important projects of the last century. Therefore, as the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, said recently, this is not just a Romanian celebration, but a European celebration.

Economic growth, democratic consolidation, and the free movement of people are just some of the benefits that EU membership has brought us. Romania is

strongly committed to the European principles and values, and Romanians do not see their future lying outside the European Union. That is why our efforts will be directed towards consolidating the European project by strengthening democracy

and the rule of law, fostering respect for citizens, and promoting fundamental freedoms.

Finally, I would like to congratulate you once again on organising this event and I

assure you that you will find in me a partner who is committed and focused on the problems you are looking to solve.

Kick-off seminar of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) in Bucharest

The situation of young workers in the European labour market – between Millennials and NEETs – was the focal issue of the EZA kick-off seminar, which was held in Bucharest/Romania from 22 to 23 November 2018, organised in conjunction with EUROFE-DOP (Europese Federatie van het Overheidspersoneel) and with the financial support of the European Union. Some 100 representatives of workers' organisations from 26 European countries gathered to exchange ideas on this and on the core issues of the EZA 2019 education programme.

Social dialogue in Europe

Jörg Tagger, Head of the "Social Dialogue" unit of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, delivered the European Commission's appreciation of the work of EZA as partner of the Commission. He said the exchange of ideas between workers' organisations and EU institutions was very important, as it led to greater political acceptance. Tagger gave a synopsis of the European Commission's current social dialogue projects, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, for better balance of family and job, or the social minimum protection of workers. A European Labour Authority to be created would pool information in future, he said.

Young workers in the European labour market

Adriana Ciacăru from the Youth Committee of the European Trade Union Confederation described the ETUC's initiatives on the situation of young people in the labour market and the huge problems young people still had to enter the labour market. Dr. Andreea Mitan, lectur-

er at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, gave an overview of studies on the Millennials and also identified special qualities – such as creativity, flexibility, quick thinking – as well as less positive characteristics – for instance, being rather impatient, unstructured and overestimating oneself –, that could result in conflicts at work.

The discussions focused primarily on the importance of vocational training. Workers' representatives from various European countries emphatically described the problem, for instance, that the crafts were racked with worries about recruiting young workers and that in several professions it had become hard to find skilled workers. The reasons for this included the gulf between the labour market requirements and the wishes of young people on the one hand, and their acquired skills on the other hand. A long-term strategy of governments and workers' organisations could remedy this. Another criticism in this connection was that European initiatives in particular were often not set up for long enough. It was urgent to counter the cliché that the dual vocational training system was only something for school failures. The entry into professional life also had to be made easier for young people.

Marie Hermans, Director of the new EZA member Centre Européen du Travail (CET), described the phenomenon of NEETs from her personal professional experience and presented several CET initiatives. She said that the question of employment and purchasing power associated with it put young people in insecurity and frustration, because they could not accomplish their dreams that seemed achievable in the near future. They also had the feeling of living in a world that

did not care for them but left them to fend for themselves.

One focus of the discussion was the Youth Guarantee, which was primarily intended for less skilled young people. Pro bono training mentors were also discussed as a further practical example. It became clear from this experience that young people often lacked self-confidence. What is more, it was not just about the training place but also about fair pay. Pay had to be a living wage. The point was also made that the situation in the different countries of the EU was not always comparable one-to-one. Another important point referred to was the issue of the "brain drain" affecting mainly the countries of Eastern Europe.

A panel discussion also underlined that it was crucial young people be given the feeling that they were heard, respected and guided, but not patronised.

The current nationalistic ambitions in Europe were deemed a great threat. The fear was expressed that European cohesion could be lost. The lack of solidarity between those with work and those without it was also denounced.

EZA 2019 education programme

The EZA 2019 education programme will comprise 70 seminars. A key feature will be the series of seminars on the strategies of European institutions, as part of which the projects on the focal issue "The future of a social Europe – methods and perspectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights and other social policies" will be given academic assistance. In 2019, there will also be co-ordinated projects on the topics of "Youth employment", "Future of work – changing labour relations" and "Safety and health at work". Further top-

ics will be “Capacity building”, “Inclusive labour markets”, “Integration of migrants and refugees in the labour market”, “Working and living in a digitised world” and the “Contribution of workers’ organisations to social justice in Europe”. EZA is also campaign partner of the “Healthy Workplaces – Manage Dangerous Sub-

stances” 2018-2019 campaign by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) in Bilbao.

In his closing remarks, EZA President Bartho Pronk wished wisdom, intelligence and understanding for the world. EZA, he said, could play an important

part in this with its education work. He regretted that politicians sometimes seemed to forget workers’ rights, and wished workers’ organisations in Europe a better resonance on national and European level. *Victoria Znined* ■

Information visit by Detlef Seif at EZA

Member of German Parliament (Bundestag) Detlef Seif visited the Secretariat of the European Centre for Workers’ Questions (EZA) in

European Affairs Committee and the working and social labour group of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag should be intensified.

During his visit Detlef Seif also informed about the progress of the Brexit negotiations. He was concerned that a disorderly exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union could occur. This would have very negative consequences for both sides, up to the endangerment of companies and thus the endangerment of jobs.

Herbert Metzger ■



From left to right: Herbert Metzger, Vice-President of EZA, Detlef Seif, Member of the German Parliament, Sigrid Schraml, Secretary-General of EZA

Königswinter in November 2018. Herbert Metzger, Vice President of EZA, and EZA Secretary General Sigrid Schraml informed the member of the Bundestag about the work of EZA and the 73-member organizations in Europe.

Detlef Seif, the chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag Committee on European Union Affairs, was very interested in the work of EZA. Seif was impressed by the extensive educational offer. Each year around 65 international seminars are held on topics relating to the world of work and social protection. In addition to the contents, experiences with the cooperation of the different member organizations were discussed.

In view of the challenges in Europe, it was agreed that contacts with Members of the

IMPRINT

Published by

EZA

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Photos

EZA, LOC, Romanian presidential office

Frequency of publication

Four issues a year



This publication receives financial support from the European Union.