

## EDITORIAL



Dear Readers,

Two years ago, nine months after the Brexit referendum, the British Prime Minister Theresa May applied in Brussels to leave the EU. The 29th March 2019 was supposed to be the

triumphant day on which the United Kingdom – after 46 years of membership – wanted to cast off the shackles of the EU, towards a new glorious national future. In some other EU member states, populist neo-national parties are on the same track. When this newsletter appears in early April, there will presumably have been an agreement on a deferral of Brexit, and so more months of uncertainty. The drama the mother country of parliamentary democracy has provided in the last three years cannot be surpassed in the irresponsibility by the political players. From the outset, the agenda was set not by political creative drive but by manipulation and destruction, opportunistic power politics and party-political intrigues. In light of the shok-

king tragedy, we must not doomfully prophesise the downfall of democracy straight away. However, nor should we be surprised if in the coming European elections even more people turn away with horror from this disgraceful spectacle and the EU. It looks like a tragicomic ray of hope that, triggered off by 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, children and teenagers are now taking to the streets the world over for more climate protection and reminding adults of their responsibility.

It is up to us to show in the European elections in late May that Europe is grown up!

Sigrid Schraml  
Secretary-General

## Interview with Luc Van den Brande, new President of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA)

**Luc, you were elected EZA President by the EZA General Assembly on 24 November 2018. How are you after the first months in office?**

In the first contacts with our members during the General Assembly in Bucharest I felt strongly they were very concerned about the challenges that workers face. Many conversations have helped me understand EZA's mission better. In the last few months, it has become evident to me how fascinating our network is and how large the commitment supported by a very dynamic team. In the meantime, I've had several meetings with Piorgio, Norbert and Sigrid to work out the major aspirations together, and I attended the European Social Week in Milan. I have a good feeling about going to work with renewed vigour. In a word: "Back to my roots".

**For many of our members you were a new face. When did you actually encounter EZA for the first time?**

I already knew EZA from reports and publications. But it was even more through personal contacts in the social movements because of my longstanding European commitment that I knew what EZA stood for. I was certainly a new face for many members, but for my part I saw many faces familiar to me again.

**What in your opinion are the biggest challenges for EZA in the next few years?**

We are living in unusual times in a globally changing complex world in which it is often hard to feel safe where we are. People feel that many things are slipping away from their control. This causes a loss of trust. This trust can only grow back if we become aware that we have to do things together. If we build a society based on shared values and objectives. A society that champions peace and security; that makes people stronger and educates them to dialogue in a growing intercultural context in which everyone has his/her place. The digital revolution, robotics and artificial intelligence are part of

this change. EZA has to focus on all of this in its analyses, seminars, conferences and in its discussion process.

**What would you as EZA President like to achieve in the next four years?**

In recent years, EZA has come a long way and made many efforts as a network of and with quality. We have to carry on building on this foundation. But new priorities are shaping up: a cross-sectoral approach, raising our impact on European society, addressing not only insiders but also people interested in our views, finding links with the local levels, focusing our discussions on topical events, concentrating on young people that have no work, and on the quality of the working conditions of those who have work, tailored communication including digital channels, collaboration with other stakeholders. Feed the debate from our seminars and put it onto the political agenda: more prosperity, more welfare and decent work for everyone. In a nutshell, make EZA even more relevant.



**How do you regard Europe today just before the coming European elections? What must happen in your opinion to create a truly social Europe?**

This year the Europeans can elect the European Parliament. Unfortunately, we saw in the last parliamentary elections that many voters made no use of their right to vote. It is essential, though, that everyone, especially every worker, takes a view and casts his/her vote. It's even more important now, as populists and extremists are currently emerging who are jeopardising and endangering the democratic content of the union. They exploit issues like social inequality, insecurity and fear, and try to win over voters with disinformation. There's a lot at stake, and we must therefore be vigilant. Only then can we be sure that the social initiatives of EU Commission President Juncker and in particular EU Commissioner Marianne Thyssen continue to take shape with the backing of the European Parliament and the Council. The concrete implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which is based on solidarity, is just as vital as a drive for genuine social dialogue.

**Would you like to tell us something about your family?**

As a child I grew up in a family with a great deal of societal commitment. In my own family my wife has always been the

mainstay for our three children and children-in-law. And, of course, we are proud of our six grandchildren: like all granddads and grandmas we think they are unique and fantastic.

My wife was a language teacher for a while, and also turned this into her voluntary work by giving refugees language lessons. She threw herself into a broader social honorary office and she taught catechesis in the parish. Together with friends we give our time to a centre for disabled children. Over all the years my wife has been my most loyal, as well as most critical supporter and ensured I kept my feet on the ground, which was sometimes necessary.

**What are your hobbies?**

I have never had much time for hobbies. I like walking and think I can take nice photos (although others are not always convinced).

**What book can you recommend?**

John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath" is still a unique book for me: even today, facing the challenge of refugees and migrants, it holds up a mirror to man's eternal search for a better life.

Recently I really enjoyed reading "The Eight Mountains" and "Il ragazzo selvatico" by Paolo Cognetti, pure stories about the interaction between man and nature.

**What music do you like most?**

Johannes Sebastian Bach's passions, cantatas and cello concertos still move me, they are timeless and connect heaven and earth. The small Romantic in me also makes me enthuse about the overtures and nocturnes of Frederic Chopin.

**What would you take with you to a desert island?**

My wife, my memories and... a pair of binoculars.

*Questions: Victoria Znined* ■

## EZA seminar in Bucharest: the Future of Work – 100 years of ILO

To make a contribution to the 100th anniversary of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) was the aim of the seminar in Bucharest on the “Future of Work”, held in collaboration between Cartel Alfa and EZA with the involvement of ACTRAV (Bureau for Workers’ Activities) from 4 to 6 February 2019.

The participants exchanged ideas on the political and economic general conditions of the future world of work in a global context and discussed what values religious communities thought should play an important part in organising work in the future.

The recently published report from the Global Commission on the Future of Work commissioned by the ILO was presented, and there followed a discussion in which the corresponding challenges were described and possible solutions proposed. The report describes in particular what efforts are required to put humans and the work performed by them at the heart of social and economic policy and of entrepreneurial action. In this regard the importance of human skills is highlighted and the necessity of investing in strengthening the institutions of work as well as in decent and sustainable work is presented.

The significance of the ILO even 100 years after its foundation was emphasised and it was stressed that trade unions – despite the non-binding nature of the ILO conventions – had many instruments at their disposal to champion workers’ rights effectively worldwide.

The outcome of the seminar includes a **Declaration**, which acknowledges the findings of this report and urges us to help create a better future – as the title of the report reflects. *Sigrid Schraml* ■

## Challenging times for work and social dialogue

The 7th European Social Week (ESW) took place in Milan from 14 to 16 February 2019. More than 100 participants from 21 European countries addressed the great social, economic and societal challenges facing Europe for which realistic solutions must be found.

To start, the Chair of the “Notre Europe” institute and former Prime Minister of Italy, Enrico Letta, gave a synopsis of the current political situation in Europe.

EU Commissioner Marianne Thyssen said in a video message: “With our European Pillar of Social Rights we have put social matters at the top of the European agenda. (...) Our societies face rapid changes. Globalisation, climate change, demographic changes, migration and digitisation - we cannot stop these developments. But we should not submit to them passively. We must shape these changes – be the architects of our own future.”

The Member of the European Parliament Claude Rolin, former Secretary-General of the Belgian Confederation of Christian Trade Unions ACV-CSC, said: “Workers’ organisations have a special role when it comes to making the anticipation of changes a key part of their negotiations. The topic of lifelong learning must be at the heart of this, as it is not acceptable for companies to lay off a part of their staff



From left to right: Paolo Cesana, Managing Director of FLC, Luc Van den Brande, President of EZA, Claude Rolin, Member of the European Parliament, Herbert Metzger, President of the ESW, Carlo Costalli, President of MCL, Enrico Letta, former Prime Minister of Italy and President of Notre Europe, Massimiliano Sabbadini, President of FLC

in order to recruit employees with profiles that fit the new technologies better, because they have not invested in training with regard to the prospects of these changes”.

### Transformation of work in the future

This first content block of the ESW contained three focal topics. The first focus was the search for an answer to the

question: “Will we still have work for everyone?” John Hurley, Research Manager at Eurofound, answered this question with a whole series of statistics and figures. He explained that “the level of employment and working hours performed in Europe and the USA has never been as high as now”. The second focus addressed the topic “The Future of Work” with an input from Emmanuel Agius of the University of Malta. Agius highlighted the ethical aspects of work: “It is not the technologies themselves, it is our soci-

al, financial and economic policy and practices that determine what technologies can and should do, whether inequalities increase or decrease, and if people can live off their wage.” The third focal topic was introduced by Elke Hannack, Vice President of the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) and Vice Federal President of the CDA, who dealt with the impact of digitisation on new forms of work: “A domain that shows how much digitisation changes the world of work is the so-called platform economy. (...) we certainly know two things: it is the form of ‘work of the future’ which in every respect is different from a so-called standard employment relationship.”

### Social dialogue urgently required

This second session looked at the reality and importance of social dialogue. Five trade union representatives from Bulgaria, Poland, Spain, France and Italy under the leadership of Jan Van Peteghem (HIVA/Belgium) debated the necessity of giving fresh impetus to social dialogue, both in their own country and on a European level. In most countries that is not an easy task. The trade union coordi-

nation levels often do not exist or vary in approach and tradition. The lack of a constructive dialogue tradition with representative workers’ organisations makes collective coordination very difficult. Yet between the lines of this debate there is a palpable positive motivation not to give up the struggle.

### Growing inequality

In the third content block, Antoine Hérouard, auxiliary bishop of Lille and Chair of the Social Committee of COMECE, the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union, stressed the necessity of greater equality, primarily in work, income, wealth and hence human prosperity.

Bea Cantillon, Director of the Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy at the University of Antwerp, presented an academic analysis of the growing inequality with clear proposals for politicians with regard to drafting more efficient measures in this area: “We must work simultaneously in several areas: social security, fair taxes, social investments, regulation of new forms of work and social econo-

my. As a start, though, two of the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights can be put into practice: principle 14 on the minimum income combined with principle 6 relating to an adequate minimum wage.”

*Leo Pauwels, Honorary President EZA* ■

## Promote in-company learning



*Dr Jeff Bridgford, King's College London, who supported the project with input on the topic, speaking at the final conference in Berlin*

**I**n Europe we are confronted with a fundamental change of work, economy and society. Digitisation on the one hand and climate change on the other are propelling a radical technological revolution in entire sectors that will entail huge restructuring of production processes and employment. Trade unions are committed to opening up the possibility of high-quality gainful employment and personal development for everyone. First

and foremost, this calls for better education and support services to train workers and the unemployed who have to keep up with new and also increasing skills needs. In future, a good level of education over the entire working life will be increasingly important for secure professional development.

Whether workers educate themselves depends quite significantly on if they get

advice, if professional prospects develop as a result, if the learning times are integrated in the work process, if they are released for it or given financial assistance. In companies it is hence necessary to create a new understanding of qualifications and developing skills. Work organisation, on-the-job training and personnel development must be co-ordinated and enhanced.

What implementation steps this requires was the focus of a conference held by the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) in November 2018. Together with European trade unions from Romania, Italy, Bulgaria, Latvia and Germany, it was the culmination of a two-year project called “SACADOS – Supporting Anticipation of Change and Development of Skills”. The project was managed by the DGB’s training institute *Berufsbildungswerk / bfw – Unternehmen für Bildung* and it was financed by European Commission funds.

Building on the exchange of experience of trade union partners and visits to companies in the countries, strategies were developed on how in-company learning could be supported by trade union co-determination.

At the conference, Elke Hannack, the DGB Vice President, said: "The workers' viewpoint must be of equal value in on-the-job training. It is about information, it is about consultation and also about the involvement of the workers' representatives. It cannot just be about we trade unions reacting when the management regards training as necessary. We want to be informed beforehand and contribute our ideas and demands.

We must come up with strategies to expand further training. It begins with identifying the need for training in a firm, covers training measures for the workers, and ends in systematic person-

nel development. And what succeeds in one company may gladly be copied throughout the sector."

A toolkit was developed, geared to workers' representatives in the companies: works councils, shop stewards and also learning mentors. They must be given assistance to take part in information, consultation and participation procedures in the company.

The following topics are addressed in this:

- The workers' rights to further training
- Rights and opportunities of the company representation of interests
- Possible financing
- Good arguments for further training
- Company examples of good practice
- Instruments for analysing the need for further training

At the end of the conference it was clear: further training doesn't happen by itself. Anyone in any soapbox speech can go on about the great value of education. That is useless. What is needed are regulations, agreements and qualification collective agreements on training. European and national recommendations were stipulated in the "Sofia Manifesto". For more information, go to:

[www.bfw.de/gfw/forschung-und-projekte/SACADOS](http://www.bfw.de/gfw/forschung-und-projekte/SACADOS)

*Hans Ulrich Nordhaus, Head of the European Education Policy Unit at DGB* ■

## Focal topics of the EZA 2019 education programme

The topics of "Youth employment", "Future of work – changing labour relations" and "Health and safety at work" are the focus of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) 2019 education programme. In addition, the topic "Strategies of European institutions" is being continued, this year with the focus on "The future of a social Europe – effects and prospects of the European Pillar of Social Rights and other social policies". The special project for workers' organisations in the Western Balkans is likewise being continued.

Other topics are "Integration of migrants and refugees into the labour market", "Inclusive labour markets", "Capacity building", the "Contribution of workers' organisations to social justice in Europe" and "Working and living in a digitised world".

The detailed education programme is available as of now on the [EZA website](http://www.eza.org).

The first seminar is organised by MOSZ (Munkástanácsok Országos Szövetsége) on "Enhancing communication strategies



for workers' organisations", held from 4 to 5 April 2019 in Budapest/Hungary as part of the EZA special project for workers' organisations in the Western Balkans. *Victoria Znined* ■

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