



MAGAZINE

HOUSE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

100 YEARS AWAY

Serbia wants to join the EU and is fighting against corruption.

THE WESTERN BALKAN 2020

An overview.

OPINION

The Western Balkan should be part of the EU.

REPORT

EZA Conference in Brussels with EU
Commissioner Nicolas Schmit.

INTERVIEW

EZA President Luc Van den Brande about the expectations
for the new European Commission.

OUTLOOK

How Danish union KRIFA trains good managers and thus reinvents itself.

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Dear Reader,

We are proud to present the first edition of the new EZA Magazin - in the future, information about our activities and the developments and stories from the countries of our members will be presented in a new style and layout, three times a year. This edition also includes a special segment on the countries in the Western Balkan - with reports, info graphs and opinion articles. Also included is a report from our Brussels conference, as we discuss the question of a "Social Deal" for Europeans with new EU Commissioner Nicolas Schmit and members of the European Parliament. So much for the good news. At this time, all of us are affected by the coronavirus crisis, which is spreading across Europe and the entire globe. Unfortunately, we have also had to cancel many of our seminars in order to protect our participants and stop the spread of the virus. Because health and safety is our top priority. Of course, we hope that we will be able to win the fight against the virus and end this crisis, and that we work together to contain the consequences for the economy, and hence the impact on workers. Let us hope that this crisis will be the beginning of increased collaboration. Let us act in solidarity across Europe.

I hope that despite all these events, you will nevertheless enjoy reading our new magazine. Give us your feedback, share the magazine, and pass it on if you like.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy Easter, and most of all good health!

Yours sincerely,

Sigrud Schraml
Secretary-General



CONTENTS

5

100 YEARS AWAY:

Serbia wants to join the EU and is fighting against corruption.

8

THE WESTERN BALKAN 2020:

An overview.

10

OPINION:

The Western Balkan should be part of the EU.

11

REPORT:

EZA Conference in Brussels with EU Commissioner Nicolas Schmit.

17

INTERVIEW:

EZA President Luc Van den Brande about the expectations for the new European Commission.

19

OUTLOOK:

How Danish union KRIFA trains good managers and thus reinvents itself.

20

IMPRINT

100 YEARS AWAY FROM THE EU

How precarious working conditions in the public sector threaten Serbia's accession to the EU.



VIEW OVER BELGRADE

SECOND CLASS EMPLOYEES, CORRUPTION AND INEFFICIENCY - THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN SERBIA IS FIGHTING PROBLEMS ON EVERY FRONT. IT COULD EVEN SIGNIFICANTLY SLOW DOWN THE COUNTRY'S ACCESSION TO THE EU. ABOUT A COUNTRY THAT MUST RE-LEARN HOW TO MANAGE ITSELF.

TEXT: Lukas Fleischmann
PHOTOS: Lukas Fleischmann

Belgrade - It is an architectural exclamation mark for Serbia's capital city of Belgrade and comes with the glamorous title "Belgrade Waterfront". Several modern high-rises can already be seen on the shores of the Save, and more are set to join them. This new city district demonstrates how Serbia wants to get away from the cliché of being the poor ex-Yugoslavia and move towards a modern western nation with luxury penthouses for the wealthy on the shores of the river - and ideally as a member of the European Union. But even the most ambitious project cannot hide the fact that Serbia has serious problems. One of them is the precarious employment situation in the public sector. "People working in the public sector are viewed as second-class workers. It is a cliché that has managed

to survive the Communist era," says Miodrag Gubijan. The lawyer and trade unionist works in the municipal administration of his home city of Prokuplje (population: approximately 28,000). "Even with a university degree, jobs in public administration do not pay more than EUR 470 a month, with up to EUR 240 for those with a secondary school diploma. How can you live on this salary?" The consequences of these low wages include personnel shortages leading slow administration processes, not to mention rampant corruption. According to the corruption index of Transparency International, Serbia is in 87th place behind Turkey, Benin and China, and has continuously deteriorated since 2015. Not a good advertisement for a country that has been an EU candidate country since 2012.

Reforms and a free economy

In 2015, the Serbian government started a radical reform of the public administration sector. The goal: streamlined organisations, increased efficiency, less nepotism. "I come from the municipal self-government sector," says Bojan Stević, State Secretary in the Ministry for Public Administration in the government of President Aleksandar Vučić. "We want to use these reforms to fight for transparency. We have introduced a completely new administration system." Before, it was not even clear how many people actually worked in the public sector. By reducing personnel, the government hoped to achieve a more efficient and modern administration organisation. "Of course it is not easy to let so many people go, but it was necessary." And what can one do against rising corruption? "Corruption also exists in other countries, and it does not fall under my responsibilities in this department," says Stević.

More administration for the EU

An efficient administration sector is also a key criterion for the EU Commission to improve the country's chances of joining the EU, as demon-

strated by the EU Progress Report 2019 for Serbia. But progress has been very slow. The problem according to labour associations: More work for the same or even less money, and not enough staff. "That is not a successful formula for a state of law," says Fritz Neugebauer, President of EUROFEDOP (European Federation of Public Service Employees). The governments of the Western Balkan - and not just in Serbia - must enter into an honest and respectful dialogue with the employees.

In addition to reducing staff numbers, a ten-year hiring freeze also slows down public administration. "The average employee is 50 years old," says Miodrag Gubijan, member of Serbia's Trade Union Congress, "and then they institute a ten-year hiring freeze? This reform is set up wrong." Another initiative of the Serbian government was the introduction of an academy for the public sector. It was supposed to train employees and in particular teach them digital skills that were supposed to make their work easier. "But what we do is to train people who join the private sector because it pays much higher wages," says Gubijan. In addition, the public sector also faces shortages of some very basic items such as computers or printer cartridges. Economist William Bartlett from the London School of Economics investigated the impact

“WE ARE NOT FIVE BUT 100 YEARS AWAY FROM JOINING THE EU.”

– MIODRAG GUBIJAN.

of these reforms since 2015. The Western Balkan expert also paints a bleak picture: “At first glance, the reforms look like an economic success. But when you look more closely, you see that while there are more workplaces in the private sector, they do not make up for the lost workplaces in the public sector.” In addition, it is evident that the quality of education has significantly deteriorated since 2015, because the education system is now more inefficient. “We are not five but 100 years away from joining the EU,” says Miodrag Gubijan. He calls on the hiring freeze to be lifted, for laws in the reforms to be changed, and that employees are paid better wages. State Secretary Bojan Stević promises these salary increases but says in the same breath: “No matter how high the salary, it will never be enough.”

MIODRAG GUBIJAN

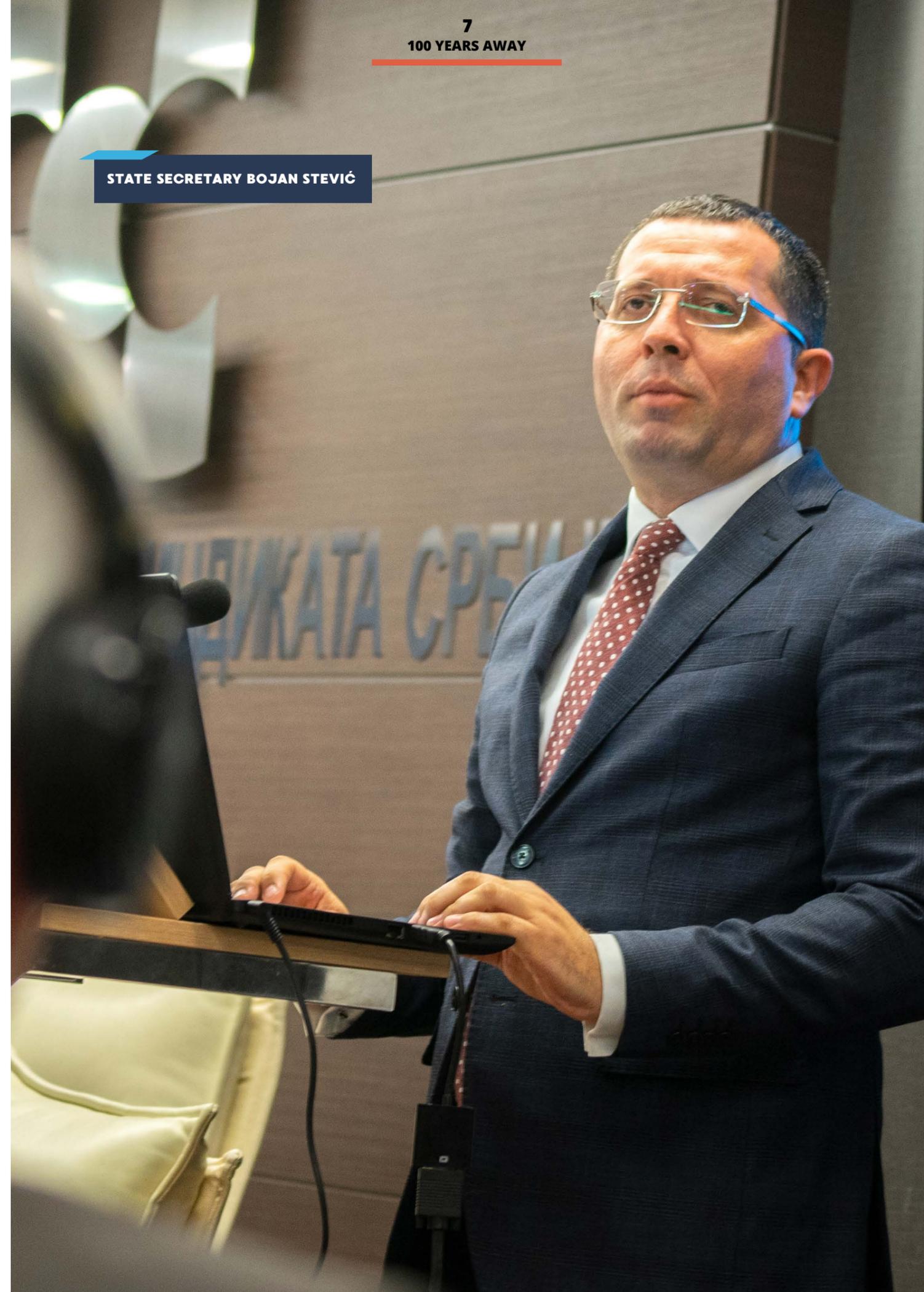


A country at the crossroads

Every year, more than 40,000 Serbs leave their country to live in the EU or elsewhere around the globe. The country's population, and hence the pool of potential workers for the public service, has been in decline for many years. The situation is especially bad in rural areas outside of the big cities, such as in Gubijan's home city of Prokuplje. In some areas, it is exceedingly difficult to find people to work in the public sector, he laments, and “sometimes I am actually happy that we are not part of the European Union yet, because otherwise even more people would leave.” That does not seem to be true for the newest “Belgrade Waterfront” model district, because the fancy flats are in high demand and are sold at dizzying prices. But with their wages, it is certain that public sector workers will not be among the buyers.

EZA member EUROFEDOP (European Federation of Public Service Employees), which is based in Brussels (BE), organized a seminar on this topic in Belgrade in December 2019. The goal of the seminar was to strengthen the resilience of workers in the Western Balkan, to promote the social dialogue and to develop possible solutions for the precarious conditions in Serbia's public sector through knowledge sharing. This article was prepared in the course of the seminar.

STATE SECRETARY BOJAN STEVIĆ



THE WESTERN BALKAN AND THE EU - THE STATUS QUO IN 2020



The stabilisation and association process (SAP), which was initiated in 1999, forms the background for the relationship between the European Union and the countries in the Western Balkan. In 2003, at a meeting of the European Council, it was confirmed that all SAP countries are potential EU candidate countries. The Commission's strategy for the Western Balkan, which resulted in the declaration of Sofia, was approved in 2018. At the same time, the countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia differ greatly when it comes to meeting the conditions for joining the EU. The current status:



Bosnia and Herzegovina

This country is a potential candidate country that is probably the furthest away from joining the EU. It has not achieved any real progress to date. This development is also due to the fact that the EU takes a critical view of the human rights situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2016, the country applied for EU membership but - as noted by the European Parliament - no real progress has been made due to the "inability of the Bosnia and Herzegovina parliament to agree to the internal rules of procedure for its semi-annual meeting with the European Parliament".



Montenegro

The country that gained its independence in 2006 applied for EU membership at the end of 2008. The accession negotiations started in 2012. Of the 32 negotiation sections, 25 had been started by the end of 2018. In the same year, the EU Commission released a plan according to which Montenegro could join the EU by 2025, although this schedule is considered very ambitious.



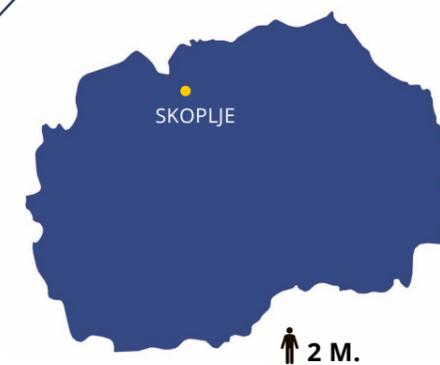
Kosovo

The situation in Kosovo is most similar to that in Bosnia and Herzegovina as regards the progress of negotiations. The country, which unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in 2008, is not recognised by five member states of the European Union (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain). At the same time, some progress has been made over the years. The "Treaty of Brussels" between Priština and Belgrade is considered ground-breaking. Since then, membership in the EU has been closely tied to the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo that is required by the EU, which is supposed to result in a comprehensive and legally binding treaty on the normalization of relations.



Albania

The country applied for EU membership in 2009. The Commission noted some progress in 2012, and the country became an official EU candidate country in 2013. In June 2018, the Council approved the potential start of accession negotiations with Albania in June 2019. Because of a controversial veto by France, the promised negotiations could not go ahead, however. Critics allege that the judiciary and constitutional reforms in the country are stuck.



Republic of North Macedonia

North Macedonia is considered a sort of model student for the Western Balkan when it comes to joining the EU. The country already received EU candidate country status in 2005. At the same time, this process was thwarted for a long time due to a conflict with Greece over the country's name. The dispute was settled in 2019, when Macedonia became North Macedonia. The Commission has been recommending the start of accession negotiations since 2009. Similar to Albania, a veto by France prevented the start of these negotiations, which led to a government crisis and early elections.



Serbia

Serbia already obtained candidate status in 2012, after an agreement was reached with Priština regarding the establishment of a regional Kosovo representation. The section on the rule of law was opened in 2016. Similar to Montenegro, a possible accession date of 2025 applies to Serbia, which however is also considered ambitious. The dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo remains the main point of conflict. In addition, corruption in the country is still considered much too high.

OPINION: THE WESTERN BALKAN BELONGS TO EUROPE

The EU must maintain its credibility - and it cannot forget that other powers from other parts of the world are watching very closely how this region, which is clearly part of Europe, is treated by the EU.

TEXT: Norbert Klein

For around eight years, EZA has promoted the social dialogue in the countries of the Western Balkan that are candidates for the European Union (EU). The challenges vary greatly, and they range from governments' hostile stance towards the social dialogue and the still on-going transition from state-managed companies to the private sector, to an unstable social partnership that is characterised by a fragmented union landscape on one hand and weak employer organisations on the other hand. The legacy from the time of the former socialist Yugoslavia is still a burden for the successor countries. It is important to remember the violent way in which the states that previously made up the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia came into being. This painful process, which resulted in many deaths, injuries, displacement and losses, is still very much alive in the minds of many people. Even Albania is undergoing a no less significant transformation that affects the entire society. The social dialogue in the Western Balkan takes place in a general environment of political, economic and societal transformation, and therefore it has not become an established part of people's attitudes and actions.

It is also evident that there are enormous challenges with regard to further development, the adjustment of the self-image of workers' organizations to the requirements of today's societies, and the establishment of a corresponding positive image through credible action. It is only natural that against this background, many workers in the Western Balkan have

longed and still long for a new political framework that promises democratic co-decision making, rule of law, viable life opportunities and finally stable wealth. Therefore it is all the more puzzling that the EU is now once again asking the countries of the Western Balkan that wish to join the EU to remain patient, especially after the European Commission announced a "Strategy for credible expansion perspectives and an increased commitment of the EU to the Western Balkan" just two years ago. Particularly Albania made a serious effort to create the conditions for starting the accession negotiations. Macedonia worked with Greece to settle the dispute about the country's name and now calls itself the Republic of North Macedonia. The settlement of this dispute was long regarded by the EU as a condition for starting the negotiations to join the EU.

And then French President Emmanuel Macron blocked the start of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia in November 2019. There is a growing sense of resignation in the region. Therefore it is important that EZA, with its special project for strengthening the social dialogue in the Western Balkan, continues its work in this area and also maintains a feeling of belonging, if the EU as a whole starts to express doubts about the timing and the conditions for future candidates. MdEP Lukas Mandl from Austria recently summarised the situation as follows: It is not the countries in the Western Balkan that must be patient, but rather the EU must hurry up to integrate these countries in the EU.

EU COMMISSIONER NICOLA SCHMIT AT THE EZA CONFERENCE

Demanding a Social Deal.

EU COMMISSIONER
NICOLA SCHMIT



TEXT: Norbert Klein

PHOTOS: Lukas Fleischmann

When the new European Commission took office, the expectations were high - particularly with regard to European social policies. The previous Commission under Jean-Claude Juncker and Marianne Thyssen left a very good track record for this area of politics. EZA too wondered about the direction that the new EU Commission would take. Therefore EZA issued invitations to its large conference "European Social Deal - Where are we today?" in Brussels. Prominent guest speaker: Nicolas Schmit, EU Commissioner for Employment and Social Rights, who said: "I will listen to you, I will work with you." One hundred participants from 20 European countries discussed current issues regarding the

future of a social Europe as well as social and worker policy initiatives - including a European minimum wage - which were suggested by the new European Commission (EC) under Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. The venue for this event was the Representation of the Free State of Bavaria to the European Union. Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Employment, Social and Integration pointed out that when it comes to digitization and climate change, the EU is currently in a transformation phase, and that it will be important to ensure that this phase is fair and that particularly the social aspects of these changes are taken into account, so that we all can emerge as winners from this process. In addition, it

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARY
VESSELIN MITOV

THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM OF THE STATE REPRESENTATION OF THE FREE STATE OF BAVARIA.

is important to focus on gender equality and youth employment and develop a strong strategy to fight against poverty. "This means that we need fair minimum wages that enable people to live dignified lives, and unions and workers' organizations must be promoted and strengthened."

"We will keep up the pressure"

A first response came from the International Secretary of the Bulgarian union PODKREPA and EZA Vice Chairman Vesselin Mitov. He is also a labour representative in the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and emphasised the importance of implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. Mitov noted that growing uncertainty with regard to labour market access, employment relationships and inequality in the EU are major challenges for European policy-makers. To fight against involuntary migration within the EU, he calls for dignified minimum wages and dynamic

wage growth, which can only be promoted when a positive climate regarding the social dialogue becomes commonplace. In addition, he also advocated an improved youth guarantee and called on political leaders to quickly respond to these challenges. Speaking to the Commission, he said: "We will support you. But we will also keep up the pressure." In the opinion of Liina Carr, Association Secretary of the European Association of Trade Unions, a stronger social Europe, as outlined in the European Pillar of Social Rights (ESSR), represents an important contribution to Europe's future and an effective means for promoting democracy and fighting against racism and xenophobia. Carr emphasised that unions will always advocate for maintaining the rule of law in the EU. "The fight against poverty is an urgent problem for the EU. Poverty knows no borders. Minimum wages that enable people to lead dignified lives do not exist in many places," says Carr. Wages that guarantee such a life can only be found in labour agreements. Gender equality can only be achieved when there is a change in the deep-rooted ways of thinking that are pervasive in our society.

MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
CINDY FRANNSSEN AND DENNIS RADTKE



Demands from the European Parliament

Members of the European Parliament (MEP) Cindy Franssen and Dennis Radtke called on the European Union to accelerate the implementation of the ESSR and to provide separate financial resources. It cannot be that funds from the European Social Fund (ESF) will be re-dedicated for the “Just Transition Fund” in the context of the Green Deal. Besides the question of fair minimum wages in Europe, it is also important to strengthen the binding effect of collective agreements in Europe, emphasised Dennis Radtke. The social dialogue needs a re-start. In light of the imminent job losses that will occur as a result of the “Green Deal” initiated by Commission President von der Leyen, MEP Radtke called for the creation of good, new workplaces. A new directive for coordinating the social security systems is in the preparation stage. It is supposed to describe general principles and set out payments for unemployed workers, families and for long-term care. In addition, options for combining the claims of different member states are supposed to be created, along with provisions against benefit fraud and misunderstandings. When it comes to the coordination of minimum wages in the EU, the Commission is primarily concerned with protecting workers who do not have a lot of negotiating power. The calculation of minimum wages raises

the question of what a fair wage is, how the social partners are included in the binding calculation of minimum wages, and the extent of the coverage. In the opinion of workers’ organizations, the minimum wage must be based on the actual cost of living; a sole focus on a percentage-based median wage leads to excessively low minimum wages, particularly in low-wage countries. The EU calls for a legally binding instrument that regulates minimum wages in Europe. The workers’ organizations believe that they can act as an impetus for positive wage developments. At the same time, covering as many workers as possible with labour agreements, which are negotiated in the social dialogue, is also a non-negotiable requirement.

Education in the era of digitisation

The last discussion item of the conference was education in the era of digitisation: The digital age requires that education systems - both with regard to their focus as well as the contents and the infrastructure - address the extent to which digitisation has penetrated all areas of life and initiate the appropriate steps. With regard to the work environment, qualitative changes can be observed in the labour market. The social dialogue comes under pressure due to the shifting balance of power.

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR WORKERS’ QUESTIONS (EZA)



European Social Deal - Where do we stand today?

The future of social Europe at the transition between Juncker and von der Leyen Commission

CONFERENCE
BRUSSELS
3/4 MARCH 2020



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“THE COMMISSION WANTS TO WORK WITH US”

EZA President Luc Van den Brande about the EZA Conference in Brussels



EZA PRESIDENT
LUC VAN DEN BRANDE

INTERVIEW: Lukas Fleischmann

PHOTOS: Lukas Fleischmann

EZA: Luc, in 2020 EZA is working on many new initiatives. One of them was the conference in Brussels, which became a meeting place for representatives from politics, unions and workers' organizations, as well as NGOs. What was your impression of this event?

Luc: It really was an innovation for us. Our central secretariat is located in Königswinter, which is a nice place for EZA's daily work and an inspiring environment for thinking about the future of Europe. At the same time, all things connected to European policies mostly happen in Brussels - not just with regard to the contacts with politicians and institutions, but also the contacts to civil society and social organisations. It was very important for us to show a presence in the European capital.

EZA: Despite the coronavirus stop in the European Parliament, the conference was attended by many interest representatives from the different fractions of the European Parliament, the European Commission and other institutions and organisations. What does that tell you about the interest in our organisation?

Luc: It demonstrates the importance of social policy issues such as the European Pillar of Social Rights to all of Europe. I think that the previous Commission under Juncker, and specifically under Commissioner Thyssen, did excellent work in moving these policy areas back to the fore. I am also convinced that this work will be continued by the new Commission under von der Leyen. The fact that EU Commissioner Nicolas Schmit attended the conference shows the importance of collaborating with organisations such as EZA.

EZA: Let us talk briefly about EU Commissioner Schmit's speech: What was your impression of his speech?

Luc: First, we should not compare the new Commission with the old one. But Nicolas Schmit also knows that there are great expectations for the new Commission, himself included. But I am convinced that he wants to not just consolidate but also improve the European Pillar of Social Rights. I had the

„OFTEN, THERE ARE CERTAIN ANIMOSITIES FROM ONE COMMISSION TO THE NEXT. I DO NOT HAVE THAT IMPRESSION IN THIS CASE. THE SUCCESSFUL WORK WILL BE CONTINUED.“

impression that it is very important to him to enter into an intense process of exchange with the member countries at the regional and local level, and to also collaborate with social organisations. Often, there are certain animosities from one Commission to the next. I do not have that impression in this case. The successful work will be continued.

EZA: What are the challenges faced by the new Commission?

Luc: There are of course many challenges. One item that Nicolas Schmit mentioned to me personally is the ability to prevent or overcome the division between western European countries on the one side and the central-eastern European member states and the countries of the Western Balkan on the other side. What we are witnessing is a transition period, and Ursula von der Leyen's Green Deal is just one item of many. I think that we need a Social Deal that ensures a transition process that is fair and just for all Europeans.

EZA: How does the new Commission view EZA?

Luc: Commissioner Schmit made it clear that he wants to work with us and listen to us. We have members who are in the midst of European society. We represent the bottom-up principle in the European Union. I think that with our extensive experience, there is nothing that stands in the way of a close collaboration. But of course we want to see not just words and declarations of intent by the Commission, but also actions.

“GOD ARBEJDSLYST” - POSITIVE WORK CLIMATE IN DENMARK

Why a positive leadership style not only makes for healthy workers but also represents the future of unions.

TEXT: Lukas Fleischmann
PHOTOS: KRIFA

Larnaca/Cyprus - Imagine a colleague who returns to his desk clearly upset after a meeting with the boss. Or a colleague who does not feel valued by her line manager. Not an uncommon situation. Frequently, the problem is not even the work per se, but the fact that workers lack a sense of purpose in their work, even though it is key to employee satisfaction and the financial success of an organisation. “Purpose means that the current moment is precious, and the future full of promise,” says Hans Henrik Knoop, a Danish psychology professor. At Danish EZA member KRIFA, purpose has become the top priority. Using the principle of “God Arbejdslyst” (Good work climate), the union wants to improve the work climate and also establish a future model for union work per se. KRIFA President Søren Fibiger Olesen says: “Satisfaction with work is one of the biggest needs of workers in the modern workplace. But many workers experience bad leadership styles and a negative work-life balance. If KRIFA, as a modern union, can take up this issue, we will not only improve working conditions but also become more relevant for our members.”

Self and external image

Comparing the self-image and external perception of bosses and their employees, we often see a wide gap between the two. A multi-year study conducted by KRIFA demonstrates that while 80% of bosses would give themselves a good reference, this opinion is not shared by 61% of employees. And asked whether employees would hire their own managers, 42% said “No”. This means that the idea of an emphatic boss, who is aware of the needs of employees and encourages them, is often an illusion, even though occupational scientists agree that people with low opinions of their bosses are far less productive. “We have engaged consultants who help our members to deal with stress involving line managers and work-life balance issues,” says Olesen. “At the same time, we have also developed the ‘Gais’ app, which

measures job satisfaction and provides suggestions for improvement.” The results of the study and the data collected by the app not only underline the importance of having an emphatic boss, but also that KRIFA’s approach seems to be heading in the right direction. “We have changed our self-image as a union, as well as our services and approaches. Collective bargaining by itself is not good enough anymore,” says Olesen. “Now we also act as a well-being service provider for our members.” Coaching is used to communicate insights to managers or directly to employees.

The four attributes of a good manager

Meaning and direction, participation and freedom, attention and feedback and the boss as a role model - these are the four attributes of good leadership style. “Because if a boss has all of these attributes, employees experience the most job satisfaction, which creates a positive work climate,” says Olesen.

Role model for other countries

“At the start of this new mission, we and our members were very excited - something that has continued to this day,” says Olesen. Many had not quite figured out what this was really all about. “We had to find our own way, and of course the journey still continues.” In fact, at the beginning the model is best suited for countries with good working conditions, wages and working hours. “It is important to note that you cannot simply copy a model and apply it in a different country,” says the KRIFA President. But: “God Arbejdslyst can become an inspiration for workers’ organizations in other countries to develop their own unique approach to become more relevant to their members.”



KRIFA PRESIDENT
SØREN FIBIGER OLESEN

In February 2020, EZA member KRIFA (Kristelig Fagbevægelse), which is based in Copenhagen (Denmark), organised a seminar on this topic in Larnaca, Cyprus. The seminar focused on good leadership style, and why good managers are not only good for employee health but also make sense economically.



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