



MAGAZINE



EZA KICK-OFF SEMINAR 2025

In cooperation with RS BOFOS

THE BATTLE OVER WORKING HOURS

How Greece is trying to compensate for labour shortages with a six-day week

"SIX DAYS A WEEK IS A STEP BACKWARDS"

Interview with DAKE president Antonis Karras

FOUR VOICES FROM FOUR DECADES OF EZA

EZA-NEWS

ISSUE 03/2025

Dear friends, dear readers,

Barely four out of ten countries in the world respect democracy, the rule of law and human rights as fundamental principles of a modern society. Independent functioning of the three powers – the legislative, executive and judiciary – as ‘hard power’, is therefore important. But that is often not the case.

The ‘fourth power’, the media, stands for information, interpretation and debate. They also have an important watchdog function in a democracy. But they are increasingly falling short of making the distinction between facts and opinions. As a result, they contribute to fake news. Public broadcasters play a major role in ensuring the quality of information.

The ‘fifth power’, the midfield, is the capstone in giving groups a voice and a place in society: entrepreneurs, health workers, those responsible for education, cultural entities. And not least social organizations and trade unions, but these are criticized for being outdated and no longer relevant. There is no justification for this, nor should we allow ourselves to be persuaded otherwise, because it is precisely under their pressure that more social justice, welfare and security have been achieved.

Their role remains essential for actively encouraging people to participate in policy through social dialogue. During our kick-off seminar in November in Belgrade, we talked about ‘competitiveness with a social dimension’. On that occasion, I pointed out that given the importance of social dialogue, it should no longer be limited to the individual or collective field of work, but should be expanded on a broader scale. If we recognise the importance of competitiveness and innovation, this cannot be left to the public authorities alone. The major challenges will only be solved if they are tackled together, with everybody acting responsibly. Social peace through dialogue is crucial to keep the European economy competitive and to increase productivity, as well as ensuring quality jobs and social justice.

The confused times that we face remind me of Stefan Zweig’s penetrating book: ‘The World of Yesterday’. In it, he describes what Vienna’s golden age meant for the good life, art, culture, prosperity and well-being before the disruption of the Interbellum, and the subsequent rise of Nazism with all its horrors.

We have enjoyed a long period of peace, certainty, international cooperation and attention to solidarity. But linking up with the certainties of the past will not work for the future. And there is no room for nostalgia. Strong action is needed on the basis of our fundamental values, not where the law of the strongest counts in a spiral of power and often inhumanity.

The midfield and civil society must take their role in this. Not as ‘hard power’ but as a ‘soft power’. And in doing so, the Christmas season can serve as an inspiration for us with the disarming and defenceless child, born into poverty. Not to develop an army and oppress people, but to bring peace, cooperation and solidarity to humanity.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas in which the Light may shine again over the world, and a year of good health, commitment and hope.

Luc Van den Brande – EZA President



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EZA KICK-OFF SEMINAR 2025 IN COOPERATION WITH RS BOFOS

Competitiveness with a social dimension: workers' priorities for Europe's future



EZA KICK-OFF SEMINAR 2025 IN BELGRADE, SERBIA

TEXT: Ljuban Bulić
PHOTOS: Katrin Brügggen

The EZA Kick-Off Seminar 2025 was held in Belgrade on 20–21 November, bringing together experts, representatives of trade unions and other workers' organisations and academics to discuss how Europe can enhance its competitiveness while safeguarding workers' rights and the social dimension of the EU. The seminar opened with a strong message: competitiveness has returned to the top of the EU agenda, but it cannot be separated

from social cohesion. EZA President Luc Van den Brande reminded participants that Europe must not abandon its own model: "Competitiveness is not an end in itself, but a path towards sustainable and inclusive prosperity." The European social model – grounded in fair working conditions and social dialogue – remains a strategic advantage rather than an obstacle.

Setting the stage – the EU Competitiveness Compass

This introductory session featured insights from Marco Buti, Professor of Economic and Monetary Integration at the European University Institute and former Director-General for Economic and Financial Affairs at the European Commission, who underlined that competitiveness is synonymous not with deregulation or cost-cutting, but with Europe's ability to remain technologically and economically relevant in a world shaped by the US and China.

The EU Competitiveness Compass aims to mobilise investment, strengthen the Single Market and accelerate strategic partnerships in energy, raw materials and advanced technologies. However, participants stressed that the Compass still underestimates the importance of job quality, worker involvement and social dialogue – essential pillars of the European model. This set the stage for the debates that followed: can Europe accelerate innovation without weakening its social foundations?

What kind of competitiveness for what kind of Europe?

Speakers stressed that Europe must avoid having to make a false choice between "green ambition" and "economic pragmatism." The real challenge lies in balancing short-term pressures with long-term transformation.

Marija Bartl, Professor of Law at the University of Amsterdam, argued that lowering labour standards will not restore Europe's competitive edge. She called instead for a broader "imaginary of prosperity" based on access to essential services, strong social infrastructure and a shared sense of future security. Evidence from EU-OSHA highlighted that unsafe workplaces cost the EU 3.4% of GDP, while every euro invested in occupational safety returns 2.20 euros – confirming that safe and healthy workplaces are a driver of sustainable competitiveness.

Closing the innovation gap

The panel opened with Reinhilde Veugelers, Professor of Managerial Economics, Strategy and Innovation at the KU Leuven, who emphasised that Europe can reconcile decarbonisation, growth and social cohesion only by "activating its innovation machine to full capacity". Europe's long-standing "innovation paradox" – excellent research but weak scale-up – remains a core challenge.

Clark Parsons, CEO of the European Startup Network, underlined the central role of startups. Their contribution to the EU's GDP has tripled in the past decade, yet fragmented regulatory systems still hinder growth. He highlighted the potential of a 28th Regime – a unified corporate framework allowing startups to scale across Europe.



JOCHEN METTLEN, PRESS OFFICER, GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF CHRISTIAN TRADE UNIONS OF BELGIUM (ACV-CSC)



MARGO MOLKENBOER, POLICY ADVISER ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS, CNV, AND MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE (EESC)

Participants also emphasised that AI is transforming labour markets, with medium-skilled workers most exposed. Algorithmic transparency, data protection and timely reskilling were identified as minimum conditions for a just digital transition.

Shaping Europe's future: EPSR 2.0 as a Pillar of Competitiveness

Kevin Flanagan, Director of the St. Antony's Centre, warned that Europe cannot build competitiveness on rising pressure, worsening mental health and in-work poverty. Technology increasingly dictates work pace and pay, especially in platform and logistics sectors. The contribution from Enrique Saludas, Secretary for Communication of the Spanish trade union USO, highlighted how industrial transition can succeed only when workers are fully involved. After the closure of the Nissan plant in Barcelona, years of mobilisation enabled 1,700 workers to move into new industrial projects – demonstrating the importance of transitions that create both high-skilled and broad-based industrial jobs.

Srđa Keković, Secretary General of the Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro, stressed that the forthcoming EPSR 2.0 must serve as a core pillar of

Europe's competitiveness. For Western Balkan countries, the EU Competitiveness Plan represents a major opportunity – but only if enlargement progresses, social dialogue is strengthened, and workers gain access to quality jobs, affordable housing and company-level participation.

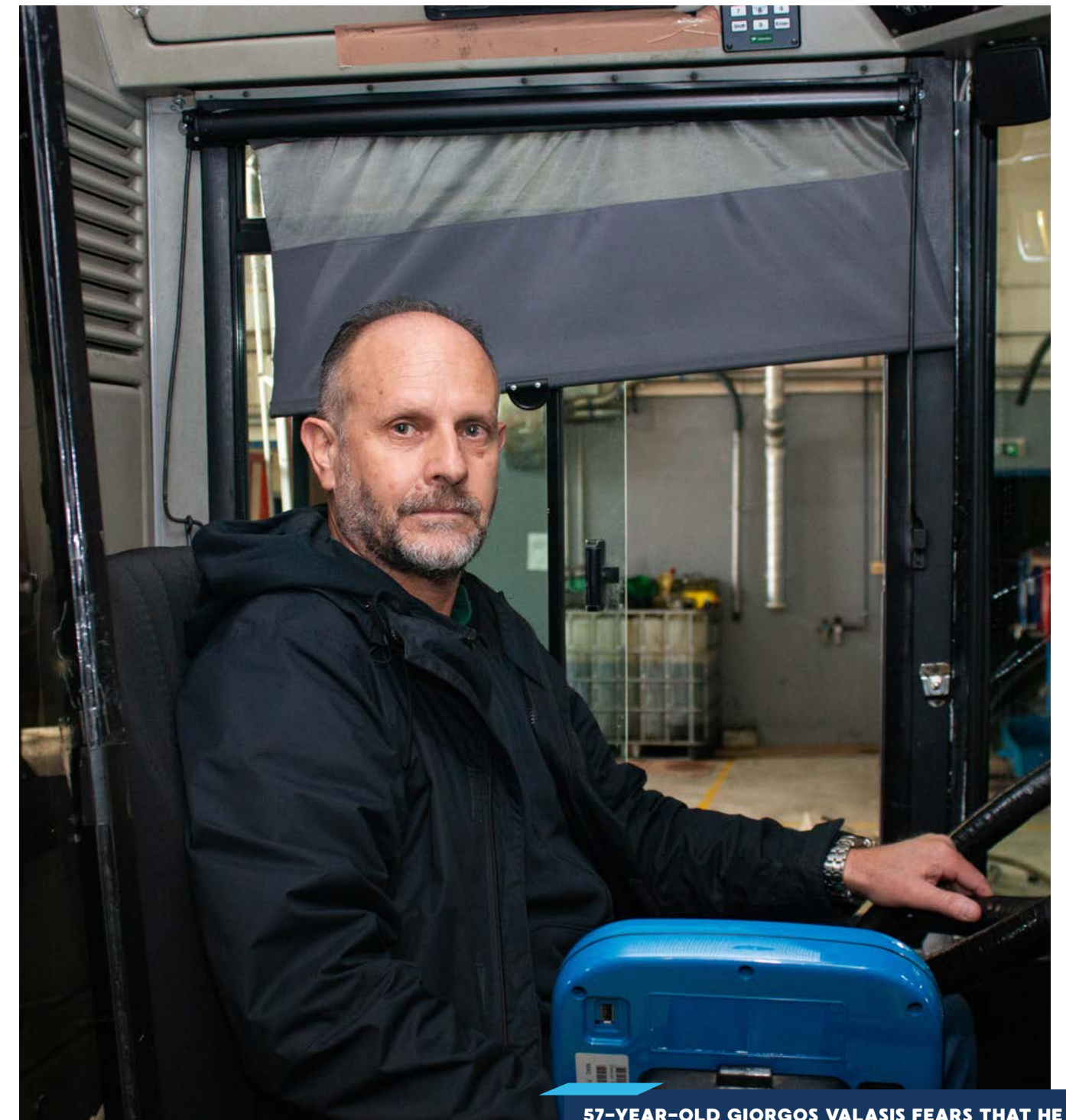
Conclusion

In the closing address, Pier Giorgio Sciacqua, Co-President of EZA, placed the seminar in the historical continuum of European integration, recalling Alcide De Gasperi's description of Europe as "a civilisation in motion, which cannot afford pauses or abdications". He underlined that today's central challenge is no longer the balance between state and market, but the balance between the human and the machine. Digital systems must not reduce workers to data points. Citing Pope Leo XIV, he urged: "Be the architects of the governance of artificial intelligence, for technology can never replace what makes human relationships truly human."

Sciacqua concluded that Europe's competitiveness will remain sustainable only if anchored in human dignity, social dialogue and ethical technological governance – values that EZA and workers' organisations have long defended.

THE BATTLE OVER WORKING HOURS

How Greece is trying to compensate for labour shortages with a six-day week



57-YEAR-OLD GIORGOS VALASIS FEARS THAT HE WILL HAVE TO WORK 13-HOUR DAYS IN FUTURE

TEXT: Ralph Würschinger
PHOTOS: Ralph Würschinger, Carsten Graf

Since the financial crisis of 2008, Greece has experienced several general strikes. The most recent was in October 2025. Workers are outraged by the hours they have to work and the general pressure put on them. Greece needs to find answers to questions concerning the labour shortages and the shrunk GDP. The government is trying to address these issues by making working hours more flexible. Intended as an incentive for higher wages and performance, this now threatens to turn into excessive demands on employees. The latest reason for concern: the six-day week.

Athens, November 2025. “You have to stay focused at all times”, says Giorgos Valasis, pointing to the roof of a public bus behind him. On top of it are long metal rods: pantographs. “You’re not only paying attention to the road itself and to the traffic, but also making sure that the pantographs are in contact with the overhead line.”

Giorgos Valasis has been driving trolleybuses in Athens for 15 years. Eight hours a day, six days a week. He took the day off to talk about his work at the depot. Meanwhile, colleagues bustle through the dark hall, washing buses, clearing rubbish from the inside and manoeuvring them. “The working conditions are very tough. There is a lot of traffic, cars often block the way, and the buses are overcrowded because there aren’t enough of them. Working for eight hours is too much.” He is referring to the hours that he and his colleagues have to work every day. Their only break of 20-30 minutes is often cancelled, he says, because the schedule is disrupted by traffic. By the end of his shift, Giorgos Valasis is completely exhausted. But now, the 57-year-old fears that he may be asked to work additional hours on top of the current eight. This is due to a law passed by the Greek government in October 2025: Law 5239/2025, entitled ‘Fair Work for All’.

Overtime to combat the skills shortage

Although it is intended to streamline bureaucracy and simplify recruitment, it is the law’s passages on working hours that have made headlines across European news outlets. From now on, employers can allow employees to work up to 13 hours a day, provided they agree. This makes Greece the first EU country to permit 13-hour days. Employees will receive a 40 per cent salary bonus for additional hours. This implies that the maximum working time per week is 48 hours and the maximum overtime per year is 150 hours. Employees can take advantage of this regulation for up to 37 days per year. The law, which is one of a series of reforms in recent years aimed at strengthening Greece’s economy, will come into force on 1 January 2026. Like many EU member

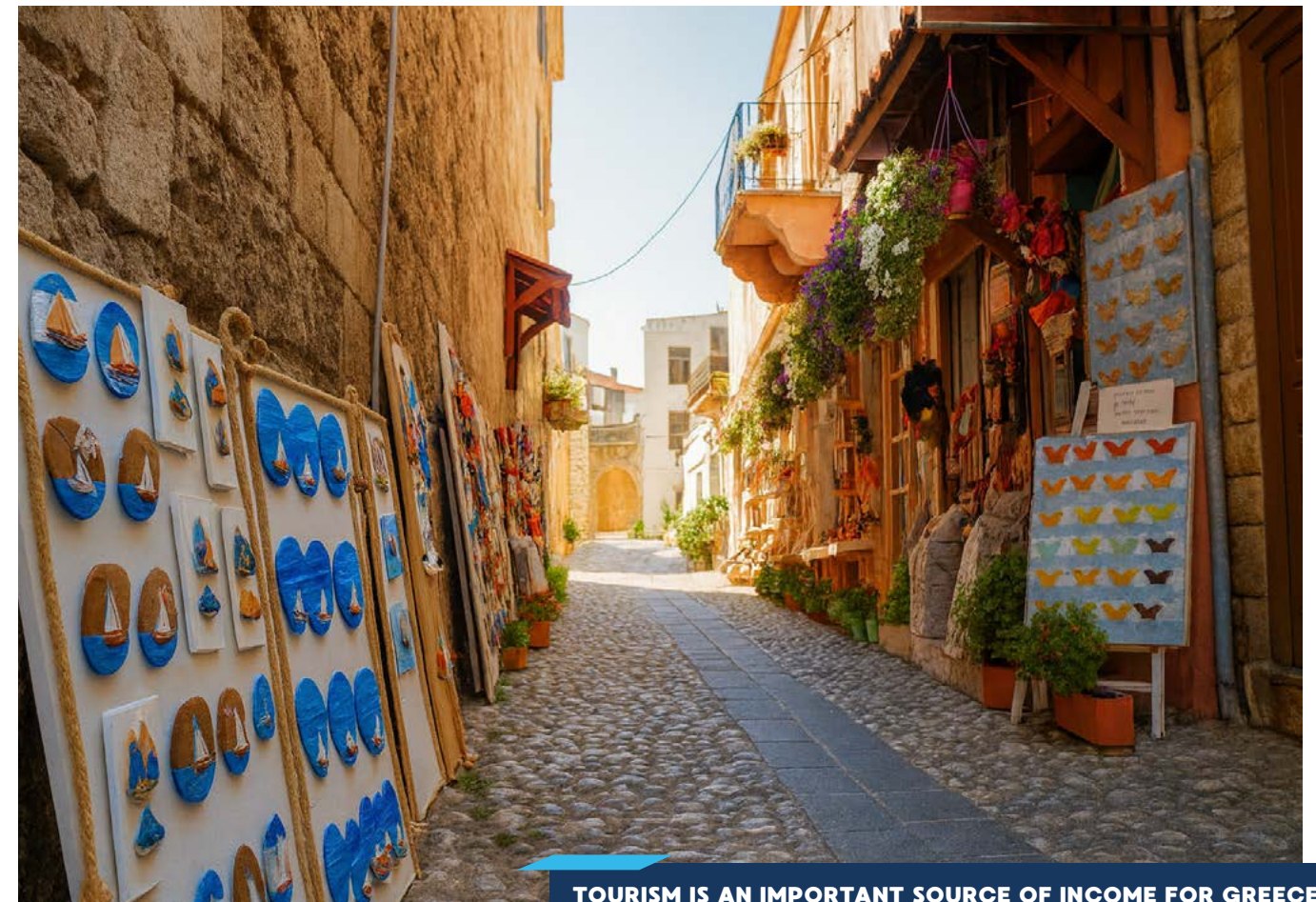
states, Greece is also experiencing a skills shortage. Many young people emigrated during the memorandum period. To fill gaps in production, agricultural and tourism, the government has put a focus on increasing working hours in conjunction with financial incentives such as bonuses and special payments.

Since 2024, certain 24/7 sectors have been allowed to offer their employees an additional working day per week (Law 5053/2023), provided the employee consents and the company is experiencing high demand. No details are given to explain when such a situation is justified and when it is not. According to the Ministry of Labour, these measures ensure that people who want to work more can do so. They are no longer dependent on a second job, and overtime that was previously paid under the table is now remunerated officially. In this way, the two laws also intend to combat undeclared work. This makes the Greek labour market more flexible than ever.

Legitimate flexibility

Back in 2005, a law was passed in Greece that made it possible to increase daily working hours by two. In 2021, a new law redefined overtime. According to the Ministry of Labour, it is now possible to work a four-day week without reducing the number of hours worked, meaning ten hours per day for a period up to twelve months.

However, critics argue that these laws obscure the real problem. Real wages in Greece are too low – the average income puts the country in the bottom quarter compared to other EU countries – and household incomes have fallen by 35 per cent since the financial crisis of 2008/09. A survey conducted by the Greek Labour Institute in early 2025 suggests that people do this ‘voluntary’ work out of necessity. According to the survey, 60 per cent of employees categorically reject a 13-hour working day. 70 per cent of those who already work long hours do so out of necessity, as they would otherwise be unable to make ends meet.



TOURISM IS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF INCOME FOR GREECE, BUT THIS SECTOR IS ALSO FACING A MANPOWER SHORTAGE

Greeks already work the longest hours per week in the EU. According to Eurostat, one in five people works more than 45 hours per week. In the name of flexibility and growth, the Greek government is following a global trend towards labour deregulation. This is in line with EU law. There is no upper limit on daily working hours. However, an average of 48 hours per week must not be exceeded over a period of four months. An 11-hour rest period must also be observed. However, a 13-hour day and the time spent commuting to work, not to mention an additional mandatory break, leaves little time for rest and relaxation.

Law passed without sufficient social dialogue

After presenting the draft in August 2025, the government initiated consultations with the social partners and opposition parties. But in reality, the time window was too short to take a proper look at the draft, says Antonis Karras, new president of DAKE, an EZA member organisation. “Unfortunately, there was no

meaningful dialogue. We asked for a prolongation of at least two months to submit comprehensive implementation proposals, but it was not given.” Antonis Karras would have liked trade unions to have played a role in drafting the law in order to completely erase the article about working 13-hour days, or at least to close ‘loop-holes’. DAKE’s approach was and still is to implement a sliding scale of overtime pay, starting at 40 per cent and rising to 100 per cent.

Nevertheless, the trade union’s requests for amendments were just partly incorporated into the final law, such as the provision that refusing to work voluntary overtime should not lead to discrimination against the employee. DAKE and the umbrella organisation GSEE are still opposed to the law. They have therefore repeatedly called for protests against the latest reform, resulting in a general strike all over Greece on 1 October. “The five-day week and the eight-hour day are significant achievements in Greece that required considerable effort”, says Antonis Karras. “The idea was that every worker could work eight hours, spend eight hours with their family, and sleep for eight hours.”

“UNFORTUNATELY, THERE WAS NO MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE. WE ASKED FOR A PROLONGATION OF AT LEAST TWO MONTHS TO SUBMIT COMPREHENSIVE IMPLEMENTATION PROPOSALS, BUT IT WAS NOT GIVEN.”

While he believes it is right that the new laws allow overtime for those who want it, he doubts that it will remain voluntary. He also acknowledges that there may be emergency situations in which employers demand more of their employees. “We believe that employers will not regard this provision as a maximum limit, but as a fixed legal limit on overtime”, says Karras.

Uncertainty among the population

There is great concern that individual employees who refuse to work overtime will be dismissed – even though the law states that this is not allowed – or will be deliberately burdened with recurring additional hours. The union fears that the lack of clarity in the law regarding what constitutes ‘urgent operational needs’ will result in workers having to work more on-call shifts – meaning longer hours and an additional day.

The idea of earning more by working longer hours does not appeal to bus driver Giorgos Valasis at all. “What’s the point of having more income if it puts me at risk of causing accidents and leaves me with no time to enjoy life?” For weeks, concerns about future overtime have been circulating through the bus company’s depot. If the 13-hour days are truly voluntary, none of his colleagues will agree to them, says Giorgos Valasis. However, he has also considered the possibility that it could become mandatory. In that case, as a union member, he will turn to DAKE for support. The union has mediated in his company before. “I will try to voice our concerns and

take it to a higher level, like GSEE, and make it visible. Because the problem is not only ours, it affects many sectors”, says Giorgos Valassis. Currently he is observing how the law will be implemented and executed.

A digital card against overtime abuse

“The 13-hour rule does not apply to bus drivers”, announces Konstantinos Karagkounis (Nea Dimokratia), Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Security, already indicating exceptions. In his opinion, there is still a lot of uncertainty about Law 5239/2025. “The law protects employees”, he says. “Without the control mechanism of the digital work card, there could be problems. But this way, everything is under control: how many days you work and how many hours per day.”

Greece introduced this card in 2022, initially applying it to banks and supermarkets with more than 250 employees. In subsequent years, it was extended to cover more sectors, including industry, catering and hospitality, and tourism. It is now mandatory for around two million employees. That is almost half of all employed persons (2024: 4.3 million workers). Working hours are transmitted in real time to a central system that the authorities can access to check for violations. According to Karagkounis, there are 90,000 checks per year. Penalties for violations amount to five-digit figures in euros. The Deputy Minister promises: “The digital work card means there are no more loopholes.”

On p. 12, you will find an interview with DAKE president Antonis Karras specifically about the introduction and reception of the six-day week in Greece, that came into force in 2024. He explains why the law favours employers over employees, and what the government should have done instead.

Incentives to combat demographic decline

However, legalising overtime will not solve Greece’s long-term problems. With a birth rate of just 6.6 babies per 1,000 inhabitants (source: Statista), Greece ranks at the bottom of the EU. The ongoing brain drain and slow integration of migrants do not bode well for the future. “The main task remains to find more workers”, admits Konstantinos Karagkounis. “One solution could be labour migration. Last year, more than 45,000 workers from third countries worked here.” He also wants to encourage more people to enter the labour market. He

points to successes in combating unemployment, which reached 18 per cent in 2019 and has now fallen to 8 per cent. However, Karagkounis can also imagine making the labour market even more flexible to attract skilled workers.

Law 5239/2025 will come into force in a few weeks. Time will tell whether it really offers more flexibility for employees and manages to make the Greek labour market more attractive or if it simply enables employers to demand more from their staff without solving any long-term problems.

CARSTEN GRAF | SPOKESMAN FOR THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF PSD BANK BRAUNSCHWEIG



More Information: The “We Work Europe”-Podcast

In this three-part podcast series, we speak to Carsten Graf, a bank executive who reduced his employees’ weekly working hours and introduced a four-day workweek. **“Since then, we have received five to six times more job applications than before.”**

The podcast examines the health impact of working longer or shorter hours together with the consequences for income levels, comparing them with the ‘Greek model’.

To listen to the episodes, simply scan the QR code or visit the following website: **we-work-europe.podigee.io.**

"SIX DAYS A WEEK IS A STEP BACKWARDS"

Interview with DAKE President Antonis Karras



ANTONIS KARRAS, NEW PRESIDENT OF DAKE (DEMOCRATIC INDEPENDENT MOVEMENT OF GREEK WORKERS)

TEXT: Ralph Würschinger
PHOTOS: Ralph Würschinger, Pixabay

Antonis Karras (DAKE, Greece) is concerned about losing the hard-won achievements of the five-day workweek. In 2023 the Greek government passed Law 5053 enabling certain sectors – mainly industry but also retail, agriculture, tourism and some services – to use a six-day workweek. This law is one of many reforms implemented by the government in recent years.

EZA: Mr. Karras, what prompted the introduction of the six-day workweek in Greece when companies in other EU countries are reducing the number of working days?

Karras: The so-called "six-day workweek" was presented by the government as a tool to address the labour shortage, primarily in industry and tourism, and to obtain accurate records of working hours with the ultimate aim of curbing undeclared overtime. However, in reality it is a policy that increases working hours without substantial increases in workers' income and may undermine established workers' rights.

EZA: Were you or other unions involved in the process in any way beforehand?

Karras: Law 5053/2023 was essentially passed without workers' participation, without consultation, without active social dialogue and without a substantiated impact study. The General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE – an umbrella organisation of trade unions representing non-public sector employees, with around 450,000 members, the largest in the country) was invited for an informational session, but not for a substantive social dialogue regarding the six-day work week. Although DAKE was also invited to this informational session, in fact we refrained from attending as we had submitted a memorandum opposing the immediate adoption of the law. We had requested an extension of at least two months to present comprehensive implementation proposals. The consultation on the law ultimately lasted only two weeks, and GSEE's proposals were only partially considered. The only proposal accepted by the ministry for inclusion in Law 5053 was the creation of a "digital work card" to monitor companies that violate both working hours and working days.

EZA: What are the general characteristics of a six-day workweek? How many companies, how many employees, and which sectors are affected by this law?

Karras: The law allows companies that operate 24/7 to ask their staff to work six days a week; a 40% increase is paid for the sixth workday and overtime in excess of eight hours is prohibited. Theoretically, the six-day workweek is optional, and many employees accept it to increase their salary. However, in practice, some employees are obliged

to accept it, experiencing workplace bullying, mainly with the threat of dismissal. It is not a general practice across all work sectors, but it creates a practice that may, in the future, encourage more and more employers to seek to include their employees in the six-day workweek.

EZA: How many DAKE members are affected?

Karras: A small but significant percentage of our members work in sectors where six-day workweeks are implemented. These are mainly members in large industries, public transport, and tourism. Officially and theoretically, six-day workweeks affect about a quarter of the entire workforce; in practice, they affect about a third of private sector employees in Greece. Similarly, they also affect the corresponding proportions of DAKE members.

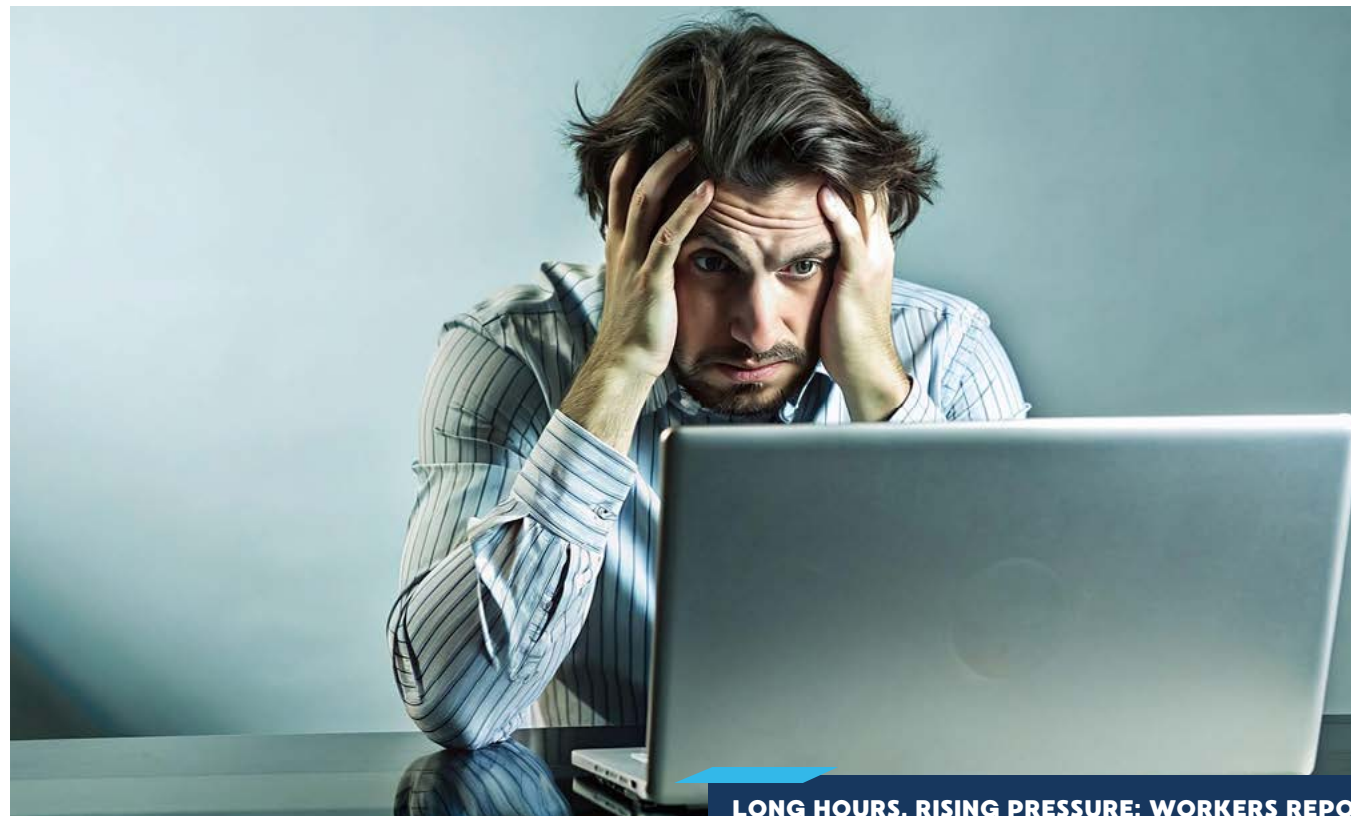
EZA: Another reason for passing this new law was to boost the GDP by increasing working hours. However, experts doubt that this will solve the underlying issue of low productivity. Greece has one of the lowest productivity rates in the EU. So how can productivity be increased in Greece?

Karras: Productivity is not increased by working more hours and more days, but through better organization, modern technology and incentives for innovation. An employee who feels secure and fairly compensated performs more and better. Productivity in Greece can clearly be increased by eliminating bureaucracy, maintaining transparency within the framework of competition, attracting investment according to European rather than third-world standards and combating unemployment by creating new jobs.

EZA: What is DAKE's position regarding the six-day workweek?

Karras: Our position is clear: we are against it. Working six days a week is a step backwards. Instead of boosting income and productivity through better wages, improved working conditions and training, the government is reverting to conditions of the previous century through such laws. We understand some employees believe they will benefit from this policy in terms of increasing their income. But in the long term, they will bear a far higher cost in terms of the psychosomatic impact.

FOUR VOICES FROM FOUR DECADES OF EZA



LONG HOURS, RISING PRESSURE: WORKERS REPORT EXHAUSTION UNDER THE SIX-DAY WORKWEEK

On top of this, we are afraid that such laws will encourage more employers to undermine the five-day eight-hour workweek with the government's blessing. When in other European countries the social dialogue examines proposals for three or four days of work, in Greece we are still trying to protect the five days and eight hours of work that we conquered 40 years ago during the 1980s.

EZA: Have you been approached by members who work six days a week and are experiencing problems?

Karras: Yes, some of our members have turned to the DAKE and reported problems with exhaustion, overload and pressure. In such cases, we provide legal and union support and intervene where necessary to protect their rights both through the GSEE (General Confederation of Greek workers), labour centres and federations, as well as by directly informing the labour inspectorate and the ministry's auditing mechanisms. The support we provide is crucial in most cases, and workers succeed in being compensated and protected.

EZA: Who benefits from the six-day workweek?

Karras: The main beneficiaries are the employers who don't need to hire more staff, and, on the other hand, gain extended work from existing employees with minimal increase in expenses. Also, some employees gain temporarily as well,

but we believe that the additional pay does not compensate for the fatigue and loss of free leisure and family time.

EZA: One of the goals was to address the skills shortage. Has that been successful?

Karras: Not at all. You cannot solve the skills shortage by obliging the existing staff to work more days and more hours. If you milk a cow from morning until night, it is more likely to kill the cow than produce more milk. Greece still has a "brain drain" because working conditions are neither clear nor stable, and because fundamental workers' rights are occasionally abolished in favour of employers. If young and skilled workers feel they are not protected, they move to countries with stable and fair work relations.

EZA: What solutions do you propose for the skills shortage?

Karras: DAKE has sound proposals for reversing the skills shortage, such as investing in lifelong learning, vocational training for acquiring new skills or for upskilling workers, while at the same time modernising companies' equipment, connecting schools with the labour market and tracking market needs in terms of future skills, fair wages, job stability and motivational benefits. Employees need prospects, not burnout.

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“You can stay right here if you like” – this is what Joachim Herudek, EZA Secretary General at that time, said to me on 10 January 1990, when I arrived at AZK Königswinter Workers' Centre for a spontaneous job interview as secretary. In those days, EZA scarcely featured on Europe's educational policy map. But, as is often the case with good projects, the idea itself, coupled with the pro-active mindset of the EZA players, convinced the politicians in the workers' group of the EPP to intercede on our behalf – against great resistance from the European Trade Union Confederation. Six years later, in 1996, I was elected Deputy Secretary General, and then Secretary General in 2002, where I remained until retiring in 2015.

As far as our education work was concerned, we were well placed in those days with the sound foundation of Christian social doctrine and social ethics. We tried to meet seminar participants where they were, according to their political and social context. This universal basic attitude played a particularly important role during our initial contacts with partners from Eastern Europe. When the Berlin wall came down, I felt it was like a present. The many voluntary partnerships helped to consolidate EZA on the inside – a real treasure and a great success! It was similar later on with our friends from the Western Balkans. Setting up something good might not be so hard to do. But it is particularly valuable to keep it going permanently on a good level. That's what all of you are working for. I'm very grateful that I could be part of it for a while, and wish EZA all the very best for the future.

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ROSWITHA GOTTBHÜT | THIRD SECRETARY GENERAL



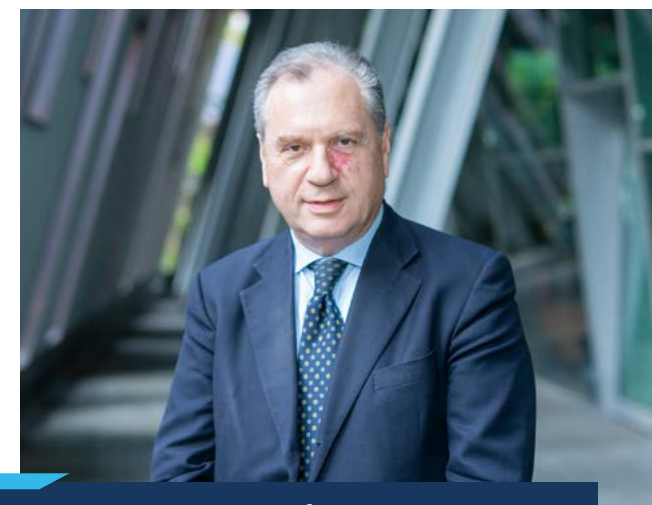
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After 40 years, the EZA still stands as a powerful example in Europe, showcasing how European social dialogue can continue to improve the living conditions of many workers.

In a time of great change, our work allows us to defend a European perspective of broader participation.

In a context where our democratic model is showing signs of decline, the role of workers is essential to ensuring social justice and the common good.

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PIERGIORGIO SCIACQUA | EZA CO-PRESIDENT



ROSA FRANZELIN-WERTH | FOUNDING MEMBER OF EZA

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First of all, I'd like to say a heartfelt thank-you for all the work that EZA has done over the last 40 years, and the commitment to celebrate EZA's 40th anniversary in due style. 40 years are a long time, but looking back they seem to have flown by. All the more reason to look back, in order to better understand the present through what we experienced in the past, to see things clearly and to make better sense of the increasingly uncertain future.

A great deal has happened in the last 40 years.

The number of EZA members has increased from eleven founding members to 70 today. The main focus of all EZA's work is the social dialogue, as described in the brief history "EZA 1985-2025". At a time when labour markets are being profoundly changed by technical progress and artificial intelligence (AI) together with climate change and demographic shifts, social dialogue is still a model for coping with complexity, finding fair solutions and promoting social justice. The EZA should ensure that the political experiences and findings from the seminars on the individual topics should be forwarded to the EUCDW for further integration in daily political work on the European level, to the benefit of workers. Similarly, the member organisations should be encouraged in making sure that the results of the seminars are put to good use to solve the specific problems pending at local level. For the future, I hope the EZA continues to show great commitment and vigilance to recognise the great challenges of our time, thus helping to find a just and fair solution in each case.

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BARBARA GOEDEN | LONG-STANDING
MEMBER OF STAFF IN THE EZA SECRETARIAT

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The EZA has been in existence for more than 40 years. Great commitment by convinced Europeans succeeded in establishing an organisation that promotes workers' interests. In the very early days, EZA worker representatives from eight countries came together to share their knowledge and their experience, compared to 30 countries today. It is good to see how EZA continues to develop all the time.

The administration and organisation tasks in the secretariat are handled with increasingly sophisticated processes, while the projects are implemented with ever more diverse methods. The EZA faces up to the new requirements, also in terms of content. The plans being made for the future show how progress continues.

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NEW FULL MEMBERS IN THE EZA NETWORK: WELCOME!



We are very pleased that the EZA has accepted the **Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro (UFTUM)** as a full member, reinforcing our EZA network as the first Montenegrin member. We are convinced that this full membership will intensify relationships with other EZA members and facilitate a fruitful exchange of experience on workers' questions, particularly when it comes to promoting the social dialogue in the Western Balkans.

The UFTUM was founded in 2008 after several trade unions in Montenegro joined forces to form a modern, democratic, locally organised trade union. Today it has 19 sectoral and three skilled craft unions, representing workers in the whole of Montenegro. Their mission is to help shape Montenegro as a state of social justice and prosperity for all citizens.



Full membership has also been granted to the **Union of Independent Trade Unions of Albania (BSPSH)**. **BSPSH** has been actively involved in the EZA network as an observer since 2017, contributing to sharing on workers' questions. We are pleased to welcome this committed trade union confederation in our midst and look forward to increasing cooperation, joint projects and expanding the social dialogue in Albania.

The BSPSH was founded in 1991. According to current reports, it has around 85,000 members in eleven different federations. The main focus of their work extends from fair wages and pensions via social dialogue to fighting gender-specific violence in the workplace.



MAGAZINE

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