

# ARITAKE-WILD

Joint Seminars of the European Social Partner Organisations

“Social partners’ participation in the  
European social dialogue

*... what are the social partner’s needs?”*

Phase 2 – Follow-up seminars

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Report of the Romanian National Seminar

Hotel Phoenicia Grand Hotel, Bucharest  
Romania

10<sup>th</sup> December 2008

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Prepared by ARITAKE-WILD  
December 2008



Project of the European Social Partners with the financial support of the European Commission

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## **Introduction**

As a part of the European Social Partners work programme 2006 – 2008, the follow up meeting of the previous year’s seminar, designed to enable the national social partner organisations in candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey) and New Member States (Bulgaria and Romania) to improve their capacity for current or future involvement in the European social dialogue, was held in Bucharest, Romania on 10 December 2008.

The programme builds on similar work undertaken in the New Member States in eight Central and Eastern European countries as a part of the social partners work programme 2003 – 2005<sup>1</sup>,

The objectives for the Romanian social partners during this one-day event were to:

- ✧ Review progress on the implementation of the action plans developed during phase one of the project;
- ✧ Identify and discuss any problems that had been encountered and propose ways to resolve them;
- ✧ Identify future “individual organisation” and “joint” priority actions for the Romanian social partners.

The seminar was attended by 3 representatives of the Romanian employers' organisations and 11 from Romanian trade unions; representatives from the European social partners ETUC and UEAPME; and experts. The full attendance list for the seminar is attached to this report as appendix one.

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<sup>1</sup> As part of the European social partner work programme 2003 – 2005, initial and follow-up seminars were held in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia between January 2005 and May 2006. Reports of the 16 national seminars and synthesis reports from the two sub projects can be found on the resource centre websites of the European social partner organizations (<http://resourcecentre.etuc.org/> for trade unions and <http://www.erc-online.eu> for employers).

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## **Methodology**

The seminar methodology was designed to assure maximum participation of the Romanian trade unions and employers with “added value” input from the participants from the European social partner organisations and the experts. A significant part of the event involved discussions in working groups followed by plenary feedback. The event ended with a consensus building session.

To further facilitate generation and development of ideas and strategies as well as effective communication, the working groups were conducted in the Romanian language with “non-intrusive” interpretation available to the European social partner participants and experts. Full simultaneous interpretation was provided in the plenary sessions. The established methodology used throughout the project has been to undertake working group activities in three groups (employers, trade unions and joint). Occasionally this has not been possible, usually as a result of participants’ preferences to work in employer and trade union groups only. In this case, due to the low attendance of employers at the meeting, discussions were held in two working groups. The outputs of both groups were presented and discussed in plenary.

This report follows the format of the seminar agenda, providing an overview report of each of the seven working sessions that made up the seminar. The detailed agenda for the meeting is included as appendix two, but the seven working sessions making up the seminar can be summarised as follows:

	<b>Outline session content</b>	<b>Nature of the session</b>
Session one	Welcome, introduction and purpose of the day	Expert input, EU social partners - plenary
Session two	“Report on the implementation of the action plan – what went well, what proved difficult, what we were unable to implement and why?” – presentations of the national trade unions and national employers	National social partners input - plenary
Session three	European level social partner presentation on the European Social Dialogue agenda and plans for the future	EU social partners - plenary
Session four	Two groups work on the questions:  “In the light of the plenary presentations – what are the most important learning points for the development of future action plans?”  “Based on our experience in implementing the action plans, and in the context of changing organisational and national / European priorities – what do we need to do in the next 12 months and in the next three years?”	National social partners - working groups
Session five	Working group feedback on the proposed actions	National social partners - plenary
Session six	Review of tools offered by European social partners - What has been most and least useful? - What could be done in the future?	EU social partners followed by plenary discussion
Session seven	General discussion on the possible content/priorities of future action plans and final remarks from the EU social partners	Consensus building session – plenary

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## **Report of the meeting**

### **Session one (Expert input) – Welcome and introduction of the purpose of the seminar**

The chairman and project coordinator, Alan Wild, welcomed the participants and introduced the purposes of the seminar. He reminded those present that the previous year the participants had discussed how to fast track engagement of the Romanian social partners in the EU level social dialogue and they had defined some priority activities and actions. The present meeting was to enable a review of progress against priorities; indicate areas of success and areas for further improvement; and to develop plans for future development so the Romanian social partners would be able to contribute more effectively to the EU level social dialogue. Its goal was also to offer an update on future plans for the development of the EU level social dialogue and to facilitate an assessment of the usefulness of tools offered by the EU level social partner organisations to the project participants.

After the introductions Alan Wild recalled the main issues discussed the previous year. These were to:

- ✧ Strengthen the financial and human resource base of the social partner organisations;
- ✧ Improve the bipartite social dialogue in Romania;
- ✧ Encourage social dialogue at all levels, in part by ensuring appropriate space and profile in relations with the government;
- ✧ Support the Romanian social partners' involvement in implementing the European employment law "acquis".

### **Session two (National social partners input) - "Report on the implementation of the action plan – what went well, what proved difficult, what we were unable to implement and why?"**

The employers' organisation and trade union progress reports immediately followed the introductory session. The trade unions recalled the detailed action plan from the phase one seminar which included the following initiatives:

- ✧ Tackling the plurality of trade unions organisations, preferably by encouraging mergers of trade union organisations, to ensure improved representivity and representation;
- ✧ Improving communication between organisations – both top-down to keep the members informed, and bottom-up to better understand how to represent member interests;
- ✧ Building an atmosphere of openness, mutual respect and preparedness to compromise between the social partners at different levels to encourage successful outcomes. It was noted that "European style social dialogue thinking" is new to Romania;
- ✧ Developing joint projects with employers' organisations to strengthen bilateral cooperation and to exercise more influence on the government;
- ✧ Ensuring that people with appropriate skills participate in the social dialogue process;
- ✧ Making sure that national social partners understand their role in the national and the EU level social dialogue processes by, for example, analysing the activities of more

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experienced trade union organisations from other countries and by following more closely developments in the EU-level social dialogue;

- ✧ Recruiting new members in order to become stronger and have deeper and broader coverage;
- ✧ Ensuring the appropriate financial, structural and human capacities are in place that allow Romania to play an effective part in the EU level social dialogue;
- ✧ Improving the effectiveness of the national social committee by ensuring a balanced composition of its members.

The trade unions went on to outline some of the achievements of the social dialogue in Romania since the previous meeting;

- ✧ Although no major actions had taken place to consolidate trade union structures through mergers, in general relations between unions had improved. Inter-confederation working groups had been established to facilitate cooperation with union networks from other EU countries;
- ✧ Some trade unions had created discussion forums on their websites to facilitate member learning and opinion exchange on both national and EU level-related issues;
- ✧ Romanian engagement in European issues have been debated by trade union management boards;
- ✧ The members of the national social committee enjoy more cooperative relationships. Although there remains a shortage of joint programmes with employers' organisations, there is now a will to establish them as opportunities arise;
- ✧ The framework agreements for work-related stress and for harassment and violence have been actively reviewed by the trade unions and training programmes organised for trade union members;
- ✧ Regulations on gender equality have been introduced and the Ministry of Labour has changed its title to include the specific concept of "Equal Opportunities". Activities to promote women's participation in trade union organizations have been undertaken. It was asked whether it was already too late for Romania to report on recent progress on gender issues in line with the request earlier in the year issued by the European social partners, although the deadline had now passed.

The employers' organisation representatives made general comments on the progress of social dialogue in Romania, but were unable to comment on specific actions as they had not been present at the previous meeting held in September 2007 and were unaware of any specific actions taken.

### **Session three (EU social partners input) – the European social partners' presentation on the European Social Dialogue agenda and plans for the future**

Liliane Volozinskis of UEAPME, Juliane Bir and Cinzia Sechi of ETUC presented results of the European level social dialogue; described the joint work programs (2003-2005,2006-2008 and

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2009-2010); and described the tools developed to assist national level social partners improve their effectiveness at the European level. Their presentation is included as appendix three.

Following a comment by the chairman on the difficulties posed in managing the meeting effectively due to the lack of employers' organisation, one of the employers' organisation representatives present suggested that if potential participants had been directly invited by the European level social partners, there might have been a better participation rate and more attendance continuity. He underlined that Romania had things to learn from social dialogue models from other countries citing the Netherlands and Japan as examples. He suggested that the government could do more to support the national social dialogue committee and that the social partners themselves needed to engage a broader group of experts in social dialogue. Cinzia Sechi of ETUC explained the process of identifying and inviting people to the current round of social dialogue seminars which involved local decisions being made by national employer and trade union coordinators. She felt that the best decisions were those made locally and then supported by the European social partners. This had proved the case in the 22 project meetings held to date. She took the opportunity to respond to the question on the annual report on gender equality due in October 2008, suggesting that the Romanian social partners might start preparation for submitting their 2009 progress report.

Finally, practical questions were asked about access to the translation fund. It was confirmed that a simple joint request should be made to Matthew Higham at BUSINESSEUROPE.

### **Session four (Working groups) - "Learning points for the development of the future action plans and action plan for the next 12 months and 3 years"**

In view of the imbalance in attendance described above, the national representatives were divided into two working groups (trade union and employer) rather than the three groups planned. The representative of UEAPME and one expert joined the employers' organisation group; the representatives from the ETUC joined the trade union group. A chairperson/rapporteur was selected by each group from amongst the national participants. The working groups were given 90 minutes to consider the following questions:

- ✧ In the light of the plenary presentations – what are the most important learning points for the development of future action plans?
- ✧ Based on our experience in implementing the action plans, and in context of changing organisational and national/European priorities – what do we need to do in the next 12 months and in the next three years?

### **Session five (Working group feedback) – Reflecting on lessons learnt and future activities**

After lunch the participants reconvened in plenary session to report back from their working groups. The report back from the two groups can be summarised as follows (the group views are listed in the order of presentation);

### Trade Union Group

- ✧ Trade union organisational pluralism is still a problem. The situation is improving but it remains on the trade union agenda;
- ✧ New member recruitment remains a trade union priority;
- ✧ Improving communication both vertically (top down and bottom up) and horizontally between organizations. A good example for effective inter-organisational cooperation is the case of the automotive industry where 11 trade union organisations from different confederations have had successes in the field of continuous learning;
- ✧ The trade unions should consider pressing for ratification of the ILO instrument on continuous learning;
- ✧ More media attention needs to be attracted on the subject of social dialogue;
- ✧ Social dialogue would be improved if more employers took the issue more seriously than they do today.

The chairman reflected that mergers might be a too difficult subject to tackle in the short term; however the issue of effective cooperation within the present structure is an important one to tackle.

The employers' rapporteur stated that neither of the employers' organisation representatives were present at the initial meeting so it was difficult to contribute in a constructive way. The main points of the employers' presentation can be summarised as follows:

### Employers' Organisation Group

- ✧ Inter-organisational communication and cooperation needs to be improved. Attempts had been made to bring all employers' organisations together in an umbrella organisation, but this was proving difficult. A new legal approach to the definition of employer representivity would help the process;
- ✧ Romania used to be a powerful, industrialised country, but this situation has changed over recent years. It was suggested that reaching the performance level of Western economies is a pre-condition for an effective social dialogue;
- ✧ Concerning communication, employers' organisations need to make more progress and called for more training organised by the European social partners;
- ✧ The improving relations between trade unions and employers' organisations are a good sign and are evidenced through several collective agreements. Sometimes relations between trade unions and employers' organisations are better than they are between employers' organisations themselves;
- ✧ The lack of interest of the Romanian media in the social dialogue can be explained by the fact that the majority of Romanian newspapers are in tabloid form and style ... and social dialogue is not a "sexy" subject;
- ✧ Improvements in the education of Romanian social partners will be important to the future. This is something that the EU social partners might be able to assist in.

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The chairman suggested that there would be a new opportunity for the Romanian social partners to get together in more equal numbers and on an important issue in September 2009 when the national seminar on restructuring would take place. Work on the development of the national dossier to be discussed at the seminar on restructuring would commence shortly and involve some of the people in the room.

**Session six (Expert input)** - *“Review of tools offered by the European social partners: What has been most and least useful? What could be done in the future? - EU social partners presentation*

The level of knowledge of Romanian participants of the EU level tools developed to assist national social partners in all of the participating countries was limited. Interest had already been shown in the translation fund and further interest was shown by the trade unions in ETUC training and mentoring initiatives. It was suggested that the Romanian social partners should review what was on offer and ensure that they profited to the maximum extent possible from initiatives that might further improve Romanian social dialogue.

**Session seven (Plenary)** – *General discussion on the possible content/priorities of future action plans following the presentations from working groups and remarks from the EU social partners*

At the end of the meeting the European social partner organisations’ representatives offered their insights.

Liliane Volozinskis of UEAPME expressed her strong disappointment about the level of employers’ organisation representation. She went further by saying that when one partner in the dialogue process is not present, the outcome is a monologue. An important contributor to successful social dialogue is the development of a shared agenda to take forward. She reminded those present of the obligation to implement European agreements at the national level. Speaking on organisation pluralism, she suggested that other countries had found ways to work through multiple trade union and employer confederations by improving communication and cooperation - and the Romanian social partners might learn from some examples. Finally she suggested that it was important to use the mentoring tools put at their disposal, to attend meetings at the EU level in order to get more experience based on the learning by doing process, to find out what was going on and lastly to influence decisions taken at EU level.

Juliane Bir of ETUC also said it was a pity that one half of the room was almost empty as the purpose of the exercise was to support the bipartite social dialogue in Romania rather than engage in a “trade union brainstorming session”. It had been useful, but was not the purpose of the meeting. She expressed her hopes that the next meeting in September would enjoy more balanced attendance. She also focused on the challenge of effective communication and cooperation in a country with 11 trade union confederations, of which 4 are ETUC members, and 14 national employers’ organisations. She encouraged the Romanian partners to use the tools proposed by the EU level social partners, including the mentoring and training programmes designed to accelerate organisational and personal development. She underlined how important it was to know what was going on at the EU level and that this could only be done through active participation. A good opportunity would be the revision of the parental leave Directive where Romanians were not yet present in the negotiating group.

Those present agreed that a review of tools to improve social dialogue should be undertaken to ensure that Romanian social partners benefit from the services available. The Translation fund is a clear example of an underutilised, but useful, tool.



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At the close of the meeting, thanks were offered to the Romanian social partners for their participation, in particular thanks were offered to the three employers' organisation representatives for their attendance and positive approach. Thanks were given to the Romanian trade union organisers of the meeting and the excellent facilities they had provided, and to the interpreters for their efforts throughout the day.

## List of Appendices

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| Appendix one   | Seminar attendance list  |
| Appendix two   | Seminar agenda   |
| Appendix three | Presentation on the European Social Dialogue agenda and plans for the future |



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