

Integrated Project of the European Social Partner Organisations

“Social partners’ participation in the
European social dialogue

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

Report of the Romanian National Seminar

Howard Johnson Hotel, Bucharest,
Romania

26th & 27th September 2007

Prepared by ARITAKE-WILD
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As a part of the European Social Partners work programme 2006 – 2008, the third in a series of seminars 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 26th and 27th September 2007. 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 – 2005¹. The objectives for the Romanian social partners during the two-day event were;

- To identify the “organisational” and “individual participant” characteristics that will enable the Romanian social partners to contribute most effectively to the European social dialogue;
- To develop individual social partner organisation and joint priorities for action that will contribute to their effectiveness as participants in the European social dialogue process.

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

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. Most of the event involved discussions in small working groups with regular plenary feedback forums and consensus building sessions. To further facilitate the generation and development of ideas and strategies, 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.

In order to maximise bipartite discussion, agreement and the development of action priorities, where discussions took place in working groups, two working groups were used: one contained exclusively

¹ During 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 2004 and May 2006. Reports of the 16 national seminars and synthesis reports from the two sub projects can be found on the websites of the European social partner organisations ETUC and BUSINESSEUROPE.



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trade union representatives and the second contained exclusively employers' organisation representatives². The outputs of the two groups were presented and discussed in plenary.

Day one of the seminar was devoted to understanding the European social dialogue; identifying current strengths and weaknesses of the Romanian social partners; and establishing priority areas for action that will lead to strengthening Romanian social partners with a view to their effective contribution to the EU level social dialogue. Through successive combinations of working groups, feedback forums, expert input and consensus building sessions, the participants were encouraged to develop a short list of key issues that they believed would have to be addressed. Day two used essentially the same working processes and was devoted to discussing in detail how the priority issues identified might best be taken forward and transferred into concrete action plans.

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

	Outline session content	Nature of the session
Session one	"Introduction & explaining the European Social Dialogue".	Expert input - plenary
Session two	"Building successful organisations and individuals to contribute to the European Social Dialogue".	Working groups
Session three	Working group feedback: "Building successful organisations and individuals to contribute to the European Social Dialogue".	Plenary presentations
Session four	"Successful social partners and successful meetings" – presentation of research findings.	Expert input – plenary
Session five	"The characteristics, actions and behaviours that contribute to successful engagement in social partnership".	Consensus building session – plenary.
Session six	Presentation: "The tools that have been developed to help you".	Expert input – plenary
Session seven	"Actions that need to be taken to promote effectiveness of the Romanian social dialogue with a view to contribute to the European level Social Dialogue".	Working groups
Session eight	Working group feedback: "Actions that need to be taken to promote effectiveness of the Romanian social dialogue with a view to contribute to the European level Social Dialogue".	Plenary presentations

² In most seminars, three working groups have been used in this session. Due to unbalanced attendance the Romanian social partners preferred to work in two groups, employers and trade unions.



Session nine	Discussion and agreement on priority actions to strengthen social dialogue in Romania.	Consensus building session – plenary.
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DAY ONE (26th September)

Session one (Expert input) - *“Explaining the European Social Dialogue”*

The evolution, participant profiles, working rules, practices and priorities of the European social dialogue were summarised in formal presentations given by Liliane Volozinskis of UEAPME, Juliane Bir (ETUC) and Valeria Ronzitti (CEEP). Their presentation is attached to this report as appendix three.

Session two (Working group activity) - *“Building successful organisations and individuals for European Social Dialogue”*

The Romanian social partners explained that they would rather work in two groups and discuss any joint issues in plenary. Accordingly, national representatives were divided into two working groups: A “trade union group” and an “employers’ organisation group”. The representatives from UEAPME, CEEP and BUSINESSEUROPE joined the employers’ organisation group; the representatives from the ETUC together with one expert 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;

- *What do we need to do to build successful social dialogue partner organisations at the national level that are capable of contributing effectively to the European Social Dialogue? What are the actions suggested for national implementation?*

Session three (Working group feedback) - *“Building successful organisations and individuals for European Social Dialogue”*

The report back from the two groups can be summarised as follows (the group views are reported in the order of presentation);

Trade Union Group

- Effective partnership in the social dialogue process requires a sound understanding of each partner’s role in the process. It also requires a degree of preparedness - social partners have to “do their homework” on the issues to be discussed;
- A better knowledge of the practical operation of social dialogue in other member States would be helpful
- National social partner representatives at the European level need to be aware of their own country’s laws, procedures and practices and have sufficient knowledge



to consider them in the context of practices and regulations in other European countries;

- To contribute effectively at the European level, better information and consultation processes are necessary at the national level. Members should be able to participate in the process of decision making, and this calls for effective two-way information flows between trade union headquarters and member organisations;
- Romanian confederations need to become representative of a larger proportion of Romanian workers. There is a clear need for better coordination between the various trade union confederations. A sustained focus on recruitment is important;
- Romanian trade union representatives in Brussels should have a clear mandate, appropriate skills to liaise effectively between the Romanian and EU social partners, and be suitably academically qualified;
- Social dialogue at the EU level should be linked closely to the national level social dialogue;
- It might help secure greater commitment if representatives of government took part in bipartite meetings in order to facilitate the strict observance of rules;
- It was felt by the trade unions that Romanian employers did not always fulfil their employment related obligations;
- Romanian social partners should be knowledgeable about the EU level social dialogue and should closely follow its work;
- The number of existing confederations and federations operating at the national level should be limited in order assure more cohesive and effective representation of Romanian workers.

Employers' Organisation Group

- Defining the players, their functions and mandates will be important for effective participation in the European social dialogue;
- In 2004 seven out of eleven employer's organisations decided to create an umbrella organisation called ALLIANCE - APCR with the consequence that the majority of Romanian employers' organisations are members of ACPR and, through them, are affiliated with the EU level employers. This provides a basis for national and international connectivity;
- Employers' organisations should play a more proactive role in both the national and the EU level social dialogue;
- Employers' organisations need to develop their internal skills, and to establish more cooperative relationships with the trade unions in order to improve the quality of both national and EU level social dialogues. There are however good examples of effective sectoral social dialogue in Romania;



- Quality and frequency of communication with member organisations on European social dialogue issues needs to be improved;
- More generally the Romanian government tends to ignore the rights of social partners and in particular the views of employers' organisations in the development of national laws and policies. Consultation is often too late for their views to be taken into account. The national Economic and Social Committee is currently misused by the government in relation to the "EU social acquis". The ECOSOC should be the natural place for consultation with national social partners as is foreseen in the law. If this obligation were to be honoured, the committee would be much more influential and effective than it is today.

Session four (Expert input) - "Successful social partners and successful meetings" – presentation of research findings

One of the seminar experts (Alan Wild) presented the findings from a series of research projects conducted during the European social partners work programme 2003 - 2005.

The purpose of this session was to allow the participants to review their own discussions and presentations from session two in the context of the knowledge and experience of individuals from different countries that had participated in the European Social Dialogue over a number of years.

The presentation described the findings from the following initiatives;

- An analysis of the discussion and conclusions of the 16 seminars conducted in the CEEC New Member States;
- The research findings that were used as the basis for the competency evaluation tool now available to the social partner organisations through the ETUC and Employers' resource centre websites (see later). This involved participants in the European social dialogue from the European social partners in each of the (then) 25 EU Member States;
- Specific research into individual and organisation "success competencies" undertaken in the "EU15" social partner organisations.

The full presentation is attached to this report as appendix four.

Session five (Consensus building session) - The characteristics, actions and behaviours that contribute to successful engagement in social partnership – general discussion

Using a "tour de table" type process, the seminar participants identified a number of issues that are important for improving social dialogue in Romania. The points raised can be summarised as follows;

- "Topic" and "process" knowledge and good communication are essential prerequisites to effective social dialogue;
- In order to develop a more effective social dialogue in Romania it would be better to reduce the number of participating organisations;



- Developing the skills of experts involved in the social dialogue is very important. The Romanian social partners need more qualified people (communication, negotiation, analysis and synthesising skills). The experts also need to liaise with regional, national and the EU level leaders;
- Appropriate structures (networks) for social dialogue at different levels are important. More adequate structures need to be created at the local and regional levels;
- Developing good relations with counterparts in other EU countries and with the EU level social partners is important;
- Effective meetings require openness, a will to investigate and learn, and the ability to “think in a European way”;
- There is a need for more informal social dialogue on important issues. The right people need to be involved if concrete results are to be achieved;
- Romania’s social partners and government need to build a stronger culture of social dialogue.
- It may be necessary to restructure existing social partner organisations in order to make dialogue more effective at all levels. It would be helpful if the employer and trade union organisations adopted structures that offer a best fit for effective dialogue;
- Social partners have to trust and respect each other more if they are to work more constructively together;
- A balanced participation of trade union and employer organisations in the social dialogue should be guaranteed;
- The Romanian social partners could investigate and make use of other European social dialogue success models;
- Respect for the laws in force should be a basic principle of cooperation between social partners.

Following the national participant “tour de table” consensus agreement was reached on the priority issues that should be focussed on in day two of the seminar. The issues were;

- Managing social partner plurality;
- Improving bipartite social dialogue;
- Improving the skill base of experts.

Following the “tour de table”, two of the representatives of the EU level social partner organisations offered their views on the discussion;



- Jørgen Rønne of BUSINESSEUROPE observed that it is crucial to understand what problems can be solved at the EU level and what problems have a purely national character. Raising important national issues with a genuine European dimension in a European way is a key factor for success. The EU social partner organisations are willing to help and assist national social partners, but they cannot take responsibility for the active participation of national social partners in the national and EU level social dialogue.
- Liliane Volozinskis of UEAPME stressed that it is important to define priority issues, and to do this in cooperation with member organisations. In order to be effective in the EU level social dialogue, Romanian social partners have to establish clear linkages between national and EU level problems in order to guarantee that their voice is heard in Brussels.

Session six (Expert input) - “The tools that have been developed to help you” - expert presentation

Cinzia Sechi (ETUC) and Matthew Higham (BUSINESSEUROPE) presented the actions undertaken by the European level social partners with the support of the European Commission that can help Romanian social partners to develop a more effective social dialogue. These include;

- Workshops on how to identify budget lines and apply for funding for social dialogue related initiatives;
- A competency evaluation tool that can be used as an audit model to evaluate a trade union or employers’ organisation staff and organisational competencies and to develop cost effective action plans;
- Both trade unions and employers have set up web based resource centres to provide on-line advice and assistance to their respective members;
- Funds have been made available to reimburse the travel and accommodation costs of additional national social partner representatives at meetings and events to add to their skills and experience. This is supported by training programmes and mentoring schemes;
- Most recently a translation fund has been established to facilitate the production of joint translations of European social partner agreements.

The full presentation is attached to this report as appendix five.

DAY TWO (27th September)

Session seven (Working groups) - “Actions that need to be taken to promote effectiveness in the European level Social Dialogue”.

Two working groups (again one trade union group and one employers’ group) were given one and a half hours to develop responses to the following questions which were based on the agreed priorities for action developed at the end of the previous day;



1. Consider the ways in which social partner plurality in Romania can be tackled? Which approach would be the most suitable and how will you go about it?
2. What are the key steps to improving bipartite social dialogue in Romania? What concrete actions will you take?
3. Improving the skills base of those who represent you in the EU social dialogue is important. Which of the plans offered by the EU social partners will you take advantage of and what will you do yourselves?

For each group, a working group chairperson/rapporteur was appointed and the experts were divided amongst the groups in a similar manner to session three above.

Session eight (Working group feedback) - “Actions that need to be taken to promote effectiveness in the European level Social Dialogue”.

The feedback from the two groups can be summarised as follows;

Employers’ Organisation Group

- Employer organisations should be restructured on a sectoral and territorial basis in order to become more cohesive. If trade union organisations were also to reform along similar lines, there would be a chance for an effective overall structure for multi level social dialogue to develop;
- Initiatives to further develop the skills and qualifications of social partner organisation staff should be undertaken;
- Internal and external communication flows should be improved. This can be accomplished initially by working on existing communication media like bulletins, conferences and seminars;
- Employers’ organisations need to initiate marketing actions in order to increase membership
- Cooperation between the social partners can be helped by working better together within the existing bipartite and tripartite machinery.

Trade Union Group

- Plurality in the Romanian trade union movements might best be tackled by encouraging mergers of confederations;



- It will be important to work on social dialogue development by improving bottom-up communication within organisations. Existing mechanisms can be used and kept (e.g. social-economic committees at the regional level) and new mechanisms can be developed;
- Building mutual respect between the social partners will be vital for effective social dialogue at the enterprise, regional and national levels;
- In order to improve cooperation with employer organisations, more joint projects might be developed. Better cooperation between the social partners will strengthen their influence on government;
- It will be necessary to ensure that people with appropriate skills are involved in the social dialogue process. This can be achieved through training and the hiring of qualified experts.

Session nine (Consensus building session) - Discussion and agreement on priority actions to promote effectiveness in the European level Social Dialogue

The Romanian social partners agreed that the areas listed above reflected a sound basis for action over the short to medium term and for review with the European social partners at a date to be arranged in around 18 months time.

To conclude the seminar, each of the European level social partners offered comments and the observer from the European Commission outlined new funding opportunities for the Romanian social partners;

- Tobias Muellensiefen of the European Commission explained that within the new regulations of ESF for 2007-2013 programming period, new provisions on administrative capacity building have been introduced. These provisions are addressed to social partner organisations in converging regions and are aimed at financing social partners' individual or joint actions. He strongly encouraged Romanian social partners to examine these possibilities and offered his help in putting Romanian social partners in contact with responsible official at the European Commission. An explanatory note will therefore be circulated with the record of the meeting.
- Jørgen Rønne of BUSINESSEUROPE stated that the seminar had been a great opportunity to learn more about Romanian social partners and labour market-related issues. This would enable the European social partners to better serve their needs and to offer advice in a more effective manner. He encouraged the Romanian social partners to participate to the fullest extent possible in the social dialogue process in Brussels;
- Valeria Ronzitti of CEEP agreed that it would be a sound idea to tackle the issue of pluralism of Romanian social partner organisations in order to develop a more effective structure for dialogue. She stressed the importance of close cooperation at the local and regional level;
- Liliane Volozinksis of UEAPME pointed out that social dialogue is a learning process that can be mastered only by active participation in it. She stressed that social dialogue is not an end



in itself, but only a tool for improving the labour market functioning. She added that in order to be effective in the national and EU level social dialogue joint actions have to be taken up by strong and autonomous national social partners;

- Juliane Bir of ETUC said that during the seminar some important basic values for conducting effective social dialogue had been defined. These were transparency, trust and mutual respect. She also agreed that coordination of cooperation between the social partner organisations in Romania at all levels of the social dialogue (enterprise, bipartite and tripartite level) will be a major challenge. She observed that developing people for the social dialogue will be important and encouraged the Romanian social partners to use the training and development opportunities offered by the EU social partner organisations. She concluded by suggesting that participants of the seminar should disseminate the discussions and outcomes within their organisations and among their leaders.

The meeting ended with the general agreement that there are issues of common interest that can be worked on and by the Romanian social partners individually and jointly.

Thanks were offered to all those involved in the preparation and conduct of the seminar as well as to the European social partners for their participation and input.



List of Appendices

Appendix one	Seminar attendance list
Appendix two	Seminar agenda
Appendix three	Presentation “Explaining the European Social Dialogue”
Appendix four	Presentation “Successful social partners and successful meetings learning from experience”
Appendix five	Presentation “The tools that have been developed to help you”.

