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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 Croatian National Seminar

Hotel Dubrovnik, Zagreb
Croatia

1st & 2nd October 2007

Prepared by ARITAKE-WILD
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Project of the European Social Partners with the financial support of the European Commission

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As a part of the European Social Partners work programme 2006 – 2008, the second 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 Zagreb, Croatia on 1st and 2nd October 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 Croatian social partners during the two-day event were;

- To identify the “organisational” and “individual participant” characteristics that will enable the Croatian 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 Croatian employers' organisations and trade unions; representatives from the European social partners BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME and ETUC (apologies for not attending the meeting were noted from CEEP); 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 Croatian 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 Croatian 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, three groups were used: one contained exclusively trade union

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 organizations ETUC and BUSINESSEUROPE.

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representatives; the second contained exclusively employers' organisation representatives and the third group was of "mixed" composition. The outputs of all three 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 Croatian social partners; and establishing priority areas for action that will lead to strengthening Croatian 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 action plans.

This report follows the format of the seminar agenda, providing an overview 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 strengthen social dialogue process in Croatia with a view to actively contribute to the European level Social Dialogue".	Working groups
Session eight	Working group feedback: "Actions that need to be taken to strengthen social dialogue process in Croatia with a view to actively contribute to the European level Social Dialogue".	Plenary presentations
Session nine	Discussion and agreement on priority actions to promote	Consensus

	social dialogue.	building session – plenary.
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DAY ONE (1st October)

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 Ralf Drachenberg (UEAPME), Juliane Bir (ETUC) and Jørgen Rønneest (BUSINESSEUROPE). Their presentation is attached to this report as appendix three.

Following this intervention there was a brief discussion on the scope of the seminar with respect to the relationships between the national and European interprofessional and sectoral social dialogue. The EU experts explained that the main focus of the seminar would be the relationship between national and European interprofessional social dialogue.

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

The national representatives were divided into three working groups: A “trade union group”; an “employers’ organisation group” and a “joint group” of trade union and employers’ organisation participants. A representative from UEAPME and one from BUSINESSEUROPE joined the employers’ organisation group; a representative from the ETUC together with one expert joined the trade union group; a representative from BUSINESSEUROPE, ETUC and one expert, joined the “joint 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;

- *Trade union and employers’ organisation groups*
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?
- *Joint group*
What are the actions and behaviours that will make our meetings together as successful as possible?

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

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

Trade Union Group

- It is necessary to amend national regulations concerning the registration of “umbrella” social partner organisations in order to ensure that federations and confederations are more adequately representative;
- The government should take more initiative in promoting and supporting both bipartite and tripartite social dialogue. This is especially important at the sectoral level;
- In order to make social dialogue in Croatia more effective, it will be necessary to develop appropriate structures and processes and to employ experts with language and ICT skills and the ability to work in an international environment. Staff with these skills are necessary to assure a prompt reaction and effective contribution to the EU level social dialogue;
- Capacity building initiatives will require better financing;
- Networking is one of the key activities that determine the effectiveness of contributions to the EU level social dialogue. It requires the collection of information and opinions from member organisations; the passage of this information to the EU level; and the dissemination of information received from EU level organisations to members;
- At the EU level, regular cooperation with ETUC will be crucial if Croatian trade unions are to assure maximum “voice” and apply for funds from appropriate EU budget lines.

Employers’ Organisation Group

- Employers’ organisation representatives agreed with the trade unions on the need to strengthen social dialogue in Croatia and the need to exercise greater influence in contacts with the government;
- Social dialogue in Croatia might be strengthened by studying European best practice;
- Effective social dialogue at the national level requires strong social partners. Both employers and trade unions in Croatia need to further strengthen their organisations.

Presentation of feedback from the employers’ organisation groups was followed by the discussion on the role of the “mandatory membership” chamber of commerce and relations between the chamber of commerce and “voluntary membership” employers’ organisations.

Joint Group

- In order to make social dialogue in Croatia more effective, it will be necessary to make it less dependent on government and to ensure strong representivity of employers' organisations and trade unions with clear mandates and well designed operational structures;
- Current legal regulations on representivity result in a high level of trade union fragmentation. This makes defining the right partner for discussions, and the discussions themselves, difficult;
- In order to make dialogue between employers' organisations and trade unions more effective, relationships need to be based more on cooperation and the identification of common problems and positions;
- More effective cooperation between Croatian social partners will be a precondition for their active participation in the EU level social dialogue, and in the meeting of obligations derived from Croatian membership of the EU.

After the joint group presentation participants discussed issues related to the representivity of employers' organisations and social partners' representivity in general. Participants agreed that it was important to define representivity and to identify the right partner for the various social dialogue processes in order to be more effective in influencing the government. It was agreed that it was crucial to understand the differences between bipartite and tripartite discussions and concertation. Participants also agreed that mutual respect and maturity are key factors in building the cooperation necessary for effective participation in the EU level social dialogue.

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 sessions two and three (above) 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;

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- 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 Croatia. The points raised can be summarised as follows;

- It is necessary to ensure that social partners are involved in shaping public policy and are treated by the government with respect. There is a need to build strategies to strengthen social partner organisations’ capacity to influence government;
- In order to maximise effectiveness it will be important to define priority areas for the national level social dialogue and to examine how they interface with EU level activity;
- It will be necessary to further develop the skills of those involved in the national and EU level social dialogue. In addition to developing current staff, it will be helpful to hire more young and skilled staff;
- Better planning for social dialogue meetings will increase their effectiveness;
- Croatian social partners need to work on making the bipartite dialogue more effective. There is a need to establish new tools and procedures and to define and eliminate the obstacles to effective social dialogue;
- The level of knowledge of the Croatian social partners should be increased, especially on EU-related subjects if they are to prioritise and plan the national social partners work programme for the next two years;
- Making use of EU experience and best practice can help to strengthen social dialogue in Croatia;
- Bipartite social dialogue should be further strengthened and regularly take place at all levels - national, regional and enterprise;
- It will be necessary to improve information exchange between social partner organisations;
- Social partners in Croatia should treat each other with more respect and establish effective contacts at all levels based on trust and a will to cooperate. There are good examples of bipartite social dialogue in Croatia. These good traditions can be built on;
- Both organisational and staff member capacities need to be strengthened;
- There is a need to find sources of additional funding that can be used to support social dialogue in Croatia.

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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;

- Improving social partner influence on public policy;
- Building a more effective bipartite social dialogue;
- Changing current laws on representivity; and
- Raising the profile of social dialogue.

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 Croatian 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 (2nd October)

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

Three working groups- again one trade union group, one employers’ group and one joint 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. *Working together to make us more influential in public policy.
Consider what we can do as individual social partners; what we can do together; and what external help we can use.*
2. *Building a more effective bipartite social dialogue.
Consider how we can identify joint priorities, what structures we may need; and the behaviours we need to adopt. Outline immediate and medium term steps to success.*
3. *What can we do to revise the rules and practices defining social partners' representivity in order to strengthen social partners and social dialogue?*
4. *How can we raise awareness of European issues with our members and with the Croatian public in a manner that it increases the profile of the social dialogue?*

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 three groups can be summarised as follows;

Employers' Organisation Group

- There are appropriate regulations setting out the social dialogue concertation process, but they are not enforced. A first step will be to make them operational;
- Social partners should be involved in the preparation of legislation and have appropriate time to effectively contribute
- Setting up a schedule for regular consultation meetings would improve preparedness, timeliness and the overall quality of formal bipartite social dialogue meetings on issues such as gender equality, youth, CSR and vocational training;
- Training is needed to make social partners aware of their rights and responsibilities in the social dialogue process;
- EU experts can assist in strengthening structures of Croatian social partner organisations. European, as well as national, pressure on government would help;
- It is necessary to identify the goals of trade unions and employers' organisations and to define the subject areas that can be worked on jointly;
- Improving multi-directional communication will be important. More information materials should be prepared in Croatian.

Trade Union Group

- It is necessary to establish sound procedures as a basis for effective social dialogue. These include better and transparent planning; fixing timetables and deadlines; defining how social partners are to be involved in the law making process; and rethinking the composition of tripartite working groups and parliamentary committees;
- Cooperation with employers' organisations in the process of influencing public policy and in the monitoring of implementation and the evaluation of legislative outcomes is needed;
- Small yet operational working groups composed of trade union and employers' organisation representatives should be set up on topics of joint interest. Trade unions' priorities include: competitiveness, employment, life long learning, CSR, energy and REACH.
- In order to cooperate more effectively social partners should create an atmosphere based on mutual respect;
- Rules and procedures for social dialogue at tripartite level need to be redefined
- Better funding is needed to strengthen social partners' capacity to work effectively;
- Better dissemination of information on national and EU level social dialogue is necessary across social partner organisations and among members.

Joint Group

The joint group explained that agreed conclusions had been difficult to reach and the points below reflect the issues discussed in the working group.

- There are already some examples of a very effective social partner cooperation that can serve as basis for the future joint work of the social partners;
- Effective bipartite dialogue depends on a limited number of strong and representative social partner organisations;
- Which organisations are to be involved in which social dialogue processes is an issue that still needs to be defined;
- It is necessary to raise awareness of members and the general public through regular information campaigns on social dialogue developments in Croatia and at the EU level.

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

It was agreed that the presentations reflected a consistency of views on the approaches that should be taken to improving social dialogue in Croatia. These include defining representivity and participation; deciding on priorities; planning; better communication; capacity building; and fund seeking.

At the end European social partner organisations' representatives offered their insights;

- ◇ Juliane Bir of ETUC stated that she was impressed by the quality of trade union group work. The Croatian trade union representatives had demonstrated an impressive level of knowledge on the EU level social dialogue and institutions. She added that their contributions in the seminar proved that trade union representatives had the capacity to play an active role in the social dialogue process. She commented that a strong position at the EU level social dialogue depends on cooperation; capacity – both organisational and individual; and effective structures and mechanisms for national social dialogue. She observed that coping with social partner fragmentation seems to be the biggest current challenge, but that social dialogue outcomes have to be implemented by EU social partners' member organisations. She concluded that a positive attitude to social dialogue process is crucial and other countries' experience can be treated as examples to follow and can serve as inspiration to design new mechanisms tailored to Croatian social dialogue process;
- ◇ Ralf Drachenberg of UEAPME stated that the seminar was very useful as it had enabled problems and challenges to be identified that can be translated into action plans to be adopted over time. He agreed that representivity seems to be the most important matter. He also suggested that exchanging good practices with other EU countries might be helpful.
- ◇ Jørgen Rønne of BUSINESSEUROPE said that it should be remembered that social dialogue is not an end in itself; it is an instrument to promote social partners' goals and interests. He added that strong national social dialogue was the key determinant of influence at the EU level.

The meeting ended with a general agreement that there are issues of common interest that can be worked on and developed further into concrete actions.

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.

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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”.



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