

# ARITAKE-WILD

Joint Project of the European Social Partner Organisations

"CEEC Social Partners' Participation in the European Social Dialogue:

*..... what are the social partner's needs?"*

PHASE TWO - FOLLOW-UP SEMINARS

Report of the Czech National Seminar

Hotel Olšanka, Prague  
Czech Republic

21<sup>st</sup> June 2005

Prepared by ARITAKE-WILD  
June 2005

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## *Introduction*

The second in a series of follow-up national seminars designed to maximise the effectiveness of the participation of the new EU member states in European Social Dialogue was held in the Czech Republic on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2005. The objectives of the seminar 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 Czech social partners.

The seminar was attended by Czech Republic employers' organisations and trade unions. Also in attendance were representatives from the European social partners UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC; and experts. The full attendance list for the seminar is attached as appendix one.

## *Methodology*

The seminar methodology built upon that used during the eight “two-day” CEEC national seminars. The one-day meeting format was designed with the objective of assuring maximum participation of the Czech trade union and employer representatives. The contribution of the participants from the European social partner organisations and the experts was designed to promote focused debate; to facilitate problem identification and resolution; and encourage action plan development. Detailed discussions were held in small working groups. Plenary feedback and review sessions involving all attendees were used to identify priorities and build consensus around actions. To further facilitate the generation and discussion of ideas and the development of future strategies, the seminar was conducted to the maximum extent possible in the Czech language.

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The seminar opened with formal presentations from the Czech social partner organisations that summarised the actions they had taken to implement their “phase one” project actions. The seminar closed with the social partner organisations agreeing a revised series of “effectiveness improvement” actions to be implemented over the short to medium term. From their experience prior to and during the seminar, the European social partner representatives recognised the Czech national social partners as being as effective as some of the original 15 member states. It was suggested that the Czech social partners might work on “active influencing” at the European level so that issues and priorities better reflect those of the Czech Republic and other new member states.

This report follows the format of the seminar agenda. It provides an overview report of each of the working sessions, and culminates in the agreed action plan developed at the end of the meeting. The detailed agenda for the meeting is included as appendix two but the working sessions making up the seminar can be summarised as follows:

Overview agenda		
Session one	Presentations by the national social partners	“Implementation of the phase one action plans.”
Session two	Presentation by the European social partner organisations	“The current European social dialogue agenda and likely priorities for the future.”
Session three	Working group discussion and feedback	“Adapting and improving action plans in the light of experience and changing priorities.”
Session four	Presentation by the European social partner organisations	“Actions to assist new member states social partner organisations already undertaken by the European social partners.”
Session five	Concluding discussion	“Action plan revision based on agreed priority needs and issues.”

***Report of the meeting***

*Session one - "Implementation of the phase one action plans."*

**Employers**

The phase one action plan of the Czech employers' organisations included six points for action which were organised under three headings:

**Czech employers "phase one" action plan**

**Financial resources**  
Meet on 27 April to consider the result of internal management discussions on:

- The identification of key person(s) with responsibility for EU affairs, in particular, European social dialogue.
- The establishment of an "Expert Travel Fund" to reduce the cash flow problems caused by late payments of expenses by the European Commission.
- Creating a network of employer representatives in EU meetings in order to coordinate the position of the Czech business community and assure reporting back.

**People development**  
By the end of September, the Employers' organisations will:

- Conduct a strengths and weaknesses assessment of their capacities in terms of technical and language skills to identify training needs.
- Ensure language skills criteria as a part of organisational recruitment strategy.

**European thinking/Information sharing**  
To make better use of existing information channels to publicise the relevance to the business community regarding EU initiatives.

- By end of May 2004 encourage the participation in the forthcoming elections for the European Parliament and to increase public understanding of the importance of Czech involvement in the EU.

To date the Czech employers' organisations have undertaken the following initiatives to implement their action commitments:

The employers' representatives met in May 2005 and reconfirmed the creation of an informal platform for a common approach in the framework of the activities of the European social dialogue and accepted the coordinating role of SPCR.

**Financial resources**

- Although the "travel fund" has not been implemented, other measures have been taken to economise on travel to Brussels. The employers noted that actions under way at the level of the European social partners would further assist in this area.

## **People development**

- The skills and resources available in the secretariats have been evaluated.
- Stricter criteria for new recruits have been determined.

## **European thinking/Information sharing**

- An informal platform for information sharing with designated responsibilities has been developed and is working well.
- External information sharing has also been improved through a public website and through various bulletins and newsletters.

In addition to the initiatives taken to support the action plan the Czech employers' organisations reported that they have, jointly with the Czech trade unions, developed and signed a bipartite agreement on cooperation. Through this, joint strategies and positions will be developed on common issues. The Czech Employers' organisations power point presentation is included as appendix three.

In undertaking these actions, the Czech employers' noted the following constraints:

- Although the establishment of a common platform for employers in many respects facilitates their common approach, the existence of more employers' subjects in certain cases complicates meeting the set objectives;
- Continuing financial and human resources constraints;
- Some of the deadlines were over-ambitious and have been modified.

## **Trade Unions**

The phase one action plan of the Czech trade unions included fourteen points for action also grouped under three headings:

### **Czech trade unions "phase one" action plan**

#### **Financial resources**

- Quantification of the probable expenditure necessary for preparation and continuation of European Social Dialogue with a deadline of March 2004 so it can be presented as an agenda item at the first meeting of the budgetary committee for 2005.
- Work with employer organisations to determine common goals for joint activities and share the costs. Also in terms of co funding, work with ILO and EC on social dialogue projects.
- Use the ETUC seminar this week as a means of determining what EC budget lines are relevant to European Social Dialogue and develop skills on obtaining these funds (how to write a project proposal in terms of content and budget).
- Develop recruitment campaigns to increase available financial resources.

## **People development**

- Language skills
  - Follow ETUC language courses
  - Revise personnel/recruitment criteria to ensure language skills
  - Revise teaching methods of language courses continuously organised and attended by union experts
- Use exchange programmes/internships/stagieres in cooperation with the ETUC and neighbouring country organisations.
- Deepen "EU dimension" of the Young Trade Unionists Council.
- Use the intranet network "Regionet" to facilitate communication on EU issues between the confederation and all other levels of trade union structure.

*Deadline for people development initiatives: End of 2004*

## **European thinking/Information sharing**

- Assure media coverage of ETUC events on EU enlargement, EU Parliament elections, European Social Model etc. (for example, Action Days, beginning of April) to promote European thinking.
- Use media forums such as periodicals, journals, internet websites, etc to communicate positions on various EU topics and provide access to information on current events.
- Make best use of internet and intranet correspondence courses to develop information/communication and feedback on EU issues.
- Contact the Czech organisation of SMEs to judge optimal ways of addressing their employees on the European integration process in case they do not have union representation.
- Use the mechanism and activities of European works councils as an example of European thinking culture.
- Promote European sectoral level dialogue as a means of promoting European thinking.

To date the Czech trade unions have undertaken the following initiatives to implement their action commitments:

## **Financial resources**

- Progress has been made on accessing additional financial resources.
- Financial administration has been adapted to the model of reimbursement of costs from the European Commission.

## **People development**

- Both language training and assuring the adequate language skills of new recruits have been addressed as priorities.
- Training activities designed to improve technical expertise on substantive issues have been organised.

## **European thinking/Information sharing**

- Information sharing has improved through increased use of the intranet "Regionet". This has also facilitated coordination of joint positions.
- Understanding of the "need for" and "value of" EU social dialogue has been promoted in various media (including the CMKOS magazine "Sondy") to reach not only members but also the wider public.

In addition to the initiatives taken to support the action plan, the Czech trade unions also reported the signing of the bipartite agreement of cooperation. The Czech trade unions' presentation is included as appendix four.

In undertaking these actions, the Czech trade unions noted the following constraints:

- Continuing financial and human resources constraints, in particular this has affected the ability to submit regional project proposals and representation at various EU meetings and committees;
- Ongoing coordination difficulties – although to a lesser extent than previously.

## **Employers and Trade Unions jointly**

### **Czech joint "phase one" action plan**

By 30<sup>th</sup> April, complete agreement on bipartite cooperation, during these discussions things like themes telework and lifelong learning will be pilot programs for bipartite cooperation

Disseminate information relating to bipartite cooperation on websites of social partners organisations.

The employers' organisations and trade unions jointly reported that full membership of the EU since the last meeting had been generally a good experience for the Czech economy and for the Czech social partners. Strong concerns were expressed however about the lack of progress on the issue of freedom of movement of people and the mismatch between EU and Czech social policy priorities. With respect to the action plan, the bipartite agreement had been established, albeit later than planned, and was now operational.

*Session two - "The current European social dialogue agenda and likely priorities for the future."*

Liliane Volozinskis (UEAPME) made a formal presentation offering a brief outline of the history and evolution of European social dialogue; a description of the current social dialogue work programme; and an indication of probable future priorities. Her full presentation is included as appendix five.

Following this presentation the participants were asked to give their views on what they considered to be the most important priorities for the Czech social partners and the European social partner representatives were invited both to reinforce and respond to the points raised. The following issues were discussed:

- The Czech social partners stressed that the current EU Social Partners' Work Programme does not fit well with the issues and priorities as seen from Prague. Unemployed youth, ageing population, free movement of labour, lifelong learning and undeclared work are the priorities of the Czech social partners. Issues of stress, telework and racism are seen as less important.
- The current work programme contains a mixture of issues. Some priorities have been identified by the social partners themselves such as lifelong learning while other priorities reflect broader European Institutions' priorities such as stress at work, telework and violence.
- The fact that the EU agenda does not adequately reflect the priorities of the new member states is a point which has been made to the Commission. The EU level social partners are working towards a more streamlined and focused work programme that will better reflect the common problems of all 25 member states. However, it is important to accept that we operate in an EU political context that has its own priorities.
- The importance of social dialogue must be stressed in view of the recent referenda outcomes and perceived reasons for the "no" votes.
- There are different angles from which social partners in the EU member states can approach the social agenda depending on their capacity for involvement. Social partners can try and influence the agenda itself, or either proactively or reactively address issues that relate to their interests.

### *Session three – Working group discussions and feedback*

*“Adapting and improving action plans in the light of experience and changing priorities.”*

The national representatives were divided into three working groups. Two thirds of the trade union representatives formed the “trade union group”; two thirds of the employers formed the “employers’ organisation group” and the remaining third of the employers and trade unions respectively formed the “joint group”. One representative from UNICE and the UEAPME representative joined the employers’ organisation group; a representative from the ETUC together with one expert joined the trade union group; and a representative from UNICE, CEEP and ETUC respectively plus 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:

*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 the next 3 years?*

The report back from the three groups covered the issues presented in the tables below:

#### **Employers’ organisation group**

##### **Immediate priorities for the next 12 months:**

- Continue improving language skills, perhaps in part through trying to coordinate language courses offered by the different Czech employers’ organisations;
- Strive for a better balance between technical and language skills of staff.

##### **Longer term priorities:**

- Further improve cooperation and coordination of employers’ organisations at the national level on the basis of the current informal platform, including developing a common mandate, a common voice and common positions;
- Find further sources of financing to support EU level activities;
- Maximise use of EU funding while at the same time exploring ways to avoid future financial dependence on this source of funds.

### **Trade union group**

The trade unions referred to their earlier action plan and felt that the same issues should continue to be priorities with particular emphasis on the following:

- Improve exchanges of information in such a way that information is disseminated down to the grassroots level;
- Make better use of European works councils;

... and in addition:

- Lobby to include labour law and the understanding of the need for and role of social dialogue in school curricula;
- Highlight the need to improve poor working conditions in some foreign companies operating in the Czech Republic.

### **Joint group**

#### **Immediate priorities for the next 12 months:**

- Ageing – focus on initiatives that would improve older workers' employment rate;
- Undeclared work – jointly engage with the government and other relevant authorities that have a role in this issue;
- Youth – promote youth employability and ease the 'school to work' transition.

#### **Longer term priorities:**

- Free movement of labour – national social partners should actively support the acceleration of free movement of labour;
- Lifelong learning – a key priority in the context of the Lisbon strategy;
- Implement the EU social partners' agreements;
- Develop mechanisms to promote national social partner agreements.

*Session four - "Actions to assist new member states social partner organisations already undertaken by the European social partners."*

In response to questions and needs expressed by the national social partners during the 2004 phase of the project the European level social partners have undertaken a range of activities to improve the effectiveness of the participation of new member states in the European social dialogue. Jeanne Schmitt of UNICE and Szilvia Borbély of ETUC made presentations covering each of the following subjects:

- Resource centres – the European level social partners have established employer and trade union resource centres and launched web sites to promote their new services;
- Training and development assistance – assistance is available from the European social partners to facilitate staff development initiatives e.g. the funding of additional places at European level meetings;
- Social partner competence development – a practical tool to help Social Partners to assess the competences of and establish personal development plans for their staff who currently, or may in the future, represent their organisations at European level.

The full presentations are included as appendices six and seven.

*Session five - "Action plan revision based on agreed priority needs and issues."*

Following the EU social partner presentations and in view of the presentations made throughout the day a "tour de table" was conducted. Each participant was asked to list the two priorities they considered most crucial to improving the Czech social partners' participation in the European level social dialogue. The list does not reflect any priority order or "multiple mentions" of issues. It simply indicates the issues raised and the order in which they were raised.

- Promote free movement of labour
- Directive on services – try to convince European Parliament as well as EU Member States that a liberalisation of services would promote European integration and promote the European economy
- Further build goodwill between social partners
- Further develop language skills
- Find more financial resources
- Improve human resources development and training
- Promote greater visibility of social dialogue – what it is, what it brings.
- Better dissemination of information
- Build organisational capacity
- Enhance the technical skills of experts
- Develop mechanisms for good national social dialogue
- Identify priority issues and coordinate position in negotiations with the government
- Free movement of truth
- Combat poor working conditions through promoting corporate social responsibility
- Promote improved collaboration between the national social partners – including seeking common solutions
- Improve capacity to communicate better between social partners – including learning to accept opposing opinions
- Make use of European Works Councils
- Youth – encourage adoption of measures that will ease the school to work transition and avoid the problems associated with early unemployment such as the absence of a work ethic.
- Define tools for improved bilateral information flows
- Ensure grassroots involvement in the development of social partner mandates
- Enhance the capacity of experts to advance their opinions in the EU social dialogue and EU bodies
- Develop efficient forms of representation
- Ensure that agreements reached are feasible and practical
- Encourage Brussels to simplify its texts

Following the “tour de table” the experts and European level social partners were invited to comment on the issues covered. The following points were made;

- What has been on the agenda today may not be as relevant for the Czech social partners as it is for other new member states that are experiencing more structural difficulties.
- Given the maturity and effectiveness of the Czech social partners they are well positioned to develop joint positions and strategies and thus to improve their influence at the EU level. The priorities of the Czech social partners came across very clearly (youth, active ageing and free movement of labour etc.). These

priorities and others should be communicated to EU level counterparts and also to MEPs and other relevant persons.

- The issues covered seem to fall into two broad categories:
  - 1) Issues of substance relating to a future agenda:
    - Free movement of labour
    - Liberalisation of services
    - Youth employment etc.
  - 2) Improvements in processes. Individual and organisational capacity building including:
    - Language skills
    - Financial resources
    - Efficient information flows
- The action plans developed are excellent and should be pursued. However, given the maturity and advanced nature of the social dialogue of the Czech Republic, the social partners may like to consider how to use their position as one of the potential leaders in mobilising the “voice” of the newer member states. If this position is taken seriously the Czech social partners can acquire a considerable capacity to influence the EU work programme.

By the end of the seminar there was agreement of all parties to the employer, trade union and joint actions outlined earlier and summarised in appendix eight. At the end of the meeting, thanks were offered to all those involved in the preparation and conduct of the seminar.

**List of Appendices**

Appendix one	Seminar attendance list
Appendix two	Seminar agenda (enclosed)
Appendix three	Employers' organisations presentation of progress on the phase one action plan
Appendix four	Trade unions' organisations presentation of progress on the phase one action plan
Appendix five	European Social Dialogue: Agenda and Priorities for the Future
Appendix six	European Social Dialogue: Employer's Support Tools
Appendix seven	European Social Dialogue: Trade Union Support Tools
Appendix eight	Agreed Action Plan from the Czech Follow-Up Seminar 2005 (enclosed)

## Appendix Two

**AGENDA**

Joint Seminars of the European Social Partner Organisations "CEEC social participation in the European social dialogue: What are the social partners' needs?"

National Seminar CZECH REPUBLIC

Venue: Hotel Olšanka, Prague

Date: Tuesday 21 JUNE 2005

0900 – 0930	Welcome, introductions and purpose of the day	A Wild in plenary
0930 - 1045	Pre-prepared presentations from the national trade unions, national employers and a national joint presentation;  "Report on the implementation of the action plan – the presentations should include what went well, what proved difficult, what we were unable to implement and why?"	Plenary session
1045 - 1100	Coffee Break	
1100 - 1145	European level social partner presentation on the likely European Social Dialogue agenda and priorities for the future	Plenary session
1145 - 1150	Briefing of working groups (employers, trade unions and joint)	A Wild in plenary
1150 - 1315	Three 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?"	Three working groups
1315 - 1445	Lunch Break	
1445 - 1530	Presentations from the working groups and questions on the proposed actions	Plenary session
1530 - 1615	Presentation by the EU social partners on the employers and trade union "support tools" and questions: 1. resource centres 2. training sessions 3. competence development project	Plenary session
1615 – 1630	Coffee Break	
1630 – 1715	General discussion on the possible content / priorities of future action plans following the presentations from working groups and the EU social partners	Plenary session
1715 – 1800	Consensus building session and agreement on the key issues and specific actions to be taken by trade unions and employers individually and jointly in the next 12 months and in the next three years	Plenary session
1800	closing remarks	Plenary session

Appendix Eight

AGREED ACTION PLAN FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC FOLLOW-UP SEMINAR

Employers' organisations	Trade unions	Joint	European level social partners
<p><b>Immediate priorities for the next 12 months:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue improving language skills, perhaps in part through trying to coordinate language courses offered by the different Czech employers' organisations;</li> <li>➤ Strive for a better balance between technical and language skills of staff.</li> </ul> <p><b>Longer term priorities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Further improve cooperation and coordination of employers' organisations at the national level on the basis of the current informal platform, including developing a common mandate, a common voice and common positions;</li> <li>➤ Find further sources of financing to support EU level activities;</li> <li>➤ Maximise use of EU funding while at the same time exploring ways to avoid future financial dependence on this source of funds.</li> </ul>	<p>The trade unions referred to their earlier action plan and felt that the same issues should continue to be priorities with particular emphasis on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improve exchanges of information in such a way that information is disseminated down to the grassroots level;</li> <li>➤ Make better use of European works councils;</li> </ul> <p>... and in addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lobby to include labour law and the understanding of the need for and role of social dialogue in school curricula;</li> <li>➤ Highlight the need to improve poor working conditions in some foreign companies operating in the Czech Republic.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Immediate priorities for the next 12 months:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ageing – focus on initiatives that would improve older workers' employment rate;</li> <li>➤ Undeclared work – jointly engage with the government and other relevant authorities that have a role in this issue;</li> <li>➤ Youth – promote youth employability and ease the 'school to work' transition.</li> </ul> <p><b>Longer term priorities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Free movement of labour – national social partners should actively support the acceleration of free movement of labour;</li> <li>➤ Lifelong learning – a key priority in the context of the Lisbon strategy;</li> <li>➤ Implement the EU social partners' agreements;</li> <li>➤ Develop mechanisms to promote national social partner agreements.</li> </ul>	<p>Will work to towards ensuring the needs of the new member states are adequately reflected in the European level work programme.</p>