

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 Estonian National Seminar

Uniquestay Hotel, Tallinn
Estonia

29th March 2006

Prepared by ARITAKE-WILD
March 2006

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Introduction

The seventh in a series of eight follow-up national seminars¹ designed to maximise the effectiveness of the participation of the new EU member states in European Social Dialogue was held in Estonia on 29th March 2006. 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 Estonian social partners.

The seminar was attended by 19 representatives nominated by Estonian employers’ organisations and trade unions. Also in attendance were representatives from the European social partners UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP, and ETUC; two experts; and an observer from the EU Commission. 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 Estonian trade union and employer representatives. The contribution of the participants from the European social partner organisations and the experts was designed to promote focussed 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

¹ The first five seminars belonged to a pilot project of 5 new Member States (Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia). The pilot project was then expanded to include Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia.

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development of future strategies, the seminar was conducted to the maximum extent possible in the Estonian language.

The seminar opened with short presentations from the Estonian trade union organisations that summarised the actions they had taken to implement their “phase one” project actions. The seminar closed with the attendees from both social partner organisations recommending priority areas for future work for the Estonian employer and trade union organisations and suggesting areas where they felt the EU social partners could help. It was agreed that these recommendations would be reported to the relevant decision making bodies of the Estonian employer and trade union organisations respectively. Between these sessions were working group discussions, plenary debate and a variety of formal and informal inputs from the European social partners.

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	“Discussion of recommendations.”

This report provides a structured overview of the discussions held during the day and contains the list of recommendations developed at the meeting.

Report of the meeting

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

The phase one action plan of the Estonian trade unions developed in February 2005 included the following five points:

Estonian trade union "phase one" action plan

1. Create a two-tier decision making system in EAKL to improve branch involvement on European issues;
2. Improve information flows from the ETUC so that important issues can be addressed in a timely way;
3. Propose to the Employers that a briefing system be established to exchange views on European issues;
4. In the Autumn of 2005 undertake a review of the issues adopted in the European social dialogue;
5. Suggest to the Estonian government that they make a contribution to the costs of Estonian social partner representation in Brussels.

The Estonian trade union representatives reported their progress on improving effectiveness at the European level by describing their experience in three practical examples; the draft Services Directive, the Posting of Workers Directive and two cases coming before the ECJ. They made the point that in implementing the action plans developed a year ago "life had made its own corrections".

On the positive side, they reported that information flows between the EU and the national trade union organisations had greatly improved. Areas where further improvements still need to be made include:

- Information flows within and between Estonian trade union organisations;
- Work on language skill development remains an important priority;
- It has been hard to get Estonian employers to engage in dialogue. It has proved particularly difficult on actions to assure the national implementation of voluntary European level agreements e.g. Telework.

More generally, the trade unions noted that the Estonian government has not always recognised the need to consult them on key issues and it has not been possible to get the government to provide any funding for an Estonian social partner presence in Brussels.

The phase one action plan of the Estonian employers' organisations also included five points:

Estonian employers' organisation "phase one" action plan

1. Identify hot issues at EU level;
2. Identify Estonian employers' priorities;
3. Identify experts on specific issues on the European agenda and convene working groups appropriate to assure that high quality inputs can be made in a timely manner;
4. Improve information flows to and from member companies and organisations on social dialogue decisions and their impact;
5. Develop cooperative relationships with other organisations representing Estonian business interests in order to benefit from the full range of available expertise.

The employers' organisation nominees attending the meeting explained that the lack of continuity of attendance between the 2005 and 2006 seminars made it impossible for them to report adequately on the earlier action programme.

The phase one joint action plan included 3 points:

Estonian joint "phase one" action plan

1. Informal communication should be initiated between the social partners to identify common ground for dialogue;
2. Social partner specialists working on European issues should assure regular, informal exchanges of views with their counterpart;
3. The social partner organisations should improve member communication on European issues.

No report back was given on the joint actions, although the trade unions had already highlighted in their report certain difficulties in engaging with the employers.

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

Thérèse de Liedekerke (UNICE) presented a brief outline of the history and evolution of European social dialogue and described the recently agreed social dialogue work programme for the period 2006 to 2008. As an example of a recent European social partner agreement slated for national level discussion and implementation, Charles Nolda (CEEP) presented the contents of the agreement on stress at work. The full presentation is included as appendix four.

Session three – Working group discussions and feedback

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

The attendees at the workshop were reluctant to follow the established seminar methodology of working in three groups; “employer”, “trade union” and “joint”. Consequently the national representatives were divided into just two working groups representing employers and trade unions. Representatives from CEEP, UEAPME and UNICE joined the employers’ organisation group. The two representatives from the ETUC together with the two experts joined the trade union group. The observer from the EU Commission moved between the two groups during the course of their discussions

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 working groups covered the following issues:

Trade union group

The trade union group critically reviewed their current activities and suggested the following points for action:

- The sectoral dimension of Estonian social dialogue needs to become more effective. The Estonian social partners should get together to discuss the development of a sectoral model;
- The social partners need to show more flexibility and readiness to cooperate with each other. This could be achieved by identifying issues on which the social partners have a shared interest and/or establishing jointly organised and managed training sessions;
- Information sharing and dialogue between the social partners at the most senior levels needs to be improved;
- The trade unions and employers should agree to develop an EU funded joint project that would help improve social dialogue. In the absence of bipartite agreement the trade unions should, in any event, undertake such an initiative ;
- The government needs to take a more positive and supportive approach to social dialogue, perhaps forming a committee of competent persons to facilitate its development.

Employers' Organisation Group

The employers' organisation group reported that it did not have the authority to represent the views of the Estonian employers' organisation. They did however make suggestions for improvements in social dialogue:

- Social dialogue could be pursued in areas of mutual concern e.g. vocational education and training and achieving sustainable economic growth;
- Better interaction with the European Union institutions will require more timely information flows.

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

In response to the needs expressed by the national social partners during the first 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. Thérèse de Liedekerke 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 support and promote their new services;
- *Training and development assistance* – various forms of assistance have been made available by the European social partners to facilitate staff development initiatives e.g. through the funding of additional places at European level meetings for developmental purposes, social dialogue related training events and language training;
- *Social partner competence development* – a process by which individuals and organisations can "self assess" against a series of "effective European social partner" competencies is now available on the social partner resource centre web sites.

The full presentations are included as appendices four and five.

The Estonian social partners were encouraged to make full use of the resources and activities described. The more these are used the more likely it is that these, and similar, services and activities will continue to be provided.

In order to focus on the most important issues facing the Estonian partners, a "tour de table" was then conducted where each national participant was asked to make three recommendations. First, the most important thing the Estonian employers' organisations could do to improve the effectiveness of their participation in the European social

dialogue. Second, the most important thing the Estonian trade unions could do to improve the effectiveness of their participation in the European social dialogue. Finally, what they believed the European social partners could do to support them.

The following list of recommendations does not reflect any priority order or “multiple” mentions of issues. It simply indicates the points raised grouped according to whether the recommendation referred to the employers, the trade unions or the EU level social partners.

Recommendations for Estonian employers’ organisations

- Develop a greater understanding of the importance of social dialogue;
- Build on the cooperation that exists at enterprise level in some large companies;
- Get the highest level social partner decision makers together to discuss social dialogue issues;
- Further develop teamwork and partnership;
- Foster honest and open dialogue;
- Employers need to broaden their understanding of social security ... “it is not just about jobs and money”;
- Social dialogue could be further developed if priority issues were identified;
- Social dialogue needs to be developed in SMEs. The representative of SMEs agreed to meet trade union leaders to talk about how this could begin to take place.

Recommendations for Estonian trade unions

- Find ways to better prepare those that represent Estonian trade unions;
- Invest more in training and in sharing positive experiences;
- Shift from parallel monologues of employers and trade unions to a two way dialogue;
- Acknowledge the limitations dictated by small numbers and limited capacities. Patience is needed;
- Find young people interested in, and willing to work on, national and European trade union issues;
- A trade union specialist/coordinator on EU issues should be identified and trained;
- The trade union presence needs to be felt and valued more at the grassroots level;
- Map the knowledge that exists and identify specialists that can best represent trade unions;
- Upward information flows need to be improved to influence the EU level agenda;
- Social dialogue in Estonia is focussed on a few big enterprises. Only around 10% of SMEs have trade union representation. This number should be increased by embracing representatives of SMEs as social partners.

Recommendations for the EU level social partners

- Try to maintain European social dialogue ideals in a globalised world;
- Continue these kinds of seminars. They are very constructive and new and useful information is made available;
- It is not always necessary to copy ideas from elsewhere. In Estonia many things have been done differently and better;
- Check that EU level reports from the Estonian government accurately reflect Estonian social partner views. If there are significant discrepancies, the EU social partners should try to find out what is really going on;
- It would be good for certain sectoral EU social partners to visit Estonia as well;
- Help get through the bureaucracy of applying for EU project funding;
- Continue collecting best practices and sharing information.

The experts and European level social partners then commented on what they considered to be the most important issues and priorities for the Estonian social partners to reflect upon. Their comments were as follows;

- There is no single or perfect model for social dialogue. Practices in other countries can serve to inspire, but effective social dialogue can only be developed by the national social partners;
- Estonia is in a strong economic position. Inevitably much of the focus of social partner effort is on domestic rather than European issues. The question for the Estonian social partners is if they want to be active participants at the European level, or if they prefer to be passive recipients of decisions that are taken elsewhere;
- It is understandable that one sometimes wishes that counterparts had different attitudes. However, one party cannot unilaterally change the attitude of another. Efforts have to concentrate on how the attitudes and strategies of one party can influence the attitudes and strategies of others for the better;
- There is an interest for all parts of Estonian society in continuing the current experience of economic success. The challenge for the social partners is to consider what they can do today to make economic success sustainable into the long term. There is a need to anticipate future challenges and consider possible solutions;
- It will be easier to influence national government if the social partners approach the issue jointly rather than separately;
- Social partner training has been identified as an important issue. Using the tools described in this seminar will help;

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- Further development of social dialogue in SMEs: the offer made by the employers' organisation for SMEs to open a dialogue on how this can be done is a positive one;
- Getting the right people to meetings is important. In the phase one Estonian seminar there was a better balance between sectoral and national level employer's organisation participation and it was easier to define priorities and actions;
- Estonia's problems are less related to lack of structure or lack of capacity than the absence of a shared view on the potential contribution of social dialogue to the identification and pursuit of a common agenda. A joint project designed to get the most senior people in the key social partner organisations together, first individually and then jointly, to identify a partnership agenda might be a sensible point of departure.

Session five - "Discussion on priority needs and issues."

It was agreed that the most important priority for the Estonian social partners is to put more energy into work on improving in the relationships between employers and trade unions.

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
- Appendix three European Social Dialogue: Agenda and Priorities for the Future
- Appendix four European Social Dialogue: Employer's Support Tools
- Appendix five European Social Dialogue: Trade Union Support Tools

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: ESTONIA

Venue: Uniquestay Hotel, Tallinn

Date: Wednesday 29 March 2006

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 European Social Dialogue	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