

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?”

Report of the Latvian National Seminar

Hotel Reval Latvija, Riga
Latvia

10th and 11th March 2005

Prepared by ARITAKE-WILD
March 2005

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The eighth and last in a series of national seminars¹ designed to identify the organisational and individual characteristics that will enable the attendees and their organisations to participate effectively in the European Social Dialogue was held in Latvia on 10th and 11th March 2005. The objectives for the Latvian social partners during the two-day event were;

- To identify the characteristics of organisations and individuals that will contribute most effectively to the European Social Dialogue;
- To develop individual social partner organisation and joint action plans to assure maximum effectiveness of their participation in the European Social Dialogue process following their accession to the European Union on 1st May 2004.

The seminar was attended by representatives of Latvian employers' organisations and trade unions; 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.

The seminar methodology was designed to assure maximum participation of the Latvian 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 Latvian language with “non-intrusive” interpretation available to the European social partner participants and experts. Full simultaneous interpretation was provided in the plenary sessions.

Additionally, and in order to maximise bipartite discussion, agreement and action planning, in the initial working group sessions, three groups were used: One contained

¹ The first five seminars belonged to a pilot project of 5 accession countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia) and which has since been expanded to further include Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia.

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exclusively trade union representatives; a 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 identifying the most important characteristics, actions and behaviours that will lead to more successful participation in the European Social Dialogue for the Latvian social partners. 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 was devoted to the development of individual social partner and joint action plans for each priority issue that will speed the transition and maximise the effectiveness of the Latvian social partners in the European Social Dialogue.

This report follows the format of the seminar agenda, providing an overview report of each of the eight working sessions, and culminating in the agreed action plan that was the outcome of the final working session. The detailed agenda for the meeting is included as appendix two but the eight working sessions making up the seminar can be summarised as follows;

Outline session content		Nature of the session
Session one	"Explaining the European Social Dialogue".	Expert input - plenary
Session two	"Building successful organisations and individuals for European Social Dialogue".	Working groups
Session three	Working group feedback. "Building successful organisations and individuals for 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	"Action plan development on the agreed priority issues"	Working groups
Session seven	Working group feedback. "Action plan development on the agreed priority issues"	Plenary presentations
Session eight	Discussion and agreement on specific action plans	Consensus building session – plenary.

DAY ONE (10th March)

Session one (Expert input)

Explaining the European Social Dialogue

The history, evolution, participants, working rules, practices and priorities of the European Social Dialogue were summarised in formal presentations given by one of the seminar experts (Alan Wild) and Thérèse de Liederkerke of UNICE. These presentations are attached as appendices three and four respectively. Additionally, each of the representatives of the European social partners; Juliane Bir of ETUC; Lilliane Volozinskis of UEAPME; and Malgorzata Czapka representing CEEP commented briefly on the similarities and differences in the approaches of their respective organisations to the development of negotiating positions, the sign-off process for agreements and methods of communication and implementation.

At the end of session one, the Latvian social partners were left with a series of specific questions for consideration during the course of the seminar;

- How will they organise member discussions and convey input to consultations?
- How will they prepare technical input for negotiating mandates?
- How will they get this mandate approved?
- How will they liaise with each other?
- How will they explain compromises to members?
- How will they organise follow up procedures?

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. Representatives from UNICE, UEAPME and CEEP joined the employers' organisation group; two representatives from the ETUC together with one expert joined the trade union group; and representatives from ETUC and

UNICE, together with 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;

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

Session three (Working group feedback)

“Building successful organisations and individuals for European Social Dialogue”

The report back from the three groups covered the following issues;

Trade Union Group

- ❖ The need to understand EU directives, their implications and how they can be harmonized with Latvian law;
- ❖ Information required on the structure and priorities of the European level social dialogue;
- ❖ A more effective system of passing on relevant information between LBAS and its members;
- ❖ Training is needed for:
 - Awareness of the importance of European Social Dialogue to a variety of audiences and;
 - Skills development for LBAS and its members;
- ❖ Accessing funds is necessary to finance the activities and training that are crucial for effective participation;
- ❖ Joint training and sharing good practices with Latvian employers;
- ❖ Improved representivity.

Employers' Organisation Group

- ❖ The importance of understanding social dialogue and the difference between European level and national level social dialogue;
- ❖ The need for a common employer position and for increased discussion and improved processes required to achieve this, setting up a Working Group could be useful;
- ❖ Round table discussions could be developed as a forum for Employers' organisations and trade unions. This forum could start by discussing less sensitive issues where reaching agreement might be less difficult e.g. telework;
- ❖ Improving representivity through gaining an understanding of who is not yet involved, and why.

Joint Group

- ❖ The need to understand what European Social Dialogue is;
- ❖ The importance of being well informed;
- ❖ The involvement of all social partners is crucial;
- ❖ Improved representation;
- ❖ Existing legislation should be better used;
- ❖ Discussion on important strategic issues is needed;
- ❖ Discussions could be expanded by approaching other partners at the EU level;
- ❖ Implementation issues must be addressed;
- ❖ Public sector needs to become involved.

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 small research project conducted specifically for this series of national seminars. 14 currently active members of the European Social Dialogue, eight trade union members and six employer members, from the “European 15” were asked the following questions relating to the organisational characteristics of “more” and “less” successful organisations and the actions and behaviours of “more” and “less” successful individuals.

Could you tell me, in your experience, what are the characteristics of the successful social partner at the European level? Could you list three or four characteristics of successful social partner organisations?

Could you tell me, in your experience, what are the characteristics of the least successful social partners at the European level. Could you list three or four characteristics of the least successful social partner organisations?

*Turning now to behaviours. Can you tell me what are the most important actions and behaviours that make **individuals** more or less successful in the European social dialogue?*

*Are there any behaviours or actions that make particular **national delegations** (employers and trade unions together) more or less successful?*

The purpose of this session was to allow the participants to review their own discussions and presentations from session three and four 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 full presentation is attached to this report as appendix five.

In summary, the following factors were identified in the research.

Characteristics of the "most successful" social partner organisations	Characteristics of "less successful" social partner organisations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Social dialogue is taken seriously; ✓ One or two individuals given clear responsibility for the social dialogue; ✓ Continuity of representation; ✓ Representatives are credible at the national level; ✓ Strong links between national and international activities; ✓ Clear process for mandate development; ✓ Clear process for reporting back; ✓ Processes for implementing agreements; ✓ Dedication of sufficient resources – admin, research and IT; ✓ Permanent Brussels presence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Lack of priority or interest in the social dialogue; ✗ Lack of clarity in who represents the organisation; ✗ Lack of delegation of authority – too many referrals to national HQ; ✗ Low credibility – nationally or at the European level; ✗ Changes in representation from meeting to meeting; ✗ Lack of processes for producing a clear mandate, reporting back or implementation; ✗ Over-political organisations/stances – lack of independence, influence of "party politics"; ✗ Poor electronic communication media; ✗ Lack of visibility in Brussels.
Actions/Behaviours of the "most successful" individuals	Actions/Behaviours of "less successful" individuals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Interested in and motivated by subject; ✓ Preparedness to research and learn; ✓ Patience!; ✓ Language skills; ✓ Good listening skills; ✓ Working outside of the formal meetings – 10% inside, 90% outside; ✓ Strong networker; ✓ Cultural awareness and sensitivity; ✓ Awareness of other country conditions; ✓ Awareness of views of other national social partner; ✓ Strong IT skills; ✓ "European" thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ No experience in collective bargaining; ✗ Lack of language skills; ✗ Lack of interest; ✗ Political operators; ✗ Dishonesty; ✗ Nationalistic approaches; ✗ Speaking to get their names in the minutes; ✗ Internet illiterate; ✗ Poor networker; ✗ Inability to work effectively outside formal meetings; ✗ Lack of closeness to the other national social partner; ✗ "9 to 5" workers.

Session five (Consensus building session)

The characteristics, actions and behaviours that contribute to successful engagement in social partnership.

Each individual was asked to consider, in the light of sessions four and five, what they considered to be the most important issues to have emerged from the discussion. During a “tour de table” exercise involving the national participants the following “long-list” of issues emerged. The list below is exactly that recorded in the meeting. It is not in any priority order and reflects only the order in which the subjects were mentioned. It does not reflect “multiple mentions” of issues.

- ❖ A better understanding of European social dialogue and the issues involved is essential;
- ❖ Awareness raising of the need for European social dialogue;
- ❖ Awareness of the priority issues in European social dialogue;
- ❖ The lack of information;
- ❖ Need to disseminate information effectively;
- ❖ Coordinating communication both from members, through LBAS and up to European level and from European levels down through LBAS to members is required;
- ❖ Due to the volume of information it is necessary to prioritise in order to communicate effectively;
- ❖ Language skills;
- ❖ Improved competencies relating both to national and EU level issues;
- ❖ People with the language skills and the competencies on European and national issues could be valuable members of a working group;
- ❖ The necessity for coalitions in order to strengthen the Latvian voice;
- ❖ IT can be used to avoid costly travel;
- ❖ The need to learn how to come to agreement;
- ❖ Keeping informed of good practices and the legislative environment of neighbouring countries;
- ❖ Mandates should have a substantive foundation;
- ❖ Wider representivity;
- ❖ The interest of the wider public must be engaged – they will be affected by outcomes and need to be informed of this;
- ❖ The EU should also understand the issues and priorities of Latvia;
- ❖ The social partners need strengthening;
- ❖ Joint activities should be organised, in particular to discuss topical European social dialogue issues;
- ❖ The need to develop procedures, in particular for identifying priorities;
- ❖ Communication between the respective Latvian social partners must be improved;
- ❖ Getting more fully involved in European sectoral social dialogue would also be very useful;
- ❖ A consultant or advisor would be very useful;
- ❖ Funding for an office in Brussels, perhaps from the Commission.

- ❖ That Latvia needs to become more active at all levels of the social dialogue;
- ❖ The necessity of getting the Latvian employers more engaged in social dialogue;
- ❖ The government and other agencies should be trained in the issues in order to get their support;
- ❖ Trade unions in the Baltic countries need to share information and have a clearer position on issues such as mobility;
- ❖ Issues such as working time and violence at work should be discussed.

Following the national participant “tour de table”, the experts were asked to give their views on what they considered to be the most important priorities for the Latvian social partners. In this short session, the experts and European level social partners made the following points;

- The institutional framework at various levels needs strengthening. The mandates of these institutions should also be clarified. National and sectoral levels of social dialogue are important and also need to be linked with the European level social dialogue. To achieve this there is a need for strong social partners at all levels. Improving information flows within and between organisations will be crucial;
- There is clearly a need to increase knowledge and awareness of the need for social dialogue. It is by working together that Latvian social partners will discover that pragmatic solutions can be developed. It may be that some of the issues on the current social dialogue agenda seem less relevant than issues on the national agenda;
- Social dialogue is not an end in itself and is only a useful activity if it helps you, your members and your country – and you are best placed to decide how to make it work.
- One of your challenges is to find the strength and motivation to get people in Latvia interested in these issues. It may be true that some of the issues presented may seem distant but they are an excellent means by which to start working together and through this process of working together you will develop skills and tools useful also for other contexts;
- The importance of communication was emphasised by both sides. There is a need to discuss what social dialogue is and what the main issues are. This relates also to the need to coordinate and disseminate information. Two strong

parties are required for the process of social dialogue so the joint capacity of the Latvian social partners must be strengthened. The ETUC offers a range of training opportunities for Latvian unions. Of particular interest might be the ETUC language courses that focus on industrial relations and “Euro” vocabulary.

- The connectivity between European and national social dialogue should not be neglected. The European social dialogue is a moving train that will not wait for the new member states to find a comfortable seat. In this respect you are in a “real time” learning process;
- There are a number of existing resources and resources under development that will help in addressing a number of the issues highlighted. With the support of the European Commission, the European level social partners have launched a series of actions. These include; the development of a model of competency that can be used to evaluate new and existing staff competencies; a workshop on how to apply for funding for social dialogue related initiatives; the establishment of two full time resource centres – one for the employers’ organisations and one for trade unions. The resource centres will provide a wide range information and assistance, and it is important that full use is made of them;

Following this general discussion, each of the national participants was asked to select three issues from the above “long-list” that they wished to spend the following day working on. This more focused “tour de table” produced consensus on four broad areas for further discussion;

Awareness raising	How can you improve your understanding of European social dialogue and raise awareness of the need for and the role of social dialogue with various audiences (your members, governments etc.)?
Communication and information flows	How can effective communication and coordination of information be achieved? The national social partners need to improve two-way communication with and between three key groups. Brussels; the social partners at national level; and with members.
Developing joint processes	What actions can the Latvian social partners take to demonstrate that win-win outcomes can be gained through working together?

Building coalitions	What coalitions can the Latvian social partners build, individually and jointly, to strengthen the voice of Latvia in Europe? This could include building on current relationships or developing new ones with member states with similar issues, objectives and concerns.
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Overnight the broad areas were converted into specific task descriptions.

DAY TWO (11th March)

Session six (Working groups)

Action plan development

Due to weather conditions, attendance at the start of day two did not permit work in three groups. Consequently two working groups; one trade union group, one employers' group were given two and a half hours to develop responses to the first three questions below. It was agreed that question four would be addressed in plenary session. Attendance did increase to the full seminar capacity during the course of the morning as conditions improved.

1. *What concrete steps can we take to improve awareness and understanding of social dialogue amongst our organisations, our members and with members of parliament?*
2. *How can we improve information flows and communication between our organisations and our members, and between our organisations and Brussels?*
3. *How can we maximise Latvian influence by developing coalitions with sister organisations in Europe?*
4. *What joint actions can the Latvian social partners initiate to build bipartite social dialogue based on win-win agendas?*

For each group, a working group chairperson/rapporteur was appointed. The employer representatives from the European social partner organisations worked with Latvian employers and the ETUC representatives worked with the Latvian trade unions. Each working group was assisted by one external expert.

Session seven (Working group feedback)

Action plan development

The group rapporteurs presented the following feedback from their working sessions;

Employers' Group

What concrete steps can we take to improve awareness and understanding of social dialogue amongst our organisations, our members and with members of parliament?

Initiate an information campaign on the importance of social dialogue using the current voluntary agreements as a vehicle.

- Translate texts of voluntary agreements into Latvian.
- By June 2005, develop and disseminate information materials to raise awareness on the opportunities of Social Dialogue and of the consequences if the agreements are not implemented.
- By October 2005, organise an employers' meeting to further discuss these issues.

How can we improve information flows and communication between our organisations and our members, and between our organisations and Brussels?

- Whilst information flows between the EU and national levels are good, due to the volumes of information there is a need to identify priorities and focus on what is important.
- Horizontal communication between the national employer organisations on EU issues should be further developed.

How can we maximise Latvian influence by developing coalitions with sister organisations in Europe?

We can build on the existing Baltic partnership.
A strategy could be developed to move into a more proactive mode.

Trade Union Group

What concrete steps can we take to improve awareness and understanding of social dialogue amongst our organisations, our members and with members of parliament?

- An awareness raising campaign should be started involving seminars, training and working groups.
- Language skills need to be developed.

How can we improve information flows and communication between our organisations and our members, and between our organisations and Brussels?

- A working group could be set up to identify priority issues and to inform a wider audience of these issues.
- Information on good practices in the field of collective bargaining should be disseminated.
- We should widen lobbying efforts to include a broader range of institutions at the EU level.
- LBAS should meet regularly to discuss strategies (this can include delegating tasks and undertaking in-depth studies).
- The existing website should be further developed.

How can we maximise Latvian influence by developing coalitions with sister organisations in Europe?

The traditional Nordic partners are good for information sharing. However collaborations should also be developed with the other Baltic countries and perhaps Poland. Logical partners might also be other countries of a similar size.

The following issues were raised in the plenary discussion of possible joint actions:

- Developing relationships as partners rather than adversaries;
- The need to find common ground (e.g. development of the Latvian economy);
- Possible collaboration with social partners from other countries;
- The need for regular meetings to keep each other informed;
- Informal round table discussions to promote greater success in formal negotiations;
- Using the Telexwork and Stress agreements as vehicles for working together through jointly translating the texts, developing information materials and establishing means of implementing the agreements.

Session eight (Consensus building session)

Action plan development

During the discussion of the working group reports in plenary session, it was agreed that action plans could be developed for the priority issues.

It was suggested that the formal action plan emerging from the seminar should be both focused and achievable but that many ideas contained in the working materials are also worthy of follow-up and should not be lost.

There was agreement of all parties to the following actions;

<i>Employers' organisations</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Improve horizontal discussions between LDDK and LAK to consolidate employers' views and opinions.2. Continue to work closely with Estonia and Lithuania and identify a strategy for coalition development with other member states on key issues.

<i>Trade unions</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. LBAS should establish a regular routine of member meetings to discuss key European social dialogue issues and strategies.2. In addition to strengthening cooperation with the Nordic member states, the trade unions will deepen relationships with Estonia and Lithuania. Further opportunities for coalition building will be investigated with Poland and other member states of a similar size to Latvia.

Joint action by the national social partners

1. Establish an informal round table that meets regularly to discuss European social dialogue issues and prepare the ground for any negotiations.
2. Use the Telework and Stress agreements as practical projects to work on together to;
 - Produce jointly agreed texts of the agreements in Latvian,
 - Collaborate on the development of informative support materials and their dissemination,
 - Prepare for reaching agreement on the implementation of these agreements in Latvia.

The meeting ended with the general agreement that a lot had been accomplished in a very short period of time. Not only had a soundly thought through series of actions been agreed upon, but the meeting itself had helped cement positive relationships between the national social partners in a very constructive way. 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	Presentation "Explaining the European Social Dialogue"
Appendix four	Presentation "Social Dialogue at the European level: practical modalities and procedures"
Appendix five	Presentation "Successful social partners and successful meetings learning from experience"
Appendix six	Agreed action plan from the Latvian seminar

<i>Trade unions</i>	<i>Employers' organisations</i>	<i>Joint action by national social partners</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. LBAS should establish a regular routine of member meetings to discuss key European social dialogue issues and strategies. 2. In addition to strengthening cooperation with the Nordic member states, the trade unions will deepen relationships with Estonia and Lithuania. Further opportunities for coalition building will be investigated with Poland and other member states of a similar size to Latvia. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve horizontal discussions between LDDK and LAK to consolidate employers' views and opinions. 2. Continue to work closely with Estonia and Lithuania and identify a strategy for coalition development with other member states on key issues. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish an informal round table that meets regularly to discuss European social dialogue issues and prepare the ground for any negotiations. 2. Use the Telework and Stress agreements as practical projects to work on together to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Produce jointly agreed texts of the agreements in Latvian; ➤ Collaborate on the development of informative support materials and their dissemination; ➤ Prepare for reaching agreement on the implementation of these agreements in Latvia.