



Final Report

Joint Project of the European Social Partner Organisations:
"CEEC social partners' participation in the European social dialogue:
What are Social Partners' Needs? "

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Overview of the Project

In their work programme 2003-2005, the European social partners (UNICE-UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC) agreed to take a number of actions in the areas of employment, mobility and enlargement. In the context of their work on enlargement, the European level social partners undertook to assist the social partner organisations in CEECs to prepare for their full involvement in the activities of the European social dialogue following their accession on 1 May 2004.

To this end, the European social partner organisations decided to launch the joint pilot project described in this report.

The specific aim of the pilot project was to help social partner organisations in the CEECs identify what they needed to do at the national level in order to strengthen their capacity to act as social partners mandated to represent the views of their members in the European social dialogue.

The pilot project covered five countries in central and eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic; Slovakia and Lithuania). The intention was to subsequently organize an identical program of seminars for the three remaining CEEC accession countries (Slovenia, Latvia and Estonia) if the methodology used in the pilot proved successful.

The pilot project involved the design and organisation of a two-day seminar in each of the pilot countries between December 2003 and June 2004. During the course of each seminar representatives of the national social partner organisations were invited to identify what they needed to do at the national level in order to strengthen their capacity to represent the views of their members in the European social dialogue. On the basis of the identified priorities, the social partners individually and jointly developed the specific and time-phased action plans that are included in the body of this report.

Project Methodology

The national seminars were designed to identify the organisational and individual characteristics that would enable the national social partners to participate effectively in the European social dialogue. The objectives for the national social partners during the two-day events 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 prepare for their full participation in the European social dialogue process after accession on 1 May 2004.

Each of the seminars was attended by representatives of national employers' organisations and trade unions; representatives from the European social partners UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC; and selected experts.

The seminar methodology was designed to assure the maximum participation of the national trade unions and employers with "added value" input from the participants from the European social partner organisations and the experts. The majority of the time in each national seminar was devoted to discussion in small working groups, regular plenary feedback forums and consensus building sessions.

To further facilitate the generation, development and ownership of ideas and strategies, the working groups were conducted in the national language with "whispering" interpretation available to the European social partner participants and experts to enable them to follow the discussion and to intervene where appropriate.

Additionally, and in order to maximise bipartite discussion, agreement and action planning, where discussions took place in working groups, three groups were used:

- one containing exclusively trade union representatives;
- a second containing exclusively employer organisation representatives; and
- a third group of "joint" or "mixed" composition.

The outputs of all three groups were presented and discussed in plenary in order to develop overall consensus on priorities and actions.

Day one of the seminar was devoted to identifying the most important characteristics, actions and behaviours that would lead to a successful entry into the European social dialogue for the national 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 the most important 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 designed to speed their transition and maximise their effectiveness of the national social partners in the European social dialogue.

The outline format of the national seminars is described below. The complete agenda with associated timings is attached as appendix one.

	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.

Each of the seminars was chaired/facilitated by the independent expert selected by the European social Partners to design and manage the seminars, Alan Wild of Aritake-Wild.

A report was prepared and translated immediately after each national seminar for the use of the seminar participants. Each report provides an overview of the eight working sessions, and concludes with the agreed action plan that was the outcome of the final working session.

Finally, and after the completion of the national seminars, representatives from each participating country were invited to a concluding meeting in Brussels on 24-25 June to present the progress made so far in delivering their national action plan; to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot project; and to discuss what general conclusions could be drawn from the exercise as a whole.

The National Seminar Conclusions

The purpose of this section of the report is to list the action plans developed by each country's social partners. It does not comment upon the discussions that took place in generating the national plans or review critically the actions that were agreed upon at the national level. This critical analysis can be found in the final section of this report.

The full national reports, which provide a comprehensive review of each of the seminars and describe the diversity, richness and detail of the national debate, are attached as appendix five.

With few exceptions, the national action plans below focus on four common areas; establishing national bipartite social dialogue; in-group coordination; financial and material resources; and human resource quality.

It would be a significant error however to assume that, because the areas for action were common to each country, each country faced similar challenges from a similar point of departure. Because the participants in each seminar were asked to unlock the same door (speedy and successful integration into the European social dialogue), they each designed a similarly shaped key. The different ways in which the keys will need to be used in each country is discussed in the section describing the overall conclusions of the project.

Each national action plan is reproduced below in exactly the form that it was agreed at the seminar. No attempt has been made to further refine, improve or otherwise change the documents.

Slovakia

The first national seminar was held in Topolcianky on 29 and 30 January 2004. It was attended by 23 national social partner representatives and eight European social partner representatives and experts. The attendance list for each of the national seminars is attached as appendix six.

Following the project methodology (see above), the aim of the seminar was for the national social partners to decide on national priority issues, and to develop individual and joint action plans to address them, in order to facilitate their rapid integration and maximise their effectiveness in the European Social Dialogue.

The Slovakian social partners agreed on the following action plan:

Slovakian Social Partner Action Plan			
Resources			
<p><i>Trade unions</i></p> <p>Examine reallocation of current financial resources at the national level to reflect change in work balance towards European activity;</p> <p>Explore options for increased financing through existing and new members.</p>	<p><i>Employers' organisations</i></p> <p>Conduct comprehensive inventory of available people/people already working on European issues in each organisation;</p> <p>Maximise use of these individuals for the benefit of the whole group;</p> <p>Explore options for increased financing through existing and new members.</p>	<p><i>Joint action by national social partners</i></p> <p>Request government funding for;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Specific social dialogue projects; o Core administrative infrastructure for social dialogue ; o Office facilities in Brussels. <p>Explore project funding at EU level and with ILO for social dialogue projects.</p>	<p><i>European level social partners</i></p> <p>UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP, ETUC to make joint approach to European Commission for the funding of a presence in Brussels;</p> <p>Provide aid in identifying EU budget lines where funding for national social dialogue initiatives might be possible;</p>
Education and training			
<p><i>Trade unions</i></p> <p>Continue to readjust current education programmes run by the Slovakian trade union institute to provide additional focus on European issues;</p> <p>Explore use of internships to bolster language competence of young people.</p>	<p><i>Employers' organisations</i></p> <p>Focus education and training resources on those individuals identified through the "network" exercise described above.</p>	<p><i>Joint action by national social partners</i></p> <p>Through EU or government funding, build presence in Brussels. Use young people with language skills as permanent delegates and to host visiting experts;</p> <p>Identify education/training project to access European funding and help build skills</p>	<p><i>European level social partners</i></p> <p>Assist in identification and acquisition of EU funding for appropriate projects.</p>
National Social Dialogue			
<p><i>Trade unions</i></p>	<p><i>Employers' organisations</i></p>	<p><i>Joint action by national social partners</i></p>	<p><i>European level social partners</i></p>

<p>Consider membership of national social dialogue from the point of view of representivity of Slovakian workers.</p>	<p>Consider membership of national social dialogue from the point of view of representivity of Slovakian employers – including SMEs.</p>	<p>Current tripartite system should remain and its effectiveness enhanced by the development of national bipartite social dialogue;</p> <p>The bipartite national structure should be based on trade union and employer representatives in current tripartite structure;</p> <p>People already active in European committees should be also considered;</p> <p>Terms of reference for national social dialogue to include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o discussion of and agreement where possible on common approaches to European agenda; o discussion of, and agreement where possible on issues on the agenda of the tripartite social dialogue; o implementation of agreements reached at the European level; o domestic social dialogue issues; <p>Before the end of March there should be a discussion between the national employers and trade unions to agree national social dialogue structure, terms of reference, operating procedures and launch.</p>	
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Lithuania

The second national seminar was held in Vilnius on 17 and 18 February 2004. It was attended by 35 national social partner representatives and 8 European social partner representatives and experts.

Using the common project agenda and methodology, the Lithuanian social partners agreed on the following action plan:

Lithuanian Social Partner Action Plan		
<i>Trade unions</i>	<i>Employers' organisations</i>	<i>Joint action by national social partners</i>
<p>1. Establish a mechanism to bring together the views of the different trade union centres to aid in establishing common positions on European issues. It is envisioned that this process will involve the establishment of coordinators and the agreement of specific time schedules for review and approval.</p> <p>2. Provide training and development for representatives including on the economic development of Lithuania, the European legal acquis, positive cooperation and negotiation practices.</p>	<p>1. Propose at the March meetings of the Presidia of LPK and LVDK to establish a joint working group on European issues. Following the Presidia discussions the two organisations will meet and agree upon follow up items.</p> <p>2. LPK and LVDK will explore the possibility of establishing representatives in Brussels to facilitate their work on EU issues and their contacts with EU players (Commission, Parliament, UNICE, UEAPME, etc)</p>	<p>1. Establish more regular informal contact between formal meetings, on European issues.</p> <p>2. Arrange a joint seminar to review issues on the agenda of the European Social Dialogue with the attendance of ETUC, UNICE, UEAPME and CEEP.</p> <p>3. On an individual basis: Make personal efforts to improve the human atmosphere during discussions; to understand the views and perspectives of the other side; and to identify common points rather than focusing on the differences.</p>

Czech Republic

The third national seminar was held in Prague on 9 and 10 March 2004. It was attended by 34 national social partner representatives and 8 European social partner representatives and experts.

Czech social partners agreed on the following action plan:

Czech Republic Social Partner Action Plan

Financial Resources

<i>Trade unions</i>	<i>Employers' organisations</i>	<i>Joint action by national social partners</i>	<i>European level social partners</i>
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Use the ETUC seminar this week as a means of determine what EC budget lines are relevant to European Social Dialogue projects and develop skills on obtaining these funds (how to write a project proposal in terms of content and budget)</p> <p>Develop recruitment campaigns to increase available financial resources.</p>	<p>Meet on 27 April to consider the result of internal management discussions on:</p> <p>The identification of key person(s) with responsibility for EU affairs, in particular, European social dialogue.</p> <p>The establishment of an "Expert Travel Fund" to reduce the cash flow problems caused by late payments of expenses by European Commission.</p> <p>Creating a network of employer representatives in EU meetings in order to coordinate the position of the Czech business community and assure report back.</p>		<p>Discuss with the European Commission ways of improving financial support to social partner organisations and request the European Commission to organise a clarification seminar on existing possibilities of financial support.</p>

People Development

<i>Trade unions</i>	<i>Employers' organisations</i>	<i>Joint action by national social partners</i>	<i>European level social partners</i>
<p>Language skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow ETUCO language courses - Revise personnel/recruitment 	<p>By the end of September, the Employers' organisations will:</p>		

<p>criteria to ensure language skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revise teaching methods of language courses continuously organised and attended by union experts <p>Use exchange programs/internships/stagieres in cooperation with the ETUC and neighboring country organisations.</p> <p>Deepen "EU dimension" of the Young Trade Unionists Council.</p> <p>Use the intranet network ("Regionet") to facilitate communication on EU issues between the confederation and all other levels of trade union structure.</p> <p>Deadline: End of year 2004</p>	<p>Conduct a strength and weakness assessment of their capacities in terms of technical and language skills to identify training needs.</p> <p>Ensure language skills criteria as a part of organisational recruitment strategy.</p>		
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European Thinking/Information Sharing

<i>Trade unions</i>	<i>Employers' organisations</i>	<i>Joint action by national social partners</i>	<i>European level social partners</i>
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Make best use of Internet/ and intranet correspondence courses to develop information/ communication and feedback on EU issues.</p> <p>Contact the Czech organisation of SMEs to judge optimal ways of addressing their employees on European integration process in case they do not have union representation.</p>	<p>To make better use of existing information channels to publicise the relevance to the business community regarding EU initiatives.</p> <p>By the end of May, encourage participation in the forthcoming elections for the European Parliament and to increase the public understanding of the importance of Czech involvement in the EU.</p>		

<p>Use the mechanism and activities of European works councils as an example of European thinking culture.</p> <p>Promote European sectoral level dialogue as a means of promoting European thinking.</p>			
Working Bipartite Dialogue			
<i>Trade unions</i>	<i>Employers' organisations</i>	<i>Joint action by national social partners</i>	<i>European level social partners</i>
		<p>By 30th April, complete agreement on bipartite cooperation, during these discussions things like themes telework and lifelong learning will be pilot programs for bipartite cooperation</p> <p>Disseminate information relating to bipartite cooperation on websites of social partners organisations.</p>	

Hungary

The fourth national seminar was held in Budapest on 15 and 16 June 2004. It was attended by a total of 18 national social partner representatives and 9 European social partner representatives and experts.

It should be noted that this particular seminar suffered from being relatively badly attended in terms of numbers of participants and representation of organizations participating in the Hungarian social dialogue bodies. As a result of attendee turnover and absence during the meeting it was not possible to follow the exact format adopted for each of the other national seminars. In Hungary it proved not possible to hold a "joint" working group on the second day of the seminar, and there are therefore no "joint" conclusions from the event.

The Hungarian social partners agreed on the following action plan:

Hungarian Social Partner Action Plan	
Trade Unions	Employers' Organisations
<p>Trade union coordination: A process needs to be established to facilitate the coordination of trade union views on European issues based on either the OET or a new umbrella structure. A working group will be established to develop concrete proposals that will be presented for decision to each of the trade unions involved.</p> <p>Language: In the short term, an audit will be undertaken to establish existing language competencies in the various professional disciplines needed for effective engagement in the European Social Dialogue.</p> <p>In the longer term, recruitment opportunities must be used to bring people with both language and technical skills into the trade unions. It was recognised that there will be a trade off between language skills, expertise in technical issues and negotiating competencies. This will need to be addressed through additional training.</p>	<p>Information flows: A more formal and reliable system needs to be established to assure a better information flow on European social dialogue issues.</p> <p>Language: Steps need to be put in place to identify technical experts with the language skills necessary to effectively represent employers in the European Social Dialogue.</p>

Poland

The fifth and final national seminar was held in Warsaw on 20 and 21 June 2004. It was attended by 29 national social partner representatives and 9 European social partner representatives and experts.

The Polish social partners agreed on the following action plan:

Polish Social Partner Action Plan

Joint Social Partner Actions

Bipartite social dialogue

A coordinating team comprising attendees from this workshop will meet before the end of September to implement the following actions:

- To arrange bilateral meetings in the metal, construction and banking sectors to discuss the scope of discussions and priorities for effective social dialogue in these sectors.
- To provide information on this activity to other sectors with the intention of promoting sectoral social dialogue.
- To develop a process of permanent national level cooperation between the social partners for presentation to the decision making boards of their respective organisations.
- To discuss and agree upon an agenda of 'common interest' issues relating both to national and European level issues where joint approaches will be of a mutual benefit.

Skill Development

As a joint initiative, the social partners will develop a project to be submitted for external funding to evaluate existing skills, to identify training and development needs and to provide training and development programmes. This could be used as a model for other accession countries.

Trade Union Actions

In addition to the items identified above as 'joint', the trade unions undertook to take the following actions:

- Using the capability profile presented at the seminar, the trade unions will undertake an evaluation of existing skills available to their organisations and develop action plans to meet the identified training needs. Particular attention will be paid to developing the skills of younger people by giving them technical experience through acting as observers.
- To improve internal coordination between trade unions, in particular where the unions concerned are not members of European level social partner organisations.

Employers Organisations Actions

In addition to the items identified above as 'joint' the employers' organisations undertook to take the following actions:

- Using the capability profile presented at the seminar, the employers' organisations will undertake an evaluation of existing skills available to their organisations and develop action plans to meet the identified needs.
- To develop teamwork initiatives to better combine language and technical expertise.
- Following the establishment of the process for national level social dialogue, the employers' organisations will develop practices to promote positive cooperation to maximise their effectiveness as an employer group both nationally and in their relationships with the European level social partners.

European Social Partner Actions

The European social partner organisations agreed to support the creation of the skills development initiative proposed in the joint action programme.

The Concluding Meeting

The concluding meeting for the pilot project was held in Brussels on 24 and 25 June 2004. Representatives from each of the pilot countries reported back on the action plans developed during the seminars;

- discussed what had gone well and what could be improved were the seminars to be run again; and
- considered the overall conclusions that could be drawn from the project.

The three countries where the seminars had been held in January, February and March (Slovakia, Lithuania and Czech Republic) had already made progress in the implementation of their action plans. However the last two countries (Poland and Hungary), where the seminars were held just two weeks and one week prior to the concluding meeting, had plainly had no opportunity to start work on implementation. It was considered by everyone present that a follow up event "one year on" would help provide a focus for continued implementation of the national level actions.

In discussions of what went well and what could be improved during the seminars, the national participants made the following observations:

	What worked	What could be improved
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided a unique opportunity to meet as potential players of a bipartite social dialogue; • Informal Atmosphere; • Focus on a specific topic; • Ability to identify common interests of the social partners; • Underlined desire of both sides to work together; • SME representatives were involved for first time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the seminar, the employer side of social partnership has been restructured – the discussion really needs to take place again; • Negative Government attitude to social dialogue makes life difficult; • Relevance of trade union representation to family based SMEs was not apparent; • Still need to develop social dialogue within the country so making progress at the EU level will be difficult.
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great opportunity for an informal and frank exchange of views; • Good exchange of information with other accession countries; • The opportunity to identify and build consensus/agreement between the social partners; • Brainstorming in a transparent format; • Helped to define priorities clearly and to identify concrete action plans; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers' organisation side was not as prepared as the trade unions; • Greater support from the leaders of the social partner organisations; • Difficult to coordinate implementation when the social partners start from different levels; • Lack of financial means makes actions difficult to implement; • The subject needs more attention

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Format of seminar was good; • Transformed the level of understanding of social dialogue for those present; • Perfect timing of the seminar in line with national activities and agenda. 	from national social partner organisations.
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The seminar began movement toward addressing the problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding of social dialogue inhibited participation; • Lack of interest in EU level topics - focus is still on Hungarian level issues; • Lack of adequate representation of all social partners and of decision makers seems due to lack of interest from social partner organisations.
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chance for informal meeting between unions and EOs to exchange views and information; • Pushed to take action in terms of bipartite social dialogue; • Great opportunity for relationship and contact building; • Opportunity to build on European experience; • Chance to discover how to better represent national views in Europe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all polish social partners were present as they were not members of EU social partners organisations; • Preparation of participants ahead of the meeting could have been better.
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The active participation format was good; • The "planned spontaneity" built into the design worked well; • Learned a lot about similarities and differences between new member states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of participation across countries varied; • Could have better tailored the experiences of the invited EU experts to the specific characteristics of country situation; • Could have used a specific example to explain how the EU social dialogue works

At the end of the concluding meeting, the national participants expressed the unanimous view that the seminar in its current form should be conducted in the remaining CEEC accession countries (Latvia, Slovenia and Estonia).

They further suggested to the European level social partners that "one year on" follow up meetings should be held in all of the participating countries. The agenda of these meetings should include a review of progress in implementation of national action plans; create an opportunity to reinforce the importance of this issue at senior and decision making levels within the national social partner organisations; and foresee discussions on the main economic and social challenges facing each country related to joining the EU.

The overall conclusions and suggested action items discussed in the meeting are further detailed in the final section of this report.

Overall Conclusions

The purpose of this final section of the report is to identify the general conclusions that can be drawn from the project. The content of this section is based upon discussions between the national and European social partner representatives that took place at the "concluding meeting" of the project held in Brussels on 24 and 25 June; on the separate observations of the European social partners (ETUC, UNICE, UEAPME and CEEP); and the views of the various experts that assisted throughout the project.

The five countries involved in this project differ greatly in their size, state of economic development, the maturity of current social dialogue systems, the resources available to the social partners and the attitude of national Government to the promotion of social dialogue. It is nonetheless possible, noting the dangers of stereotyping the countries involved, to draw certain general conclusions from the project as a whole.

No "one size fits all" solution

The first general conclusion is that any temptation to apply a "one size fits all solution" or "single model of bipartite dialogue" to the five CEEC accession countries participating in the project should be resisted. Although the overall conclusions reached at the end of each individual meeting on first sight seem quite similar, the concrete issues faced by the social partners in the five countries visited are both complex and very different. This means that the social partners will need to take varying routes in working to resolve essentially similar overall problems.

For example, although they still have a lot of work to do, the social partners in the Czech Republic are individually well organised, have basically sound relationships with each other and benefit from a degree of Government support. This contrasts with the situation experienced in Lithuania where a tradition on how social partners can engage in a respectful social dialogue does not yet exist; in Slovakia where the national Government is taking steps to dilute the influence of trade unions and employers' organisations; and in Hungary where it proved impossible to get all of the social partner organisations around the same table with participants of sufficient decision making stature to the seminar.

The need for diverse approaches to the resolution of essentially similar problems needs to be constantly borne in mind throughout this section.

Bipartism or Tripartism

By far the most common issue encountered in the national seminars and most extensively discussed at the concluding meeting was the subject of the relationship between tripartite and bipartite dialogue.

In each of the five participating countries the Government had already established tripartite consultation mechanisms to advise, to a greater or lesser extent, on the move from state control to market economy. This same tripartite structure was also used, again to a greater or lesser extent, in the development of national laws, and in particular labour laws, that were required to implement the European *acquis*.

At the commencement of each seminar, it was clear that not everyone saw the need for a system of autonomous bipartite social dialogue. Bipartite and tripartite dialogues were frequently seen as mutually exclusive and it took some time before certain participants could see that bipartite social dialogue and tripartite concertation could be *complementary* and not *alternative* approaches to partnership.

By the end of the seminars every country had concluded that not only was an autonomous system of bipartite social dialogue necessary to link effectively with the European level equivalent, but that effective bipartite dialogue could lead to increase the influence of the social partners in the existing tripartite system.

A series of practical problems associated with the development and maintenance of an autonomous bipartite dialogue were identified:

- i) *Resources*; Few of the trade unions and none of the employers believed that effective bipartite dialogue structures could be established using only existing resources. Trade unions reported falling membership and declining revenues. Employers' organisations described the difficulties they had experienced since their creation of getting sufficient companies to see the benefit of membership. Both parties described considerable internal difficulties associated with shifting extremely scarce resources from the local to the international level.
- ii) *Bipartite autonomy in a tripartite framework*; Temptations were great to seek "quick fixes" to the resource question by using the structure and resources provided by Government to the tripartite social dialogue. However, the social partners in every country acknowledged the adverse impact of using tripartite resources on the autonomy of the social dialogue in terms of priority and agenda setting; the ability to meet as and when they wished or to effectively control work performed by the Government-funded secretariat. This approach was therefore seen as resource efficient but sub-optimal in terms of autonomy.
- iii) *The Government as an employer*; In each of the project countries the Government remains a major employer. Both employers and trade unions felt uncomfortable with the failure of Government to separate its political responsibilities from those it has as an

employer. It was frequently said that the inability or unwillingness of the government to distinguish between the roles of “elected Government” and “business owner” in its engagement in the social dialogue politicised discussions to a great extent. This issue will be further elaborated below.

- iv) *Strength and representativity*; Both sides were aware of the need to strengthen their role as social partners in the eyes of Government and the general public as well as vis-à-vis their own constituents. Steps to increase their representativity towards their constituents would assist them in their efforts to improve their effectiveness in discussions and negotiations at either national or European level. Furthermore, without broader membership, it would be hard to deliver national or European level agreements without relying on governmental help. Government regulation was frequently seen as the only way that they could assure compliance with their decisions and agreements.
- v) *Membership of European level organisations*; most but not all key national level trade unions and employers’ organisations participating in the tripartite social dialogue in their country are members of the European level social partner organisations. This raises important questions for implementation of voluntary agreements in some countries.
- vi) *Scope for bipartite dialogue in a heavily regulated environment*; The project countries have a long history of high Government intervention in the labour market. In the face of a Government with strong interventionist tendencies it is difficult for the social partners to find space for their autonomous activities. The absence of a recognised, autonomous and influential role feeds the negative spiral of representativity, membership and resources.
- vii) *The top down demand for national bipartite social dialogue*; It appeared from the debate, that those most demanding autonomous bipartite social dialogue were not so much the national trade unions, employers’ organisations and their members, but the European Union institutions. The key driver being the essential role of social dialogue in EU decision-making and governance in the area of labour affairs. In the absence of this top down “demand-side pull”, there would seem to be little “supply-side push” for the development of sophisticated bipartite dialogue. Strong, autonomous and financially self sufficient social partners are very unlikely to simply “emerge” from the environment currently prevailing in the project countries.

The issues outlined above apply to a greater or lesser extent in individual countries. They are no “quick fix” solutions and the development of an autonomous national social dialogue depends first and foremost on the needs of the national social partners themselves. However, actions by the national Government can either support or undermine their efforts. Moreover, the European level social partners and financial support from the EU can help to initiate movement.

Attitude and role of Government

One seminar participant described Government attitude to social partners and social dialogue as comparable to the need to have exotic animals in a zoo. The Government knew that, to please the European Union, it needed such animals – but in reality, it considered them to be difficult to control, expensive to feed and temperamental. Although it was careful to keep these animals alive, the Government would seek to control the animal’s behaviour rather than creating conditions that would allow it to prosper.

At the tripartite level, it was commonly claimed, the Government tended to prefer to reinforce its own position as decision maker by trading one side off against the other and the prospect of employers and trade unions developing and pursuing a shared agenda was not something to be encouraged.

However, the Government was not the only player bearing responsibility for this situation. In the short term this approach allowed either trade unions or employers to side with a friendly Government, leaving the excluded party with little alternative but to oppose everything and wait for a change of Government after an election. Both employers and trade unions described themselves as being more experienced with “opposing and blocking” followed by “maximising advantage”, than in developing a genuine long term shared agenda on key economic and social issues.

The structure of ownership further complicates relations between social partners and the Government. The state remains a very influential employer in its own right but is either unable or unwilling to separate the roles of politics and business ownership.

By developing more long term cooperative relationships, the social partners themselves can work to change this pattern and break out of the “win/lose” cycle.

Leadership and in-group coordination

In many countries of the world both employers’ organisations and trade unions are either looking to merge or to develop fruitful cooperation based on a clear division of tasks between complementary sister organisations. By contrast, in most of the project countries, the trend still seemed to be towards competitive behaviours on the part of these organisations.

If the project countries are to maximise their influence at the European level, these competitive behaviours need to be modified. Their acknowledgment of this fact at the operational level is reflected in each action plan in each country. The need for improved coordination of group positions; the identification of areas of consensus between the social partners; and a sharing of duplicated resources are major items on every agenda. However, the degree of support for such cooperative attitudes at technical level by the highest decisions makers in the organisation varied from country to country.

If the project countries are to exert a more effective influence in the short to medium term at the European level, the need for improved cooperation must be rapidly embraced by the most senior managers in both trade unions and employers' organisations.

Financial and Material Resources

Without exception, the employers' organisations and trade unions spoke of financial and material resource shortfalls. These tended to be generally less acute in the trade unions. It is clear nonetheless that the organisations are struggling to do more than their sister federations in established EU countries with fewer resources and are faced with certain "chronic" difficulties.

Contrary to what happened in the established EU countries, which were able to switch resources gradually from the domestic to the European stage as the locus of law creation gradually shifted from the national level to the European, the social partners in the project countries have had to cope with the national implementation of the European acquis at the same time as being required to become operational in dealing with the new issues on the European level agenda. The short term workload they face is quite extraordinary.

Moreover, the most successful employers' organisations and trade unions in the established EU countries have built financially and structurally sound organisations out of a long history where collective answers to common challenges made sense both for unions and companies. There is no comparable history upon which to build in the project countries.

Finally, whilst there is little doubt that the organisations can do much to help themselves from a resource point of view through membership growth, service development and sharing resources, this will probably not be sufficient for them to impact dramatically at the European level in the short to medium term.

There is a strong argument to suggest that these countries would, against longer term sustainable governance and business plans, benefit from a short to medium term injection of assistance. In almost all cases, the social partners spoke of having a presence in Brussels and being able to train and develop their people. These would be sound places to start in considering assistance.

Human Resource quality

Although many organisations mentioned the pure shortage of numbers of people available to them, the overriding human resource issue they identified was that of language capability. Moreover, the best language skills they had in their organisations were typically possessed by those with little knowledge or experience in the technical issues or in social negotiations.

This mismatch of language and technical skills was a general theme in the actions contained in each of the national action plans. The plans concentrated on two themes;

- i) The conduct of audits of language/technical capabilities within individual organisations and within the employers' organisation and trade union sides as a whole in order to better use existing resources and to prioritise training and development efforts;
- ii) To provide fast track learning opportunities for younger people, including work experience placements and funded "observation" places at social dialogue meetings.

Whilst the action to undertake this process have to be taken nationally, this could be better carried out across the accession countries in the context of an externally funded programme comprising the following elements:

- ❖ The development of a template for skills review based upon an extended version of that provided in the seminar;
- ❖ The designing of a model audit process; and
- ❖ The design of activities to fill the identified training and development gaps.

With respect to the "observer" and "experience placements", since neither employers' organisations nor trade unions currently have "spare" staff to benefit from these types of programmes, they would have to either generate funds for additional staff or define a system of sharing human resources with their respective members to train and use quality people to whom they could assign the task of representing their views on EU issues in the future. The question of continuity needs to be assured.

Next steps

The seminar programme was viewed as a valuable exercise. It brought to the surface the practical problems of connecting with the European social dialogue machinery and supported the development of concrete action plans to facilitate this. Aside from the technical objectives of the seminars, the

opportunity was provided for the national social partners to work together in a practical way on developing consensus approaches to certain issues. Additionally, the seminars proved to be an important source of two-way learning and relationship building between the European and national social partners.

From an action point of view it was agreed to

- arrange similar seminars in the remaining CEEC countries (Latvia, Estonia and Slovenia);
- to undertake "one year on" reviews of all eight countries to follow up on the action plans and to add further reinforcement to their progressive implementation.

The continuation of this programme combined with actions to support the skill development initiative referred to in the human resource conclusions would run in parallel with other initiatives on enlargement foreseen in the social dialogue work programme such as the study on restructuring in new Member States and should be part of a more integrated programme of assistance to social partners of the new member states.

Appendices

1. Generic National Seminar Agenda
(English, Slovakian, Lithuanian, Czech, Hungarian and Polish versions)
2. *Presentation* - The European Social Dialogue
(English, Slovakian, Lithuanian, Czech, Hungarian and Polish versions)
3. *Presentation* - The European Social Dialogue Process
(English, Slovakian, Lithuanian, Czech, Hungarian and Polish versions)
4. *Presentation* - Successful Social Partners and Successful Meetings
(English, Slovakian, Lithuanian, Czech, Hungarian and Polish versions)
5. Complete texts of the Country Reports from Slovakia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland (English, Slovakian, Lithuanian, Czech, Hungarian and Polish versions)
6. Executive Summary of the final report
(English and French versions)
7. Attendance Lists for each National Seminar and for the preparatory and final meetings
8. Accounts