



Integrated Project of the European Social Partner Organisations

Minutes of the Conference “Social partners’ participation in the
European social dialogue

... what are the social partner’s needs?”

Brussels, Belgium

23rd & 24th January 2008

Prepared by Anna Kwiatkiewicz
ARITAKE-WILD

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Integrated Project of the European Social Partner Organisations

“Social partners’ participation in the
European social dialogue

... what are the social partner’s needs?”

Report of the interim conference

ETUC Conference Centre
Brussels, Belgium
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As a part of the European Social Partners work programme 2006 – 2008, the third phase of a project designed to enable the national social partner organisations in the new member states and the candidate countries to improve their capacity for current or future involvement in the European social dialogue took place between February 2007 and October 2007. This phase of the project involved the new member states of Bulgaria and Romania and the candidate countries: Croatia and Turkey.

The methodology used was based on similar work undertaken in the earlier phase of the project involving the new member states in eight Central and Eastern European countries as a part of the social partners work programme 2003 – 2005¹. The results of the project were presented during a 2-day conference organized in Brussels on the 23rd and 24th January 2008. The participants were representatives of national social partners from the 4 countries mentioned above as well as representatives of national social partners from remaining UE25 (the complete list of participants can be found in appendix one).

The objectives of the final conferences were;

- To present synthesis of the results of the national seminars held in Croatia, Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria,
- To present concrete actions taken by the eight CEEC member state representatives after their involvement in the joint national seminars,
- To offer representatives of national social partners from “old” member states (EU15) the opportunity to better understand specific challenges faced by the social partners from new member states and candidate countries.

This report follows the format of the final conference agenda, providing insights and conclusions of the sessions that made up the seminar. The detailed agenda for the meeting is included as

¹ During the European social partner work programme 2003 – 2005, initial and follow-up seminars were held in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia between January 2005 and May 2006. Reports of the 16 national seminars and synthesis reports from the two sub projects can be found on the websites of the European social partner organizations ETUC (<http://resourcecentre.etuc.org/>) and BUSINESSEUROPE (<http://www.erc-online.eu>).

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appendix two, but the nine working sessions making up the seminar can be summarised as follows:

	Outline session content	Nature of the session
Session one	Introduction to the project – its scope, objectives & approach.	Expert input
Session two	Overview of findings and conclusions from the project.	Expert input
Session three	“How the project countries approached common issues and how successful were they?”	Joint social partner presentations and plenary discussion
Session four	“Coping with enlargement” – a review of how the social dialogue of 27 works today and defining possible ways of improvement.	Panel discussion
Session five	“Developing the individual and organisational capacities for success in the European Social Dialogue” – presentation of the research findings.	Expert and national social partners representative input
Session six	European Commission film on Social Dialogue.	Film projection
Session seven	“How the project countries approached common issues and how successful were they?”	Joint social partner presentations and plenary discussion
Session eight	“Improving the effectiveness of a European social dialogue with increased responsibility, membership and diversity”	Expert input
Session nine	Closing plenary comments	Expert input

DAY ONE (22nd January)

Session one (Expert input) - “Introduction of the project – its scope, objectives & approach”. Maria Helena Andre (ETUC) offered a short overview of the project explaining the methodology of the joint national seminars and actions taken within the framework of the project. She expressed her hopes that after the series of meetings the notion of “old” and “new” member states would be replaced by the notion of social partners’ organisations in the enlarged Europe. She stressed that supporting the development of independent, strong and conscious member organisations in new member states of the EU that are able to provide input to the European

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level social dialogue is equally important as taking European solutions to the local level for implementation. Jørgen Rønne (BUSINESSEUROPE) commented on concrete tools that have been developed as a result of earlier phases of the project and that are now available for national social partners to use (trade union and employer resource centres, training and mentoring programmes, capacity audit tools and the translation fund).

Session two (Expert input) – Overview of the findings and conclusions from the project.

Following this intervention, Alan Wild presented a synthesis of the project results. As an introductory remark, he underlined that during 4 years there have been 20 national seminars organised, underlining the commitment of the European Social Partners to the project and to developing close relationships between European Social partners and national social partners as well as among national social partners from different countries. For some social partners, the national seminars had been the first opportunity for them to meet formally without government and it was the first occasion ever to reflect upon the methods of work and procedures in place to support bipartite social dialogue. Some common issues relate to structural, mechanical and relational issues but one of the biggest challenges is the shift from engagement in what were described in the seminars as parallel monologues to genuine dialogue.

Session three (Expert input) - "How the project countries approached common issues and how successful were they?"

After introducing some ideas on social dialogue, Jørgen Rønne gave the floor to national social partner's representatives to present their insights about the following issues: the establishment of an effective national bipartite social dialogue; the development employer and trade union national mandates; the improvement of employers and trade union coordination.

Slovenia

A representative of employers' organisation Anze Hirs (ZDS) commented on the new laws and regulations that have been adopted in Slovenia: the Collective Agreement Act, the Chambers of Commerce and the Industry Act and amendments to the Small Business Act. He explained that as a result of the actions agreed in the project the flow of information between the employers' organisation and its members had been improved, a better quality of human resources had been hired and membership had increased. The future goal is to ensure better coordination between employers' organisations and trade unions with a view to assuring the early identification of priority issues and a more precise definition of the social partners' short and longer term goals.

Following this intervention, a representative of the trade unions Metka Roksandic (ZSSS) highlighted the challenges arising from the new legal regulations that apply to employers' organisations and trade unions. According to his diagnosis, obstacles to the further development of social dialogue on the employers' side are their reduced representativity and competition; and on the trade union side insufficient organisational capacity and human resources skills limit their ability to implement European agreements.

Romania

A trade union representative from Romania Lucien Vasilescu (CNSLR-Fratia) explained that a tangible result of the project was the setting up of the National Council for SMEs. An objective going forward is to form an alliance among the five trade union confederations. Future challenges have been defined as follows: reduction and/or consolidation of organisations at the national level; defining issues that should be discussed at the EU level; developing cooperation at the sectoral level; and effective bipartite social dialogue based on cooperation and trust.

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An employers' organizations representative, Mihai Manoliu (ACPR) agreed that a more intensive bipartite coordination is necessary along with consolidation within representative bodies. In order to strengthen bipartite relations it is necessary to create a virtual forum for exchange and the support of European Social Partner organisations will be crucial to the development of bipartite social dialogue in Romania.

Croatia

An employers' representative from Croatia, Nenad Siefert (HUP) suggested that it is important to increase the effectiveness of the social dialogue and this can only be done by investing more in human resources and attracting new members. Another important challenge is to improve employers' organisations and trade union coordination, so they are able to define current priorities and future plans at the national level together.

Durdica Kahalina (UATUC), a trade union representative, confirmed that some progress has been made since the national seminar. She agreed that future challenges include strengthening bipartite relations; preparing joint analyses and action plans; and defining common strategic goals. She quoted concrete examples of more possible joint undertakings and outlined those that are in progress: joint projects to get EU funding; a round table on young people and their situation on the labour market; organising joint meetings with government representatives and establishing sector councils.

The Czech Republic

A trade union representative Hanna Malkova (CMKOS) stated that the project helped to define three weak points of social dialogue in the Czech Republic: lack of appropriate skills and competencies of people, lack of required financial resources and limited knowledge of EU affairs. These issues were addressed in the Czech action plan and appropriate measures were proposed. Moreover, the project had also helped to get an overview of the EU level social dialogue and its outcomes. It allowed the social partners to rethink priorities, set goals and mobilise necessary resources. Tangible results included the signing the first bilateral agreement (telework agreement) and drafting material on autonomous agreements and the social partners' role for the state authorities ("The Litmus paper").

The employers were represented by Vladimira Drbalova (SPCR) who explained the employers' action plan aimed toward improving the financial resources available for active participation in the European level social dialogue, preparation of experts for the EU level social dialogue and deepening "European thinking". She pointed out that further development of bipartite social dialogue in the Czech Republic is necessary. Tangible results of the European Social Partners project include improved bilateral cooperation: ad hoc position papers are prepared, i.e. technical amendments to the Labour Code and joint projects related to social dialogue to be financed by the government or from the European Social Fund. According to Mrs. Drbalova, the project has brought inspiration for bilateral relations, assistance in training and technical issues (e.g. the translation fund) and an introduction to other resources that can further strengthen national social partners' capacity.

Session four (Panel discussion) - "Coping with enlargement" – a review of how the social dialogue of 27 works today and defining possible ways of improvement.

Maria Helena Andre, chair of the fourth session, stated that the results of the project clearly show that there are different cultures and traditions of social dialogue in Europe and that ready-

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to-use universal solutions do not exist – social dialogue is a “learning by doing exercise”. In order to deepen the subject and look further for common issues the following method was used: three sets of questions were asked to national social partner representatives from five different countries.

The first set consisted of the following questions;

- How can we develop better the links between national, sectoral and the EU level dialogue? How does the EU level social dialogue influence national level social dialogue?
- Are the obligations derived from the EU level social dialogue a burden or an opportunity? Does EU level social dialogue serve as development tool for the national level social dialogue?
- Does EU level social dialogue help to develop bipartite/tripartite relations? Are the issues discussed at the EU level relevant for the national social partners? How will you go about transposing agreements in such areas as stress, harassment, violence at the national level? What instruments do you need to implement the EU resolutions?

The first speaker, an employers’ organisations representative from the Netherlands, Loes Van Embden Andres (VNO-NCW) explained that it was useful to hear about the new member states experience as it helped her to better understand reality of social partner organisations functioning in new member states; *“Now I understand that you have to do the same work with 11 people that we do with 50. It makes a difference”*. The Netherlands has a 50-year-long history of social dialogue, but the social dialogue still faces challenges. Obligations derived from European level social dialogue are perceived as a natural consequence of the European integration process and a result of growing number of cross-border relations. The social dialogue agenda remains however mainly national and not too closely linked to the EU level agenda, although the latter is relevant as a growing number of issues that can only effectively be dealt with at the EU level.

An employers’ organisation representative from Estonia, Eve Paarendson (ETTK) pointed out that EU accession has influenced economic and social development in the new member states to a great extent: *“We were forced by the EU accession to develop social dialogue in Estonia”*. As a result, there is a need for more proactive approach, more partnership and more effort in the field of legislation. The biggest challenges are the lack of workforce skills and reforming the educational system to remain competitive in the global arena.

The next intervention from a trade union representative, Thierry Dedieu (CFDT) stressed the importance of the interrelationship between national and EU level social dialogue. In the case of France, where the government has historically left little space for social dialogue, participation in the EU level social dialogue has given more power to the French social partners. Examples included the signing of an agreement on the labour market the previous week and transposing agreements concluded at the EU level (the stress agreement was to be negotiated that week).

According to representative of Polish employers, Zbigniew Ruciński (KPP) EU level social dialogue is only loosely related to the national level social dialogue. *“The problem is that government tends to take a dominating position and makes decisions without consulting or seeking opinion from employer organisations”* Ruciński explained. He added that Polish social partners agenda was overwhelmed with issues linked to transformation, therefore issues related to EU level are often left aside as they not the ones of the utmost immediate importance.

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Patrick Itshert (ETUF:THC), a European level sectoral trade union representative, pointed out that EU social dialogue and sectoral level dialogues are complementary, not competitive. The foundation for strong sectoral and branch level social dialogue is high membership and close links with their members – *“the agenda at the branch level should be more “bottom-up”*.

The second set of questions was addressed to individuals as follows;

- For Thierry Dedieu and Loes Van Emden Andres: Enlargement has inevitably induced the process of change. How do you perceive enlargement and its influence on the quality, challenges and opportunity for social dialogue?
- For Zbigniew Ruciński and Eve Paarendson: How is social dialogue embedded in the day-to-day operation of your organisations? What new procedures and systems have been introduced to keep in touch with your members and to upgrade competencies? What is the influence of the EU level social dialogue on the functioning of your organisation?
- For Patrick Itshert: What have you done as representatives of the EU sector level social partners to integrate enlargement and make it a success? What strategies have been developed at the sectoral level?

For Van Emden Andres a visible result of enlargement is the growing number of colleagues from the new member states in European level negotiating teams. Now colleagues from the old member states should leave room for colleagues from the new member states to be more active: *“Now, after listening to your presentations, I understand why the situation is as it is”*.

Dedieu stated that there is a myth that before enlargement the social dialogue model was completed and perfect – in fact it already varied among different member states: *“Colleagues from social partner organisations from new member states should be seen in this light”*. Challenges that are linked to enlargement are: the lack of a tradition of social dialogue in new member states and problems with representativity. He suggested the developing social dialogue at the sectoral level is “a must”.

According to Paarendson *“Estonia was allergic to the idea of developing social dialogue”* and only enlargement forced Estonian social partners to develop it more and to promote the idea of social dialogue in a broader society. Enlargement brought knowledge on how to get organised and operate more effectively. A tangible result is the joint project aimed at training civil servants on social dialogue.

Ruciński agreed that Poland has had the same experience as Estonia: *“We still need expertise to develop the capacities of the people working in social partner organisations. We have had to establish special units to deal with the issues linked to enlargement on a day-to-day basis”*. The present challenge is to organize one representative organisation for employers’ organisations – a good start has been already made: on January, 17, 2008 the First Congress of Employers’ Organisations took place in Warsaw: *“Trade unions are stronger, so the employers have to become better organised to become strong partners for trade unions and the government”*.

Itshert explained that integrating colleagues from new member states is not an easy task: *“So far, we have not found the best way to incorporate our colleagues from new countries in the social dialogue at the sectoral level”*. In order to do so, there is a need to empower social partners and to develop new approaches to attract members from new member states.

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“Dialogue like this is different to negotiations and this has to be reflected in social partner attitudes”.

The question asking what the immediate and future needs of the social partners are was addressed to all panel participants and the following comments were made:

- Joint work programmes should focus more on working out mutual positions, papers and to promote constructive cooperation;
- More focus is required on implementation taking into consideration the specificity of implementation conditions in different member states;
- More joint research and analysis such as the recently published labour market analysis should be undertaken and supported by promotional campaigns;
- Agreements that are concluded in Brussels or common positions that are worked out at the EU level social dialogue need to be implemented effectively at national level;
- More tools and activities should be introduced aimed at developing autonomous dialogue;
- More work needs to be done to support informal, effective and regular flows of information between the European and national levels.

In concluding the session Maria Helena Andre pointed out that it is very important to trust each other and be more proactive as this leads to stronger joint bargaining power of the national social partners in contacts with the government.

Session five (Panel discussion) - “Coping with enlargement” – a review of how the social dialogue of 27 works today and defining possible ways of improvement.

Liliane Volozinskis (UEAPME), chair of the fifth session, asked one of the experts (Alan Wild) to present findings of research into organisational and individual social dialogue success factors. His presentation is appended.

Following this presentations two contributions were made on how EU resources made available to national social partners have been used to strengthen national social partners’ human resource and organisational capacities.

The ETUC training and mentoring programme – a trade union representative from Lithuania, Rasita Jankauskaite (LPSK) participated in the EU training and mentoring programme in 2007 promoted by the ETUC. Thanks to this exercise she was able to acquire better knowledge and understanding of European level social dialogue and how it functions. *“Besides professional benefits, the programme has brought also personal ones like contacts, understanding people from different cultures – in brief, understanding “the Brussels way”* said Jankauskaite. One of the tangible results of her participation in the programme was creation of coordination centre of three national trade union confederations in Lithuania, whose role is to enable exchange of information and working out common positions in the trade unions involved.

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EU funding – “Thanks to EU funding, the employers’ organisation from Slovenia had undertaken two projects on the financial participation of workers” said Grit Ackerman (ZDS). The first one, TOBEQU was aimed at spreading knowledge on workers participation as well as influencing how the law on financial participation would evolve (financial participation is obligatory in Slovenia). The project was based on exchanging knowledge with Slovenian social partners and their counterparts from the “old” member states, studying different models of financial participation, organising study visits in different companies and interviewing HR Directors and tax specialists. *“Publications, lobbying initiatives, PR work, interviews and identifying perspectives for introducing financial participation solutions followed. As a result, the perception of the idea of financial participation in Slovenia has changed”* Ackerman added. The second project concentrated more on the national approach and promoting the idea of financial participation. In addition, there were two projects organised with the “new” member states – one on free movement and the social dialogue (a position paper was drafted) and the second one on ageing workers (an analysis of 1,300 enterprises and 630,000 workers was conducted and actions were defined).

DAY TWO (24th January)

Session six (video presentation) – European Commission film on Social Dialogue. The second day started with the recently produced video recording on the history and development of the social dialogue at the EU level.

Session seven (Joint social partners presentations and plenary discussion) – *“How the project countries approached common issues and how successful were they?”*

The session was chaired by Valeria Ronzitti (CEEP) and followed the format of the plenary session from the previous day: there were short presentations by four different countries; each country was represented by a trade union and employers’ organisation representative. They commented about the following issues: engaging member organisations and members in the European dimension; balancing national and European priorities; making best use of limited resources.

Bulgaria

According to the representative of trade unions, Jeljazko Hristov (CITUB), membership in the EU level social partners’ organisations enables the social partners to participate in the EU level social dialogue and, at the same time, strengthens national social partnership back home. Experts of the social partners are members of think tanks that work closely with the government and the members of five working groups at the European Parliament. Tangible results are the following: for the first time ever social partners and representatives of the government signed a social pact, a bipartite agreement concerning indexation of salaries in the private sector was concluded and 72 new bipartite sectoral agreements were signed (in addition to 69 existing ones). Hristov underlined importance of the support from the EU social partners in further development of social dialogue in Bulgaria.

Hungary

Representatives of Hungarian social partner organizations (Anett Ruszanov from MGYOSZ and Karoly Gyorgy from MSZOSZ) prepared a joint presentation. Both trade unions and employers’ organisations have taken numerous actions such as organising a bipartite forum for information exchange, training of experts, participation in working groups and ensuring presence in Brussels - they are full members in the four EU level organisations and have an office in Brussels. The

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Hungarian social partners have invested in their human resources – the trade unions claimed to be slower in his regard than the employers' representatives; have attracted new members; and strengthened sectoral level social dialogue. Future challenges were defined as follows: ensuring that organisational pluralism does not hinder their effectiveness; clarifying rules for representivity; and defining common language and terms of reference. For the Hungarian social partners recruiting staff with appropriate combination of language skills and technical knowledge remains a challenge.

Slovakia

Juraj Borgula (RUZ) representing the Slovak employers' organization said that one of the biggest challenges for social dialogue in Slovakia is to get politicians and the public interested and aware of the social dialogue – for now social dialogue is very often understood as collective bargaining. Obstacles to greater progress have been the splitting of employers' organizations; the strong influence of the government; and an unstable socio-economic environment (the Labour Code has been changed seven times already). The quality of human resources still remains a challenge for all national social partners. It would be good if the European social partners could help promote the idea of social dialogue among national stakeholders like the Slovak government and members of the European Parliament. Margarita Domenyova (KOZSR) agreed with the presentation of Juraj Borgula and offered further comments on legislative changes.

Turkey

Representative of employers' organisation, Faith Tokatli (TISK) stated that as a result of the national seminar the EU Acquis Committee was established to follow developments in the Community Law. He added that the EU level social dialogue is fully relevant for the Turkish social dialogue as the national and the EU social dialogue agenda are parallel and there are some issues in common. Turkish social partners have taken up joint work on lifelong learning and labour market institutions: TISK - TURK-IS project "Activating local labour market monitoring and guidance mechanisms" and HAK-IS - TISK project on bilateral social dialogue. The two projects were implemented with EU funding. Tokatli stressed the willingness and commitment of the partners to work together despite the sensitive elections that took place last year; it has been the first time in a decade that a common position has been agreed. At present Turkish social partners are dealing with the subject of social security system reform, the next subject will be trade union legislation. There are other joint projects in the pipeline: publishing the joint labour market analysis prepared by EU social partners and starting discussions on flexicurity. Namik Tan (TURK-IS), representative of trade union, stated that the final conference in Brussels was a very useful event as it created opportunity to meet colleagues from other countries who face similar problems and challenges in the social dialogue process. He stated that Turkish social partners have always considered the EU level social dialogue as a model, although it has to be adapted to the realities of the Turkish social dialogue. The present challenge is to fight for adoption of all articles of European Social Charter by the government.

After these presentations a short debate took place. The following points were made:

- Marie-France Boutroue (CGT) asked about the role of social dialogue and the functioning of the European Work Councils in multinational companies located in the new member states;
- Judit Czuglerne Ivany (MOSZ) observed that thanks to EU accession and closer links with the EU level social partners national level social dialogue has become more

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effective. The new challenge is to bring EU level social dialogue closer to the grass roots;

- Continuity and attendance at EU level meetings seems to be a problem: due to limited funding, attendance is low and the organisation representatives constantly change;
- Osman Yildiz (HAK-IS) stressed that pluralism is the only way to accommodate the interests of different people and should not be look upon in a negative way;
- Alan Wild added that the issue of pluralism is relevant to all new member states and it serves the interests of individuals and organisations as long as it is well coordinated; when pluralism is not well managed, there are problems with the national representative mandate and a waste of resources with organisations working on the same subject.

Session eight (Expert input) – “Improving the effectiveness of a European social dialogue with increased responsibility, membership and diversity”.

The last session was chaired by Alan Wild and it was the time for the leaders of the EU social partner organisations to give their views. As an introductory remark Alan Wild stated that two issues have to be analysed in parallel:

- EU enlargement from 12 to 27 member states resulting in a more complex European social dialogue machinery;
- The change from social dialogue based on policy concertation mechanism to a dialogue with increased power and autonomy.

John Monks (ETUC) stated that the conference was a good opportunity to learn from each other and to remind business once again what social dialogue is and what are roles and responsibilities of social partners: “*Defending Social Europe is not enough, we have to export it!*”.

Today’s challenges include the role of the social partners in defining environmental standards; initiatives to combat decreasing trade union membership; coordinating issues that are on the EU level social dialogue agenda by encompassing needs of more and less advanced countries: “*It is important to realize that with four freedoms written into the Treaties the division between national and EU level issues does not exist anymore – there is much more interdependence and mutual influence*”. Monks also suggested that for the new member states a big challenge seems to be establishing solid grounds for autonomous social dialogue, where there is a tendency to have more tripartite than bipartite interactions.

Philippe De Buck (BUSINESSEUROPE) suggested that the present European Commission discussion on climate change and environmental standards is very important as it influences the future of industry and jobs, especially in energy-consuming industries. He continued that partially different priorities at the EU and national level are natural, but discussion and lobbying are at the heart of the EU social dialogue model. De Buck underlined that the social dialogue project was an important project for BUSINESSEUROPE as it allows for mutual learning among member states and eliminating the division between “new” and “old” member states: “*National social partners have to have their own agenda and develop bipartite cooperation; setting some rules and some trends can be a result of the EU level social dialogue*”.

BUSINESSEUROPE and its members believe that one of the biggest achievements of the European social partners is the recently published joint analysis of the labour market and recommendations for different stakeholders. De Buck concluded his intervention with the observation that autonomous national level social dialogue is natural as it is impossible to harmonise rules between the countries: *“We can just set the tone and set trends”*.

Liliane Volozinskis (JEAPME) took the floor on behalf of Andrea Benassi, who could not participate in the conference. She stated that the final conference helped to understand that there are differences in the national systems and that the EU solutions have to be adapted to national conditions. *“Social dialogue is a tool, not the goal in itself. One of the main goals is to make the labour market function better”*. Volozinskis continued and added that social dialogue is much more than collective bargaining and collective agreements: *“Social dialogue is about finding common interests, preparing positions and engaging into discussion. Topics dealt with in the social dialogue are constantly broadening and therefore many different new actions/instruments have to be implemented in order to make social dialogue function”*.

Charles Nolda (CEEP) said that employers from the public services sector should get even more involved in the social dialogue: *“There are 15 million public service employees in Europe and the services provided by them are crucial to the functioning of the market. Furthermore, trade unions density is highest in organizations that are CEEP members”*. He argued *“Most of the employment legislation derives directly or indirectly from the EU legislation or interpretation of this legislation. As a consequence, EU level social dialogue allows us to influence decisions that are taken at the EU level and will later influence national employment legislation”*. Nolda stated that despite that fact that it is a slow and complicated system, it is worth participating in it as it gives the opportunity to make one’s voice heard and one’s interests to be taken into consideration. *“Let’s hope that the subjects that will be chosen for the next 3-year workprogramme, are relevant for the most of the social partners in different countries”* he concluded his speech.

Nikolas van der Pas (European Commission) stated that for the European Commission importance of the social dialogue was always clear. The European Commission perceives its role as *“an indirect driver and someone who will rock the boat to make social dialogue develop”*. The European Commission has applauded loudly the social partners’ approach to flexicurity as it goes beyond the issues that have been discussed so far. *“Now the question is whether we can build bridges between various approaches and instruments”* van der Pas added. He stressed that the Commission will do everything to support social dialogue, both at the EU and national levels – the new European Social Fund (ESF) regulations that are aimed at strengthening social dialogue prove it. In order to secure appropriate funds from the ESF, the European Commission awaits specific national requests.

Session nine (Expert input) – Closing Plenary Comments

Alan Wild thanked all the speakers for their contribution and especially the last speaker, Nikolas van der Pas from the European Commission, for clarifying the role of the Commission. He stated that during the conference there were many concrete examples of undertaken initiatives that can be taken back home by the national social partners and used as inspiration for their own actions.

Wild offered thanks to all those who had participated in the four national seminars, organised them and provided follow up. He also thanked representatives from the EU15 countries for positive comments and expressed hopes that after this exercise they would be able to better

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understand the situation and differences within the new member states. He suggested that there is need to work even harder to be able to manage pluralism; the coordination of social partners work; influencing the role and impact of the government; and improving skills and resources.

Thanks were offered to the European Commission for funding the project and to the European social partner organisations for their commitment to it and to ETUC for its hospitality. Thanks were also offered to the interpreters.

APPENDICES

- 1. Attendance list for the conference;**
- 2. Agenda;**
- 3. Interim report of the project**
- 4. Power point presentations.**