

# ARITAKE-WILD

Joint Project of the European Social Partner Organisations

"CEEC Social Partners' Participation in the European Social Dialogue:  
..... *what are the social partner's needs?*"

PHASE TWO - FOLLOW-UP SEMINARS

Report of the Slovakian National Seminar

Holiday Inn, Bratislava  
Slovakia

1<sup>st</sup> February 2006

Prepared by ARITAKE-WILD  
February 2006

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### *Introduction*

The fifth in a series of follow-up national seminars<sup>1</sup> designed to maximise the effectiveness of the participation of the new EU member states in European Social Dialogue was held in Slovakia on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2006. The objectives of the seminar were to:

- Review progress on the implementation of the action plans developed during phase one of the project;
- Identify and discuss any problems that had been encountered and propose ways to resolve them;
- Identify future "individual organisation" and "joint" priority actions for the Slovakian social partners.

The seminar was attended by 12 representatives from Slovakian employers' organisations and 13 from Slovakian trade unions. Also in attendance were representatives from the European social partners UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC; and experts. The full attendance list for the seminar is attached as appendix one.

### *Methodology*

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

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

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the generation and discussion of ideas and the development of future strategies, the seminar was conducted to the maximum extent possible in the Slovakian language.

The seminar opened with formal presentations from the Slovakian social partner organisations that summarised the actions they had taken to implement their "phase one" project actions. The seminar closed with the social partner organisations agreeing a revised series of "effectiveness improvement" priorities to be worked over the short to medium term. Between these sessions were working group discussions, plenary debate and a variety of formal and informal inputs from the European social partners

This report follows the format of the seminar agenda. It provides an overview report of each of the working sessions, and contains a schedule of future priority issues developed at the meeting. The detailed agenda for the meeting is included as appendix two but the working sessions making up the seminar can be summarised as follows:

<b>Overview agenda</b>		
Session one	Presentations by the national social partners	"Implementation of the phase one action plans."
Session two	Presentation by the European social partner organisations	"The current European social dialogue agenda and likely priorities for the future."
Session three	Working group discussion and feedback	"Adapting and improving action plans in the light of experience and changing priorities."
Session four	Presentation by the European social partner organisations	"Actions to assist new member states social partner organisations already undertaken by the European social partners."
Session five	Concluding discussion	"Discussion of priority needs and issues."

***Report of the meeting***

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

The phase one action plan of the Slovakian trade unions included 5 points for action under three "theme headings" as follows;

***Slovakian trade union "phase one" action plan***

1. Resources:
  - Examine reallocation of current financial resources at the national level to reflect change in work balance towards European activity;
  - Explore options for increased financing through existing and new members.
2. Education and training:
  - Continue to readjust current education programmes run by the Slovakian trade union institute to provide additional focus on European issues;
  - Explore use of internships to bolster language competence of young people.
3. National social dialogue:
  - Consider membership of national social dialogue from the point of view of representativity of Slovakian workers.

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

- ◊ Funds were identified and earmarked specifically for both national and EU level activities;
- ◊ Significant progress has been made in improving language skills using ETUC programmes;
- ◊ Improvements of "EU social dialogue participation" related skills have been achieved through a variety of workshops and conferences.

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

- ◊ The newly established mechanism for bipartite dialogue had not yet met expectations;
- ◊ The Slovakian national context is not currently as conducive to constructive social dialogue as it might be;

- ◊ As yet it has not been possible to find enough funding for permanent trade union representation in Brussels.

The phase one action plan of the Slovakian employers' organisations also included 5 points for action under three "theme headings" as follows:

### ***Slovakian employers' organisation "phase one" action plan***

#### 1. Resources:

- Conduct a comprehensive inventory of available people/people already working on European issues in each organisation;
- Maximise use of these individuals for the benefit of the whole group;
- Explore options for increased financing through existing and new members.

#### 2. Education and training:

- Focus education and training resources on those individuals identified through the "network" exercise described above.

#### 3. National social dialogue

- Consider membership of national social dialogue from the point of view of representativity of Slovakian employers – including SMEs.

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

- ◊ People capable of working on EU issues within Slovakian employers' organisations have been identified. Efforts have been made to maximise use of these individuals, but more can still be done;
- ◊ New, and active, members have been attracted to employers' organisations;
- ◊ Some training related to EU social dialogue effectiveness has been undertaken.

In addition to the initiatives taken to support the action plan, the Slovakian employers reported;

- ◊ The adoption of an overall strategy of identifying specific priorities and focussing on them rather than spreading limited resources too thinly);
- ◊ A representative acting as permanent liaison officer for employers is now in place in Brussels.

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

- ◊ The split of the previous major Slovakian employers' organisation into two has made it more difficult to find common employer positions;
- ◊ In spite of attracting new and more active members, overall membership is declining.
- ◊ The current Slovakian government attitude to the promotion of effective social dialogue is not helpful.

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

Jeanne Schmitt (UNICE) presented a brief outline of the history and evolution of European social dialogue; a description of the current social dialogue work programme; and an indication of probable future priorities. Her full presentation is included as appendix three.

*Session three – Working group discussions and feedback*

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

The national representatives were divided into three working groups: A "trade union group"; an "employers' organisation group" and a "joint group" of trade union and employers' organisation participants. Representatives from UNICE and UEAPME joined the employers' organisation group; one representative from the ETUC together with one expert joined the trade union group; and representatives from ETUC, CEEP 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:

*In the light of the plenary presentations - what are the most important learning points for the development of future action plans?*

*Based on our experience in implementing the action plans, and in the context of changing organisational and national/European priorities – what do we need to do in the next 12 months and the next 3 years?*

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

### **Trade union group**

- A schedule of regular bipartite meetings between the social partners needs to be established;
- Regulatory and social partner circumstances have changed since the Spring 2004 seminar in Topoľčianky. Social dialogue structures and practices need to better reflect these changes;
- Social dialogue needs to be seen as a priority both nationally and internationally.

### **Employers' Organisation Group**

- Recent successes in collective bargaining can help strengthen the process of social dialogue;
- Employers need to be more active at the EU level earlier in the process;
- Information flows between the national level employers' organisations and the EU level social partners need to be further improved;
- For social dialogue to be successful, the social partners need to have more realistic expectations of it;
- Slovakian priorities are of a domestic economic nature. Certain issues on the EU social dialogue agenda will not command the same resources and attention in the short term;
- Freedom of movement is a crucial issue for the Slovakian employers' organisations and needs to be incorporated more solidly in European level discussions;

### **Joint Group**

- The importance of both bipartite and tripartite social dialogue were noted. The need to improve the efficiency and quality of both these processes were emphasised. More effective bipartite dialogue would help improve the tripartite process;
- Ways to secure funding for the bipartite social dialogue need to be further explored.

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

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

- Resource centres – the European level social partners have established employer and trade union resource centres and launched web sites to promote their new services;
- Training and development assistance – various forms of assistance are available from the European social partners to facilitate staff development initiatives e.g. through the funding of additional places at European level meetings for developmental purposes, social dialogue related training events and language training;
- Social partner competence development – a process by which individuals and organisations can “self assess” against a series of “effective European social partner” competencies is now available on the social partner resource centre web sites.

The full presentations are included as appendices four and five.

Rounding off the presentation, the Slovakian social partners were encouraged to make full use of the resources and activities described. The more these are used the more likely it is that these services and activities will continue to be provided. A “tour de table” was then conducted at which each national participant was asked to consider, in the light of the presentations made throughout the day, what they thought to be the most important issues to have emerged from the discussion. The following list of issues does not reflect any priority order or “multiple” mentions of issues. It simply indicates the issues raised and the order in which they were raised.

- Take steps to institutionalise bipartite social dialogue. This would in turn both strengthen tripartite social dialogue and help identify common “Slovakian” social partner positions on issues under discussion at the national and EU level;
- Develop bipartite social dialogue;
- Social dialogue aims to create a balance between the social partners providing benefits for both. As such expectations of negotiations should be kept reasonable;
- Awareness raising is needed to explain the role of the social partners, who the various organisations represent, and the need for social dialogue and its benefits.
- Regular meetings between the social partners should be organised;
- More training for those leading the process of social dialogue is required;
- The internal structures and general quality of the social partner organisations need to be improved;
- Skills training for those involved in negotiations is a priority;
- The social partners should get together and find common positions on issues of mutual interest to influence developments in the national and EU legal frameworks;
- Both parties need to learn to compromise and not make unrealistic demands;
- Even within the social partner organisations, awareness needs to be raised on the role and importance of social dialogue at various levels in order to get representatives actively involved;
- The social partners need to create partnerships with specific objectives;
- National level social dialogue has to be strengthened if the Slovakian social partners are to become more effective at the EU level;
- Positive experiences from company and sector level negotiations should be built on;
- Additional resources need to be identified and mobilised;
- Employers’ education centres are needed;

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

- Do not be discouraged by the fact that your experiences to date do not quite meet the expectations from Topol'cianky. The shift from strategic thinking to implementation is never easy. Do not underestimate the importance of the progress you have made. A number of important actions have been taken and each step in the right direction has value;
- Both sides need to identify the most important issues on which progress can be made in order to support the process and demonstrate the value of social dialogue to sceptics. You need to find subject areas that matter to members and where, through a process of give and take, win-win solutions can be found;
- Be cautious of abstract awareness raising and information campaigns – concrete results are a far more effective and convincing way of demonstrating the value of social dialogue;
- Try to identify links and synergies between national and EU level issues and activities;
- Institutionalising social dialogue is definitely an important step. However, this does not need to be complicated and can be accomplished with relatively limited resources;
- Having boarded the “EU social dialogue train”, you need to pay some attention to influencing the overall agenda;
- Bipartite and tripartite social dialogue are complementary processes. Try to find the key synergies and links between them;
- It is not enough to talk about social dialogue you have to do it. Positive social dialogue is built on practical experience;
- SME's are important to the success of the Slovakian economy. SME interests need to be represented in the sectoral, regional and national levels of social dialogue.

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

Following the tour de table and expert comments the working group reports were discussed in the context of the inputs during the day and a number of priority needs and issues were identified in the light of experience to date. It was concluded that the

same areas for improvement applied equally to both sets of social partners individually and to the trade unions and employers working collectively.

## *Slovakian Priority Needs and Issues*

1. *Institutionalisation of bipartite social dialogue. This need not be a complicated process that demands enormous resources ;*
2. *Additional sources of funding need to be identified to support effective bipartite social dialogue;*
3. *Continued focus on training and skills development for those involved in social dialogue is necessary for those involved in negotiations;*
4. *The identification of issues of genuine and mutual concern to find common messages to present to Slovakian politicians and EU level organisations is a priority;*
5. *Continue to improve information exchange and information flows;*
6. *Work to raise awareness of the role of the social partners and the importance of social dialogue within employers' organisations and trade unions, with members and the general public.*

At the end of the meeting, thanks were offered to all those involved in the preparation and conduct of the seminar.

**List of Appendices**

Appendix one	Seminar attendance list
Appendix two	Seminar agenda
Appendix three	European Social Dialogue: Agenda and Priorities for the Future
Appendix four	European Social Dialogue: Employer's Support Tools
Appendix five	European Social Dialogue: Trade Union Support Tools
Appendix six	Agreed Priority Needs and Issues from the Slovakian Follow-Up Seminar 2005

## APPENDIX TWO

## AGENDA

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

National Seminar: SLOVAKIA

Venue: Hotel Holiday Inn, Bratislava

Date: Wednesday 1 February 2006

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

## APPENDIX SIX

### AGREED PRIORITY NEEDS AND ISSUES FROM THE SLOVAKIAN FOLLOW-UP SEMINAR

Slovakian Social Partner Priority Needs and Issues
To be addressed by trade unions and employers' organisations individually and jointly
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Institutionalisation of bipartite social dialogue. This need not be a complicated process that demands enormous resources ;</li><li>2. Additional sources of funding need to be identified to support effective bipartite social dialogue;</li><li>3. Continued focus on training and skills development for those involved in social dialogue is necessary for those involved in negotiations;</li><li>4. The identification of issues of genuine and mutual concern to find common messages to present to Slovakian politicians and EU level organisations is a priority;</li><li>5. Continue to improve information exchange and information flows;</li><li>6. Work to raise awareness of the role of the social partners and the importance of social dialogue within employers' organisations and trade unions, with members and the general public.</li></ol>