

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 Slovenian National Seminar

Grand Hotel Union, Ljubljana
Slovenia

15th February 2006

Prepared by ARITAKE-WILD
February 2006

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Introduction

The sixth in a series of eight follow-up national seminars¹ designed to maximise the effectiveness of the participation of the new EU member states in European Social Dialogue was held in Slovenia on 15th 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 Slovenian social partners.

The seminar was attended by representatives from four Slovenian employers’ organisations and from one Slovenian trade union. 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 Slovenian 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

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

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

The seminar opened with formal presentations from the Slovenian 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 revised and more focussed “effectiveness improvement” priorities to be worked on 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

The detailed agenda for the meeting is included as appendix two but the working sessions making up the seminar can be summarised as follows:

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

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

Report of the meeting

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

The phase one action plan of the Slovenian trade unions included 5 points for action as follows:

Slovenian trade union "phase one" action plan

- Introduce in the newspaper Workers Unity, a specific section dealing with social dialogue at the European level;
- Ensure regular discussion of European issues in the most senior trade union policy-making bodies;
- Nominate a specific individual to find sources of European funding that could be accessed by the Slovenian trade unions;
- Make maximum use of the new ETUC resource centre in the wide circulation of relevant information on European issues;
- Propose the establishment of an informal group of Slovenian trade union officials to identify and discuss their common interests in Europe at the next meeting of the board of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

It was noted that a lack of continuity of attendance between the 2005 and 2006 seminars made it difficult for those present to report back in detail on the earlier action programme. Although the participants in the current meeting had been chosen by the national social partners themselves, attendance had been influenced by an unforeseen conflict with an important event in Strasbourg.

The Slovenian trade union representatives reported the following progress, but stressed that their account may be incomplete in certain areas:

- The newspaper Workers Unity regularly reports on EU issues;
- There are discussions on EU issues in the relevant policy making bodies, but more could be done to improve their effectiveness;
- There are currently two people working on improving information flows, but again further improvements can be made.

In reporting on these actions, the trade unions reiterated that more effective information sharing within and between trade union organisations is needed if problems of continuity of representation are to be overcome.

The phase one action plan of the Slovenian employers' organisations included 4 points as follows:

Slovenian employers' organisation "phase one" action plan

1. AES will establish working groups comprising a network of employers' organisations and members to construct joint employer opinions on European issues. UNICE and UEAPME will assist their respective members in identifying the dates of important EU meetings and key issues on which to concentrate preparatory work at national level;
2. Establish joint employer meetings to discuss the implementation of European level agreements;
3. Based on information provided by the joint European employers' resource centre maximise Slovenian access to European funding;
4. Rules will be formulated for the improvement of information flows between and within national employers' organisations on European issues.

The Slovenian employers' organisations reported some, but limited, progress on the above points. More effective activity has been seriously hampered by two key issues:

- Efforts have focused on strengthening the organisations' capacity to act on domestic issues and providing services to members;
- As yet unimplemented Government plans to end compulsory membership of the Slovenian Chambers of Commerce and Craft have made inter-organisation cooperation difficult.

The phase one joint action plan included 3 points as follows:

Slovenian joint "phase one" action plan

- Improvements in Slovenian social dialogue should build upon existing forms of joint discussion, the economic and social council;
- Jointly benchmark and review social dialogue models from other member states in order to further improve Slovenian practice;
- In order to further improve mutual trust and respect between the social partners they will develop an action plan, including regular meetings and conferences, to discuss European issues and to review progress. In particular, maximise and publish areas of agreement on non-contentious issues, e.g. lifelong learning.

Actions taken to support delivery of the joint action plan were referred to in the employer and trade union reports above.

Despite the difficulties reported above, both the Slovenian employers and trade union organisations noted that relations between the national social partners had generally improved since the seminar one year ago.

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

Valeria Ronzitti (CEEP) 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.

Following this presentation, and in response to a specific question about the importance and relevance of the EU agenda to the Slovenian social partners, the clear consensus amongst participants was that European issues are important, the 2006-8 Social Partners' Work Programme is relevant to them and actions should be taken improve their effectiveness in influencing the process;

When asked for their views, the EU level social partners commented on Slovenia's participation in EU level social dialogue as follows:

- The issues that Slovenian social partners face seem very similar to those of a Western European member-state like Luxembourg. Resource allocation decisions for social partners in smaller countries are much more acute than in larger states. Slovenian social partners might choose to focus on attending only the most important negotiations and meetings. On other issues, communication with the European level social partners can be handled electronically;
- More progress will need to be made quickly on the implementation of EU level agreements. Failure to meet implementation commitments on the telework and stress agreements will create tensions with social partners in other member states;
- On the trade union side, as Slovenia has only one trade union affiliated to ETUC, coordination and decision making should be easier than it is in member states with more complex structures;
- Slovenia is gradually becoming more active at the EU level. Participation in the working groups and negotiations for telework and stress was limited, but Slovenia is one of only six new member states to have nominated representatives to take part in the negotiations on harassment and violence at work;

- Like all member states with limited resources, a strategic approach to the setting of priorities is crucial for operational effectiveness.

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

The trade union group critically reviewed their 2005 action plan and suggested the following areas for improvement:

- Continuity of participation in meetings on specific issues needs to be assured;
- Existing initiatives relating to information sharing and high level debate of EU issues can be built on.

Employers’ Organisation Group

The employers’ organisation group also reviewed where they stood vis-à-vis the 2005 action programme and agreed that they should focus on two elements; inter-organisation coordination and improved information flows. In this context they suggested the following specific areas for improvement:

- Employers organisations need to find more effective ways to discuss EU issues amongst themselves and to assure the limited resources they have are not duplicated on particular subjects. The Chamber of Crafts proposed to establish a clear schedule for future EU coordination meetings;
- Improvements in information flows need to be based on clear processes and allocation of responsibilities;
- Telework needs critical attention, an agreed translation of the text will be a good first step towards implementation of the EU agreement.

Joint group

- The unstable legal situation relating to voluntary and compulsory membership of employers' organisations is negatively affecting social dialogue. This will remain a fundamental constraining factor until new laws are implemented;
- There are roles for both tripartite and bipartite social dialogue. In Slovenia more could be made of the bipartite process.

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. Mathew Higham 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 Slovenian 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.

- Continuity of representation;
- Information flows still require further development, particularly at the grassroots level;
- Employer and trade union pluralism must be overcome;
- An increase in funding for education and training would be beneficial. Those who receive training should maximise its impact by transferring their knowledge to other levels of their organisation;
- Informal bipartite meetings that do not focus on specific agreements and contracts would be beneficial;
- There is some confusion between the roles of ECOSOC and EU social dialogue;
- In order for Slovenia to be more competitive, key measures should be based on the Lisbon Strategy;
- There is consensus on the priority of Slovenia’s economic well-being in a global context - the difficulty is in reaching a degree of consensus on how to achieve this goal. Social dialogue plays a crucial role in reaching this consensus;
- Better employer coordination is needed for the future;
- The voluntary membership issue needs to be resolved for progress to be made;
- Awareness needs to be raised on the importance of social dialogue;
- A coordinated approach at EU level is crucial;
- Use of financial and human resources needs to be prioritised and optimised;
- The difference between what is within the power of the social partners and what is not needs to be recognised and priorities set accordingly.

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

- Continuity is an issue that has been raised by both sides. There are two dimensions to this. One is sending the same people to meetings on the same subject. The other is ensuring that information is passed on within the organisation and to members. Continuity is thus a matter of a sufficient number of people on all sides being broadly aware of issues discussed and their implications. It seems that there is room for improvement on both sides in this regard;
- The current number one priority on EU social dialogue for the Slovenian social partners is probably to agree on a joint translation on telework as the deadline for implementation has already passed. Reports on implementation are due in March 2006. It is important not to confuse or combine the process of agreeing a base translation with the process of negotiating implementation. The most effective way forward will be to deal with the translation as a technical issue quickly;

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- The training and mentoring programme assumes that those who participate in events will act as “knowledge-multipliers” at the national level, explaining to colleagues how things operate at the EU level. An invitation to participate in the third round of these programmes will be issued shortly;
- There are important differences between ECOSOC and the EU social dialogue. The social partners are in control of the social dialogue agenda and process and are able to reach agreements and make decisions. ECOSOC is an important body, but is essentially advisory in nature and is not the body where social dialogue takes place;
- A key thing to consider in Slovenia is the identification of EU-level priorities in the context of limited resources. Telework is a crucial short term issue to tackle.

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

It was agreed for the future that a focus on a limited number of important issues will be important. Although an overriding concern to all remains the question of legislation relating to membership of employers' organisations, it was recognised the social partners have to get on with the current agenda. To do this the issues of internal coordination, priority setting, better resource utilisation and improvements in information flows will be crucial.

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 2

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: SLOVENIA

Venue: Grand Hotel Union, Ljubljana

Date: Wednesday 15 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