

Joint European Social Partners' Work-programme 2009 – 2010
Joint Study on Restructuring in the EU

BELGIUM NATIONAL DOSSIER
BRUSSELS 14TH OCTOBER 2009

“The role of the Belgian social partners in restructuring”

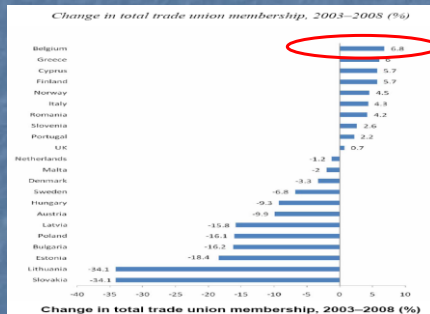
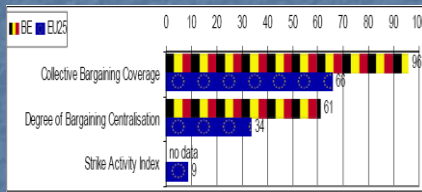
Belgium - “The role of the Belgian social partners in restructuring”

Reminder ... the purpose of the presentation and discussion:

- ▼ Have we got the facts right?
- ▼ Have we got the emphasis right?
- ▼ Have we got the issues right?
- ▼ What evidence and insights can you add?

The Belgian social partners

- Comparatively high rise in trade union membership (2003–2008) combined with high bargaining coverage (EIRO figures)



The Belgian social partners

- Comparatively high rise in trade union membership (2003–2008) combined with high bargaining coverage
- High employers' organisation density (est. 72%)
- Mature structures for collective bargaining and institutionalised tripartite and bipartite social dialogue
- Well-developed structures for employee representation (i.e. works councils of *ondernemingsraden/conseil d'entreprise*) and employees' rights (information and consultation – see Renault Act) at the enterprise level (extended since 2007 to SMEs with at least 20 employees).

“The role of the Belgian social partners in restructuring”

Key questions

- Can a relatively strong institutionalised social dialogue system – institutions and collective agreements at national and sector levels - support organisations and employees in dealing with the quantitative and qualitative changes in employment with regard to restructuring?
- Have SPs in Belgium promoted innovative measures to anticipate and accompany change and encourage employment transitions? Are there differences across sectors and between companies?
- How far is the current crisis having an impact on collective bargaining and the system of social dialogue in Belgium?

The Belgian social partners

- Powers and operations of the works councils are established by law
- The law on works councils is enforced through regular checks by the labour inspectorate
- An external auditor can assist the works councils
- Transposition of the Directive 2002/14/EC in Belgian Law

The first recovery plan of the Belgian economy

The 1996 Law on competitiveness and "Follow-up"

- The safeguard of competitiveness in Belgium – Law 1996 on sector level negotiation on wage increases within the margin set up by the cross-industry bargaining round
- Inter-professional agreement 2007-2008 ("for an innovative economy and employment") → balance between:
 - Growth of the wage costs;
 - Employees' purchasing power;

The second recovery plan of the Belgian economy

Recovery plan "Bis" April 2009

Three major crisis measures:

- Temporary reduction of working hours;
- Voluntary, temporary switch from FT to PT;
- Suspension of work contract (totally or partially)

The SPs and the content of collective agreement

- Pay and working time
- Employment and vocational training
- Training for active ageing
- Financial contribution and participation rate to the training program

SPs' involvement

- Educational paid leave;
- Joint sectoral funds for vocational training;
- Employment cells and outplacement.

How far is the current crisis having an impact on collective bargaining and the system of social dialogue in Belgium?

- Increase or reduce scope for reaching consensus between the SPs (?)
 - inter-professional level;
- Increase or reduce scope for State intervention (?)
 - drastic measures taken by the State