The labour market of the future will look for workers with digital and entrepreneurial skills as well as for creativity. As a result of digitalisation, work is now organised along more flexible lines, with an impact on when, where and how tasks are performed. These are just some of the key conclusions of the study entitled "Impact of digitalisation and the on-demand economy on labour markets and the consequences for employment and industrial relations".

The study explores the impact of digitalisation on employment, enterprises and labour relations in terms of creation, transformation or destruction of jobs, altered roles of employees and employers and changes in the organisation of work. The study covers both traditional businesses and industries and the on-demand economy.

Unlike many other studies previously conducted in this field, which have mostly been written from the view point of employees or workers who offer their labour on online platforms, this study focuses on the aspects relevant to employers, sectors and businesses of all sizes.

According to the researchers, key factors for successful adaptation of enterprises to the changes brought about by digitalisation are the ability to collect and exploit data, the interconnection of value chains, the creation of digital customer interfaces and mitigation of cyber threats.

New techniques such as big data analytics, additive printing, automation, virtual reality and the Internet of things allow for the development of new, more complex and sophisticated products and services. The new jobs needed to develop and maintain these products and services often require higher skills, while the application of the technologies can also create more service-oriented, low-skilled jobs. According to the study, every job that is created in the high-tech industry has been estimated to create an additional five jobs in the wider economy.

The study was prepared for the European Economic and Social Committee at the request of the Employers’ Group by a research
As a result of that settlement, better known as the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), the EU, along with many others, has been working to enhance cross community co-operation and prevent a return to violence. The EU has played a critically important, if unsung role in this – unlike the UK, Irish or even the US Government, it is the only impartial ‘hands-on player’ without, as the Irish saying goes, ‘a dog in the fight’. Yet it was the most serious conflict within the EU.

The EU has facilitated a “neutral space” for the encouragement of dialogue not only at political level, but also on the ground at cross-community level. The Employers’ Group Newsletter

**Investigation of informal trilogue negotiations since the Lisbon Treaty**

The second recently completed study, entitled “Investigation of informal trilogue negotiations since the Lisbon Treaty - Added value, lack of transparency and possible democratic deficit”, focuses on the use of trilogues and early agreements in the EU. Today, trilogues are the standard operating procedure for reaching agreements between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. The use of trilogues has long raised concerns regarding transparency and accountability. Much has already been done to improve the way in which each institution’s negotiating team is held accountable to their respective institutions. However, there is still scope for improving the transparency of trilogue meetings.

The purpose of this study is three-fold. First, it provides an overview of recent developments in the use of trilogue meetings to reach early agreements. It provides a detailed descriptive statistical overview of the use of early agreements to conclude legislation in the period 1999 to 2016, negotiated under the ordinary legislative procedure. Second, it analyses EU policy initiatives taken in the areas of transparency and accountability. Third, it suggests several avenues for improving the transparency and accountability of trilogues.

The study draws on an extensive review of both academic and non-academic literature on the use of trilogues and early agreements. It also presents some new quantitative and qualitative data to shed light on the use of trilogues and early agreements. The document will shortly be available for download from the EESC page.

**Brexit:**

**WHY THE IRISH BORDER IS A CORE ISSUE?**

The inclusion of the Irish border as one of the three key issues in the Brexit negotiations, along with the divorce bill and the rights of EU and UK citizens, may at first seem surprising. The short answer to that is Peace – maintaining the 1998 Peace Settlement in Northern Ireland, which ended some 30 years of violence. With currently no devolved administration in Belfast, the underlying tensions have clearly not gone away and peace still needs to be worked for.

As a result of that settlement, better known as the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), the EU, along with many others, has been working to enhance cross community co-operation and prevent a return to violence. The EU has played a critically important, if unsung role in this – unlike the UK, Irish or even the US Government, it is the only impartial ‘hands-on player’ without, as the Irish saying goes, ‘a dog in the fight’. Yet it was the most serious conflict within the EU.

The EU has facilitated a “neutral space” for the encouragement of dialogue not only at political level, but also on the ground at cross-community level.
A Customs Union is vital: the EEA (the ‘Norway solution’) does not include agriculture. Agriculture and food processing account for 55% of all cross-border trade. Some 30% of all milk produced in the North (around 600m litres) is sent South for processing - pigs are key in the other direction. Major cross-border processing occurs too with alcohol, notably in the production of Guinness, Bailey’s and Irish whiskey, a designated EU GI (Geographical Indication). Not only do farmers in the North stand to lose their CAP payments, up to 80% of their income, but the act of processing food could, under a “hard Brexit”, also result in a change of tariff heading, or affect whether the end product is covered by a Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ).

That is why the Irish Government has been urging that the Irish Sea should become the new customs border, and the British that the border issue also involves the wider EU – UK trading and customs relationship.

Retaining a single Irish market is also essential, such as offered by membership of the EEA/EFTA. A Single Market ensures regulatory coherence. With few ports or airports too, the North increasingly relies on cross-border access.

Today the picture could not be more different: cross-border trade has now reached over €3bn a year. It is this that Brexit threatens to disrupt, as well as the significant Irish – UK trade. Building on the Internal Market, a single Irish market and economy is becoming a reality. An EU-backed Trade and Business Development Programme started before the GFA doubled trade in seven years. Now about a quarter of all goods exported from the North go South.

Some form of unique status or arrangement for Northern Ireland is essential if a hard border is to be avoided, one that would become a full external frontier of the EU with huge potentiality to disrupt the GFA. First Northern Ireland needs to remain a permanent part of the EU Customs Union, or to be in a partial customs union with the EU notably more extensive than that currently between the EU and Turkey. Temporary solutions will not work - especially if SPS issues arise through the UK permitting import of say hormone-enhanced beef from the US.

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Each day some 35,000 people commute across the border for work, school, retail, cultural or sporting activities. As well as agri-food, there is significant cross-border trade in building materials and in chemicals. Above all, most cross-border trade is conducted by SMEs, often operating on very thin profit margins. Extra costs from any new customs regime, however technical or using electronic ‘behind the border’ requirements, could easily drive many out of business.

The UK repeatedly emphasises the need to protect its strong and historic ties with Ireland, maintain the Common Travel Area, and to have ‘as seamless and frictionless a border … as possible’. The GFA is based on the UK and Ireland working together within the EU and SEM: a return to a hard Border would not only encourage smugglers but also the men of violence. A hard border would seriously undermine the GFA and undo a lot of the work of reconciliation. It must not happen.
A Paris-style agreement is needed on the future of work

When you hear ‘sustainable business’, you probably think of reductions in carbon footprint, ‘going green’ and embracing renewable technology. This side of sustainability has gained pace in recent years - Facebook and Apple recently announced that their new data centres will run entirely on renewable energy, while Volvo has committed to producing only electric or hybrid motors after 2017. There is a lot of sense in this approach. Forward-thinking businesses see the climate and energy-related risks that are looming on the horizon, while an increasingly sustainability-conscious consumer base is reinforcing the need to catch up with the curve.

For many businesses, this approach to sustainability also includes membership of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. WBCSD is a global business network of almost 200 companies, which collaborate through projects in five key systems: Food & Land, Energy, Cities & Mobility, Circular Economy and Redefining Value.

By working together, we can rally for change in a much bigger way. During the Paris negotiations in 2015, WBCSD brought together 170 companies and over 70 partners to work on low-carbon solutions for climate change. The Paris Agreement became a watershed moment in sustainability, where governments, science, city mayors and company leaders successfully came together to address one of the great challenges of our time.

I admit, however, that up until now too much of the sustainability conversation has focused on the environmental agenda. Conversely, not enough time has been spent on the social agenda – the impact on jobs, job transitions and livelihoods.

As action on this side of sustainability grows through initiatives including WBCSD’s Social Capital Protocol, the framework provided by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has become ever more important.

The SDGs are the greatest gift that the UN has ever given to the world. There are 17 Goals with 169 Targets, with the potential to unleash innovation, economic growth, and development on an unprecedented scale. They also provide a strong business case for engagement with each element of the sustainability agenda.

The need to take advantage of these opportunities and address sustainable employment solutions is becoming more acute every day.

Implementation of the SDGs takes place against the backdrop of a changing world, where the global economy is moving east and protectionism has become a concerning political trend. While automation and new technologies provide economic opportunities for business, their inherent social risks have also been highlighted as a contributory factor to political instability.

Each of these trends makes clear why the need to create enough and rewarding jobs is one of the biggest challenges facing us – and this is just as much a sustainability issue as energy or climate change.

Business must play a central role in confronting this challenge through global, collaborative platforms like WBCSD. However, to achieve long-lasting change, we must follow the successful model of Paris and the SDGs – where governments, business, workers and all stakeholders come together to produce innovative and long-term solutions.

By jointly shaping the transformation that lies ahead, and rejecting the status quo, we have the opportunity to deliver social prosperity for decades to come.

About the author:
Peter Bakker
President of World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)
The Employers' Group president was in Sofia last month (7 & 8 August) to discuss ways of tackling crucial issues for the business community ahead of Bulgaria’s EU presidency in the first half of 2018.

Accompanied by Georgi Stoev, a member of the EESC’s Bulgarian delegation, Mr Krawczyk held extensive discussions and debates with senior business representatives in the country from the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Industrial Association, as well as with leading experts from the National Assembly’s Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of European Funds. Key topics included improving civil society dialogue, support for the macro-economy and social policies, the further development of the internal European market and the framing of an integrated SME policy.

Mr Krawczyk also had separate meetings with deputy prime minister Tomislav Donchev and with Monika Panayotova, deputy minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2018. It emerged clearly from these meetings that employers’ priorities were in line with those of Bulgaria’s EU presidency and that efforts would be made on both sides to address issues such as skills and competences, which are also directly linked to industrial policy, Industry 4.0 and digitalisation.

The Bulgarian authorities were also informed of the extraordinary meeting of the EESC Employers’ Group that would be held in Sofia on 22 & 23 March 2018 and would be devoted primarily to bridging the skills gap and examining the relevant EU macro-regional strategies for the Danube and the Black Sea. The Employers’ Group is looking forward to an extremely successful Bulgarian presidency in 2018!

Upcoming Group events

The future of trade and digital society – these are the topics that the Employers’ Group will focus on during its events this autumn.

In September, the Group will continue its tradition and play an active role in this year’s European Forum of New Ideas (EFNI) in Sopot, Poland. In the framework of EFNI, the Employers’ Group will organise a roundtable on trade on 28 September. The roundtable, “Trading up for a stronger EU27: Free trade of the future – social partners’ perspective”, aims to raise the question of the social partners’ role in shaping the future of EU trade policy.

In the context of the very dynamic current trends in global trade relations, the panellists will try to answer sensitive questions such as: How should we address the needs and concerns of both employers and trade unions? How can they have a more active role in making the case for international trade in general, with the EU-Korea FTA, CETA and the EU-Japan FTA serving as benchmark deals for future trade agreements? How is EU trade policy perceived by our global partners? How should we respond to growing distrust towards free trade?

In October, the Group will contribute to the calendar of the current Estonian Presidency of the European Union. On 25 October, in cooperation with the Estonian Employers’ Confederation and the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, we will organise a seminar in Tallinn entitled “Advantages of digital society”. We are honoured to announce that high-level speakers (including the EU Commissioner in charge of Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Elżbieta Bieńkowska, and the Estonian Minister of Economic Affairs and Infrastructure, Kadri Simson) have confirmed that they will be attending our conference.

The aim of this event is to reflect upon the opportunities linked to the digital single market and the development of digital public services, something that will be a priority topic during the Estonian Presidency.
What is MobiliseSME?
The project MobiliseSME (Mobilities for professionals and qualified employees of MSMEs) – devised and led by European Entrepreneurs CEA-PME and funded by the EU programme Employment and Social Innovation, PROGRESS, 2016-2017 – set out to analyse the opportunities and benefits of the cross-border mobility of employees of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the EU.

The project was conducted in two phases: an assessment of the legal feasibility and the demand for the idea, by consulting MSMEs from 20 countries and territories, and a pilot mobility scheme.

Inspired by a vision like the successful Erasmus programme for university students, this new pilot scheme took place between November 2016 and June 2017 and allowed small and medium-sized companies in Europe to send one of their employees to work in another company abroad for a period between two weeks and two months or to host an employee of a foreign company for the same time span.

The impact of MobiliseSME
By the end of the project nearly 400 companies were registered and active on the MobiliseSME Matchmaking Platform, which made it possible to find partners, so that companies from 23 different sectors participated in 54 exchanges.

91% of the companies sending employees abroad and 95% of the host companies said that they were satisfied with the matching of needs and competences within the exchange that they had joined.

The benefits of the exchange matched or surpassed companies' expectations:

• About 90% of companies stated that cross-border business would develop better, thanks to the exchange.
• About 75% stated that they would be able to develop new products and services.
• 81% of participating employees felt that the exchange had added value to their professional development.
• Employees also felt that they had benefitted greatly in various ways from the exchange.

The Future of MobiliseSME
The facts and figures prove that there is a real appetite in Europe for a mobility scheme for SMEs and their employees. The MobiliseSME pilot scheme now requires investigation into how this programme could be established permanently in the framework of the European Union’s tools and legislation, like EEN, EYE and ERASMUS+, but also the skills agenda and labour mobility. A follow-up pilot scheme might make this possible, provided that it prioritises the following key points:

• Key resources for match-making and information are needed, particularly at local level, to reach out to as many companies as possible. Ideally there should be at least one partner in each of the 28 EU Member States, with a strong network of member companies.
• A well-functioning and familiar matchmaking platform remains key to managing the whole process easily, but it needs to deliver better, through more intelligent algorithms and more users.
• Longer exchange periods from two to six months should be tested as well.
• The legal documents and criteria for exchanges used in the MobiliseSME pilot scheme should be kept, as these were both comprehensive enough to provide adequate legal guarantees and allow monitoring, and yet simple enough not to constitute a barrier to participation.

If you would like to know more about the future of an “Erasmus for SMEs and their employees”, you can register for the following upcoming events:

On 26 September, the breakfast debate “Encouraging SMEs to go cross border: EU Project to Mobilise SMEs”. Registration: http://bit.ly/SMEsGoCrossBorder

On 28 September the MobiliseSME final conference “The Future of a Mobility Scheme for SMEs and their Employees in Europe”. You can register here: http://bit.ly/2gFtYLV

More information available at http://mobilisesme.eu/

Employees’ views on what participation in the exchange may lead to

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About the author:
Stefan Moritz
Managing Director
European Entrepreneurs CEA-PME
The Common Agriculture Policy: IT’S LESS ABOUT DIRECT PAYMENTS THAN YOU THINK!

In today’s world where the customer is king, producing low volume, high quality food is not a financially rewarding occupation. Over the past 20 years most European small farmers would agree that the risks and social disadvantages they have suffered make it impossible for many of them to recommend small-scale farming to their own sons or daughters.

Under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), EU grants have helped to sustain small farms. However, with every grant or subsidy now comes a demand that there must be identifiable and quantifiable “value for money”. So how do politicians and citizens put a monetary price on farming and the rural countryside?

With current CAP payments amounting to 38% of the European Union’s total budget, the CAP is one of the most important European policies, but it is also one of the most misunderstood. Since its inception in 1962 it has encouraged farmers to produce safe, cheap food while at the same time ensuring high levels of animal health. However the latest round of discussions on the future of CAP has exposed some alarming assumptions by some consumer groups, environmentalists and politicians, especially in relation to “value for money”. It has even been suggested that CAP has become an unnecessary financial drain on government and that the current objectives should therefore be radically changed.

The argument, particularly against CAP, is that food is too expensive and can be bought more cheaply on the world markets but this assumption places little or no value on the social or economic role of Europe’s rural remote mountain and island areas and how they presently support towns and cities.

The problem is that most of the hidden “value for money” that rural areas create is extremely difficult to quantify. For example, clean water. Without good agricultural and forestry practices the water that lands on the fields and in the forests could become polluted. Fish in the rivers would therefore not survive and the water that reaches the cities would not be fit to drink. Unfortunately, most people do not make that link and therefore put no value on such indirect benefits.

Forestry is also a huge benefit because it gives us wood that is used to build houses and make furniture. Trees also help excess water to seep into the soil therefore stopping rivers from flooding and causing damage downstream in the towns and cities that are on flat land. Wood is used to generate electricity and heat many towns. Rural areas also offer somewhere that people can go to escape from the hustle and bustle of the cities. Clean air, open recreational areas, places to go to relax and recharge tired minds and bodies and places to walk and see nature. These are all indirect benefits that many politicians and some taxpayers appear to ignore when they criticise the European Common Agricultural Policy.

Quality food is also undervalued. In today’s disposable world many supermarket customers do not bother to check whether the food they buy is local or from the other side of the world. Price has all too often become the customers’ main criteria.

There is no doubt in my mind that the CAP will change and “value for money” will become more important, but that also means that there are opportunities to recognise the indirect benefits that rural areas bring to the wider society.

Recognition of the special needs of low population density areas is also necessary if we are going to improve Europe’s rural areas. Too often there is an assumption by local government that what works in towns and cities will automatically work in more isolated areas. This is seldom true, as is demonstrated by the provision of adult education. In this case, local solutions need to be implemented in order to mitigate the problem of rural people having to spend excessive time travelling long distances if they want to improve their educational skills.
The EESC initiates a discussion on the circular economy in Lithuania

The circular economy has become a hot topic throughout the EU, and Lithuania is no exception. The need for a circular economy is becoming widely acknowledged across Europe and is being addressed by businesses, society and policy makers. One of the first discussions of this kind in Lithuania, involving government, regional officials and civil society representatives, took place in the Druskininkai Municipality on 28 July. I had the opportunity to present the position of the EESC Employers’ Group on this very important topic.

Switching from a linear “extract-transform-use-throw away” economy to a circular one where waste can be turned into resources is a critical challenge for Europe. It could provide new economic opportunities and markets, both within and outside Europe, and lead to the creation of local jobs.

Overall, the participants in the discussion shared the EESC’s position on the circular economy. It was also noted that prosperity in the circular economy could only be achieved by bringing together existing private and public initiatives, removing barriers, fostering technological innovation and stimulating demand. The recognition of the need to transition to a circular economy is welcome news for the business community. Access to finance will be an issue for SMEs and entrepreneurs wishing to take advantage of the opportunities that will open up as a result of the circular economy; specific policy tools should therefore be developed. Green Public Procurement is an important driver when it comes to promoting sustainable consumption.

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Europe’s rural and remote areas should not be seen as a burden, but as an opportunity. With the continuing support of CAP, innovative ideas that will benefit us all need to be explored and developed. This will require a more entrepreneurial approach by local and national politicians and a willingness to reconsider what they define as “value for money”.

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New bespoke solutions will also have to be found so that health services can be improved in remote areas. In some parts of Europe online medical services are being trialled that directly link city hospitals to health centres in low population areas that are staffed by nurses instead of doctors. This innovative approach means that basic services can be retained but without the high costs of providing doctors in every small village.

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