

The Future of Work: Today. Tomorrow. For All

Speech by Oliver Röpke, EESC Workers' Group President, on the occasion of the European Commission Conference on the future of work – 9 April 2019

MANAGING CHANGE – Governance and partnership

- It is an honour for me to here representing the voice of European workers;
- Congratulations to the ILO on its Centenary year and for choosing to focus on the future of work to mark this occasion; and thank you to the European Commission for organising this important conference;
- **The future of work is a key priority for the EESC Workers' Group.** We want to work towards a European Union that protects and enables workers and other citizens, and provides secure and fair perspectives for all.
- Change can be daunting and when that change involves major transformations in our way of life, this can be especially challenging. The future of work will involve major societal transformations. It cannot be seen in isolation but must form part of a comprehensive and holistic approach which also addresses the sustainability of our way of life and the future of our planet. We need to join the dots.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am convinced that the first condition for managing change successfully is a broad consensus:

- **Building a consensus about the future that we want:** the starting point for managing the transformations in the world of work is that we need to establish a consensus on where we want to go. We cannot be passive spectators. It is up to us to take the decisive action (and make the difficult decisions) to ensure that the future of work delivers fairer, more inclusive

labour markets offering opportunities for all, based on quality jobs, decent wages and effective social protection coverage for all workers.

- I would like to applaud the **ILO's Global Commission for the Future of Work** for the excellent work they have done. The recommendations set out in the "**Work for a brighter future**" report provide a sound basis for building that consensus and to set us on the right path.
- The Global Commission has called for human-centred agenda for the future of work, that is: "a new approach that puts people and the work they do at the centre of economic and social policy and business practice". This is something we should all endorse.

The second fundamental condition for managing the change is dialogue:

- **The need for effective and open dialogue at all levels:** dialogue is one of – if not *the* - key element needed to build consensus and manage change. It must be the foundation for developing effective and comprehensive policies need to address the future of work.
- As a trade unionist, and President of the EESC Workers' Group I must start with the **social dialogue**. We know that countries with the most developed social partnerships and effective social systems are among the most successful, resilient and competitive in the world. But yet, that there are still too many countries in the EU and elsewhere, where the social dialogue is weak or even non-existent.

- A strong dialogue between the social partners, in the spirit of mutual respect and an open approach, is essential. We need to move away from some of the ideological positions that can often hamper a constructive dialogue.
- While the effectiveness of the social dialogue is primarily the responsibility of the social partners themselves, **governments also have a responsibility to promote and facilitate social dialogue**, while respecting the autonomy of the social partners.
- Apart from the difficult question of competences: we should urge the Member States to set the framework conditions for reliable industrial relations and for collective bargaining.
- **Collective bargaining, workers' participation and workplace democracy** are all key ingredients which must be strengthened. Collective bargaining should be promoted at all appropriate levels. The EESC has already recommended collecting data on the coverage of collective bargaining throughout Europe, through indicators in the European Semester, while fully respecting national practices and industrial relations systems (opinion on European Pillar of Social Rights).
- Governments also have an important role as regards governance. They must provide the right political and social environment, as well as the legal and policy frameworks which allow trade unions to operate freely and independently and so that workers' also feel able to exercise their right to freedom of association.
- As an Austrian trade unionist, I would especially like to underline that governments have to involve the Social Partners in the decision making

process. Social Dialogue in the sense of Social Partnership also requires a strong commitment of governments.

- Effective social dialogue needs solid players on both sides. Independent employers' organisations that understand the benefits of dialogue and consultation, on an equal footing with trade unions, are also a pre-condition.
- Therefore a strong tripartite dialogue is also needed, where governments actively listen to the views of the social partners and works in a spirit of partnership.
- **Importance of broad civil dialogue, a key pillar of democracy:** the social partners have a specific role to play in the elaboration and implementation of policies directly or indirectly affecting employment and labour markets, but the future of work will bring changes that affect society as a whole. Wider civil society has a significant role to play if we are to achieve more inclusive societies, including in the area of work.
- Civil society is an essential **pillar of democracy** but the space for organised and independent civil society is shrinking in many Member States. This should be a worry for everyone. Civil dialogue needs to be strengthened to ensure that all citizens, including young people and those in vulnerable situations or facing discrimination, feel that they are able to participate in the design, implementation and review of policy-making processes.
- We know the challenges but there is no crystal ball and no predetermined future for the world of work. There are choices to be made. Our ability to make the right choices, in the interests of the many and not the few, will

determine how successful we are in shaping a future of work and the wider world that gives hope for future generations.

Please allow me a final remark on the question of governance and partnership:

- The future of work will also mean an increase in cross border work forms, migrant workers and cross border posting.
- **But:** How is it possible that today we can easily enforce traffic fines across borders while we are not able to coordinate the cross-border fight for fair working conditions and for the same wage for the same work at the same workplace? **Why are Member States not able to enforce cross-border sanctions against companies which do not pay the minimum wage to the posted workers?**
- When in some regions, the likelihood of wage dumping is 50 times higher in cases of cross-border posting compared to local companies, then something is wrong with this single market!
- In light of this I hope that the creation of the European Labour Authority will be a first important step in the right direction.

- How can social partners and civil society adapt to ensure that they remain highly relevant in the changing world of work?
 - Like all other institutions, the social partners and other civil society actors need to respond to the changes taking place around them. We need innovative and resilient institutions.
 - Social partners are in the business of adapting to change! Some practical examples of existing agreements from the European social partners that address changes in the world of work: the framework agreements on part-time work, on fixed-term contracts and on parental leave, which all became directives. (The new Directive on Work-Life Balance updates the Parental Leave Directive, originally negotiated by the European social partners – unfortunately on this occasion the European social partners were unable to agree a mandate to update the provisions themselves).
 - **National example:** trade unions are already taking action to adapt to the changes taking place in the traditional employment relationships. Many national unions are looking at how to organise non-standard workers (e.g. those in the platform economy) and the self-employed. In September 2018, the Danish 3F signed a 12 month pilot collective bargaining agreement with Hilfr.dk, a website platform providing cleaning services for around 1,700 customers across Denmark. (<http://www.uni-europa.org/2018/09/20/worlds-first-collective-agreement-between-platform-company-and-trade-union-in-denmark/>)
 - **At the European level**, for their sixth Work Programme (2019 – 2021) the European social partners have committed to negotiate an **agreement on digitalisation**; they will consider issues such as the acquisition of digital skills, work organisation, health and safety, and working conditions.
- What should be the role of the European Union? Which instruments should be used to support national governments and other relevant stakeholders?

- **The need for a comprehensive and overarching strategy at EU level:** European labour markets are increasingly interconnected; although there is no "one size fits all", in the context of an internal market with free movement of goods, capital, services and people we need a solid framework to ensure fair and well-functioning labour markets and upward economic and social convergence.
- **The European Pillar of Social Rights is a positive development:** it lays the ground for a renewed consensus at EU level on the need for upward social convergence, to go alongside economic convergence. There have already been some positive developments but the momentum for implementation must be maintained. The EU institutions, Member States, social partners and wider civil society all have a role to play to ensure that the Pillar becomes an effective instrument for convergence. (Recently adopted EESC opinion calling **For a European Framework Directive on a Minimum Income.**)
- **Making the necessary links - future of work and the sustainable development agenda:** a European framework for digitalisation, in the context of an EU industrial policy strategy to prevent a race to the bottom (including fair taxation of the profits of digitalisation, regulation of the platform economy. EESC's recent opinion "*Listening to the citizens of Europe for a sustainable future*" (Sibiu and beyond) – EESC's vision is for Europe to become the global leader on sustainable development and has therefore called for **a strong EU strategy for the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**
- **Public and private investment are essential:** supporting just transition, decent work and employability requires:
 - investment in people (training, upskilling, re-skilling & life-long learning), not forgetting the particular situation of younger and older workers
 - resources to support workers in sectors that are already affected by this transition
 - investment in quality public services and infrastructure such as childcare and older care facilities

- **The post-2020 multiannual financial framework (MFF)** could be an important driver in assisting Member States to manage the changes in the world of work by support social priorities and policies relating to the labour market and education. This is why trade unions are particularly concerned about the proposed cuts to the allocation for social issues.
- **The role of the EESC** – the role of the EESC as an advisory body representing the voice of organised civil society at the EU level should not be overlooked. As a body that brings together the main civil society actors representing employers, workers and other diverse groups (e.g. consumer and environmental organisations, social non-governmental organisations etc.) our added value comes from our ability to reach consensus on often difficult issues affecting European citizens.