

EESC-Employers.Today

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN EDUCATION ESTABLISHMENTS AND EMPLOYERS

In this issue

Partnerships between Education establishments and Employers 1

Coordination and moderation the role of the EU in the crisis 2

Mobility as a key driver for the sustainable EU labour markets 3

Europe without barriers 3

Strategy plan of the Employers' Group 4

Diversity and anti-discrimination at the workplace 5

European recovery plan 6

A more effective approach and use of resources 7

Euromed Summit 2009 8

REQUEST OF THE CZECH PRESIDENCY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

At the end of 2008, just as it was about to take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the government of the Czech Republic requested the European Economic and Social Committee to draw up an opinion on partnerships between education establishments and Employers. This request was no matter of chance. It was the fruit of close relations between Czech employers' organisations, Czech members of the EESC's Employers' Group and the government in Prague.

Indeed, in light of the economic crisis, it makes sense to assume that a higher level of private investment in education will contribute to tackling short-term labour market problems and to preparing for the economy of tomorrow.

The EESC's Employers' Group could not fail to welcome this initiative and the opportunity to take the lead. A hearing held in Brussels brought together participants as wide-ranging as the Rector of Cracow University, the President of the European Construction Industry Federation, a teacher's trade union representative, a Czech minister and a Portuguese student, to mention but a few. All participants, including EESC members, backed the idea of setting up these partnerships and stressed the importance of giving them a strong European dimension.

A UNANIMOUS EESC RESPONSE

The EESC opinion was adopted at the March 2009 Plenary session, with the backing of the three groups. It advocates an EU-level "Prague process" to serve as a framework for promoting such partnerships in the EU through structured dialogue between social partners and public authorities, pilot schemes set up by the professions and the use of existing EU funds. A fundamental aspect of these proposals is the call for local initiatives implemented by small motivated teams and reliance on SME networks

and local employers' organisations in order to cut red tape.

A PRIORITY FOR THE EESC'S EMPLOYERS' GROUP

The EESC opinion was presented on 6 and 7 April in Prague during an Interministerial Conference. It will also be used to support the work of the key extraordinary meeting of the Employers' Group to be held in Bucharest on 16 June 2008. It marks the



President Henri Malosse

will of European entrepreneurs to invest in the future, and therefore in education. Needless to say, the business world and academia have different goals. They should not be subordinate to one another or dependent on each other. However, by understanding each other better and developing joint projects together, they can contribute to shaping a European society better able to foster individual development and face the challenge of globalisation.

Henri Malosse

PRESIDENT OF THE EMPLOYERS' GROUP

Rapporteur of the Opinion of the EESC SOC/325 – EESC 630/2009

http://eescopinions.eesc.europa.eu/EESCopinionDocument.aspx?identifier=ces\soc\soc325\ces630-2009_ac.doc&language=EN

COORDINATION AND MODERATION THE ROLE OF THE EU IN THE CRISIS



Peter CLEVER
Vice-President
Employers' Group

“Coordination and moderation means, highlighting the similarities in the problems and challenges we face, holding solution-based discussions and thus working towards an agreed approach based on shared beliefs”

The last few months of the global crisis have made it abundantly clear how important international agreement and coordination is. This can succeed only with the EU and not without it.

Nobody knows whether the large national recovery packages will ultimately be able to bring the downwards economic spiral under control. However, what was effective in preventing the meltdown of the global financial system is an indispensable requirement here: the measures that each state can and must take on their own responsibility will only succeed if there is international agreement over the timeframe and course of action. Crucially, this will depend on bringing forward and boosting investment wherever the impact is sustainable and, as far as possible, spans the generations: this means first and foremost investment in education and in the infrastructure projects involving the major traffic arteries in Europe and the world.

MAKE EUROPE SUCCESSFUL THROUGH COORDINATION AND MOTIVATION

Europe always seeks to gain power, influence and significance through binding rules. This is in principle the wrong approach to take.

The EU should first and foremost emphasise its "moderating and coordinating role". At face value, this might sound as if it were a question of giving the EU non-binding and weak powers. In fact, the opposite is the case.

Coordinating individual national or regional policies, moderating the discussion of key issues - such as the correct national response to fundamental demographic challenges and increased global competition - can provide crucial incentives for reform without any direct EU regulation.

This has been particularly notable in education policy where the EU has no regulatory powers nor is it seeking any. And yet the EU was the key source of strategic reforms in almost all Member States. We are talking about the impact that Europe has had on national education policies by moderating the discussion of important subjects and coordinating the discussion process. In so doing, the EU has set in train movements which

encompass all Member States, without even a single regulatory text.

Coordination and moderation means, highlighting the similarities in the problems and challenges we face, holding solution-based discussions and thus working towards an agreed approach based on shared beliefs. It is this that is required in the current crisis.

As the largest export nation, Germany, for example, has a special interest in ensuring that the effects of national crisis management policies complement each other through EU-wide coordination of measures. However, the EU must ensure that the State's role does not come to replace that of business for example - a role to which it is not suited.

The regulatory principles of the social market economy, which are also reflected in the rules of the internal market that intentionally restrict state influence, are not just fair weather principles: they are also applicable when a storm is raging. It is now in particular, during the current crisis, that the EU Commission must rigorously ensure compliance with the rules on subsidies.

RETURN TO STABLE PUBLIC FINANCES WITH BALANCED BUDGETS

State support measures have raised public financial obligations to dizzying proportions. It is the task of the EU to ensure that each Member State is already taking measures to guarantee a return to a policy of balanced public budgets as quickly as possible.

GEAR THE POST-LISBON STRATEGY TOWARDS THE LONG TERM

The EU also has a key coordinating role to play in the Lisbon Strategy. The current crisis runs the acute risk of allowing the true Lisbon Strategy to degenerate into an inflated short-term recovery programme that is unsustainable. This must be prevented because it runs contrary to the main goal of the Lisbon Strategy, namely to make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" by 2010. However, this goal remains the right one, even if its attainment is delayed.

MOBILITY AS A KEY DRIVER FOR THE SUSTAINABLE EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKETS

Despite the right to move and to work within the European Union is considered by the 53% of the European citizens as a EU's greatest benefit and advantage, mobility across Europe is still very low and should be optimized. The aim of the European Commission's **Job Mobility Action Plan for the years 2007-2010** was to analyse the situation in light of the challenges posed globalisation, demographic change and the development of new technologies. The Czech Presidency continues in this effort to increase the mobility in the EU and focus its priorities on promoting the greatest possible freedom of movement of workers and on facilitating and increasing workers' geographical and job mobility across the entire EU market.

From this reason the CZ Presidency has encouraged the EESC to develop an **explanatory opinion about the outstanding barriers to the mobility in the internal labour market**. My main challenge as a Rapporteur was to make firstly a stock-take what are the EU's ambitions in this respect and what is the reality from the companies and citizens perspectives. The second step was to debate and identify the remaining administrative, legal, technical and

psychological mobility barriers and to define the appropriate recommendations to the European Institutions, Member State, Social Partners and Civil Society Organisations.

The EESC fully supports all initiatives of the European Commission and Czech Presidency focus on improving worker mobility and better matching of labour demand and supply in the EU. The first opportunity to contribute to the common discussion at the European level was in Luhačovice in January this year. The mobility and free movement of workers was on the agenda of the Informal Labour ministers meeting. The second chance to stress the view of the EESC on this topic was in the process of preparing workshops before the informal tripartite Social Summit in Prague.

The main message of the EESC is that the mobility has to remain on the EU top agenda. The appropriate actions across a broad spectrum of areas and involvement of all relevant actors, particularly the social partners are needed bearing in mind that free movement of workers is a fundamental principal of the European economic integration. Any protectionism is no way for the future!

EUROPE WITHOUT BARRIERS

Extraordinary Various Interests Group meeting, Prague 13 March 2009

Bureau Members met representatives from employers' organisations, trades unions and NGOs at Prague's Clarion congress centre. Three topics were on the agenda:

- The role of Czech civil society in the decision-making process and the public participation;
- Active European citizenship – sustainable funding of NGOs;
- Europe without frontiers – organised civil society involvement.

Also taking part in the meeting was the minister for human rights and minorities, Michael Kocáb, who set out the priorities of the Czech EU Presidency and stressed that the development of civil society was an intrinsic part of building a people's Europe. Getting the public democratically involved was essential, especially in a time of crisis, to safeguard cohesion and the future.

As Luca Jahier emphasised in his summing up: "We face a process of considerable growth and

change in all the countries of the Union which will affect the multi-faceted and elaborate world which is variously structured and labelled (NGOs, third sector, non-profit organisations, the social economy, and so on), but which shares many characteristics and a similar evolution. It is in the interests of all, then, to assist this growth, above all by acting together, and to develop its organisational and institutional framework to make it more cohesive and robust. On the one hand, then, these associations and the third sector face the challenge of capitalising on the past and the experience acquired in different yet close areas (businesses, agriculture, trades unions, cooperatives, the professions, and so on). On the other hand, there is a clear invitation to all these elements to chart a common path, to work together and in so doing to harness the specific assets of each body and sector. In this the experience of the EESC Group III and the EESC as a whole is an exceptional and unique institutional opportunity."



Vladimira DRBALOVÁ
Employers' Group Member

"Free movement of workers is a fundamental principal of the European economic integration. Any protectionism is no way for the future!"



Maria ZVOLSKÁ
Vice-President
Employers' Group

UPGRADING THE STRATEGY PLAN OF THE EMPLOYERS' GROUP BASTIA - 2nd APRIL 2009



Cveto STANTIČ
Vice-President
Employers' Group

“Every strategy is about winning. But it is not a rule book, a blue print, or a set of programmed instructions. Strategy is the unifying theme that gives coherence and direction to the individual decisions of an organisation”

I remember this definition from my MBA studies in the USA many years ago. I still like it and think it is relevant also when thinking about the needs of a Strategic plan for Employers' Group. I accepted with great interest the proposal to be one of the coordinators in preparing the new document for future mandates.

WHY DO WE NEED AN UPDATE OF THE EXISTING DOCUMENT?

Our Group produced a good strategic document in 2008 which was well in line with President's goals set up for the 2006 – 2008 Mandate.

But the world around us is moving fast and we have to respond to these changes in an efficient and timely manner. Let me just mention the financial and economic crisis which hit European economy really hard. As a result, expectations and values are now changing and are bringing about new challenges.

In 2012, our Group will be taking over the Presidency of the EESC. We have to be ready to recognise new strategic opportunities with clear directions, while at the same time; we need to be flexible to exploit these opportunities.

Eight chapters of our 2008 strategy paper contain a great number of tasks and ideas to improve our efficiency and visibility. It is an appropriate time do a “stock-taking” of our achievements: I am pleased to have identified several improvements in the last two years.

Let me briefly mention just some of them:

- Better cohesion of the Group and better working methods
- More structured relationships with our partner organisations
- Positive impact on the budget 2010
- Positive impact on the overall EESC governance

WITH OPEN DISCUSSION FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

The preliminary discussion in the Employers' Group Bureau during its meeting in April proved that there is still room for further improvement:

- The communication and follow-up of the opinions are still unsatisfactory,
- Relations with EP are inadequate, with the Council virtually non-existent,
- The visibility of EESC Members is poor, especially in the Member States and the profile of the EESC and Group I need to be further enhanced.

In these difficult times, our companies expect us to fight with full determination for Employers' interests and be even more result oriented. Our Group should assume a leading and forefront role on the topics which are important for business.

CAN WE ACHIEVE THESE STRATEGIC GOALS ON OUR OWN?

For certain issues the answer is positive. But the majority of our ideas and endeavours can be materialised only through the EESC. The way to achieve our goals is to successfully influence the EESC policies and decision making. I am convinced that we can do it only with a consistent direction based upon clear views of the “game” being played.

The most important element of any successful strategy is implementation. It is also the most difficult phase in the whole process. Therefore we suggest setting up a concrete Action Plan, a genuine “roadmap” which will facilitate this implementation.

The draft document should be presented at the Bureau meeting in September 2009 in order to be endorsed by the Group by the end of the year.

In the meantime I would like to invite all the Members of the Employers' Group to participate actively in the process of our strategy update. Because the purpose of strategy is to help us to win, let's do it together.

PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION PRACTICES AT THE WORKPLACE

During April, I have had the privilege of attending a number of events where ethnically I have been in the majority. First there was the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary assembly on Prague (6-9 April), then I flew to the USA to be one of speakers on The Harambe Bretton-Woods Symposium on Africa's Global Intellectual Capital (11/12 April) and finally I attended a Transatlantic Event on Inclusion held at the European Parliament (15/16 April). I chaired one of the plenary sessions in the morning and in the afternoon I was one of the panellists in of the workshops.

However my focus on Diversity in the workplace started in March with a meeting with employers from France and Belgium to share good practice. Thanks to representatives from the companies ACFCI, Air France, La Caisse d'Epargne, La Poste, Randstad and Thomson. A special thanks to Emmanuel Jahan of Air France for his considerable help in making this meeting happen.

MIGRATION AND DIVERSITY

There are nearly 200 million people living outside their countries of origin or citizenship. According to ILO estimates, about more than half of international migrants and immigrants are economically active: employed, self-employed or otherwise engaged in remunerative activity. This means that migration today is essentially about labour and employment.

Due to economic, demographic and technological changes, increasing numbers of jobs in industrialised economies simply cannot be filled by native-born workers. That remains the case even in these times of recession and rising unemployment. Aging of the native workforce combined with declining populations are important factors. But it is also important to note that many services and activities, including construction and healthcare services, cannot be off-shored. Most SMEs don't have the option of moving operations overseas.

CENTRALITY OF EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is a de facto situation of social exclusion, of personal destabilization, of deconstruction of identity and dignity, and of social organisation. Unemployment has often been strikingly racialised, with minority populations - those Europeans and migrants referred to as populations of colour - often facing

unemployment rates far higher than those of the dominant populations.

It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that employment is central to everyone's participation in society, to their independence, inclusion, to identity and to dignity. However employment remains a key terrain of the struggle for equality, for anti-discrimination and for anti-racism. Obtaining equal opportunities and treatment in employment necessarily requires a tripartite approach:

1. a legal regulatory framework and its enforcement by the State,
2. workplace measures by employers, and
3. initiatives by workers themselves.

GOOD PRACTICE

Good practice requires

1. implementation of a rights-based normative and regulatory framework which the EU has done with Article 13 which combats discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.
2. A consistent and accurate knowledge base - As we say in business "Good policy depends on good data".
3. Rules, procedures and administrative mechanisms to give practical effect to principles, legislation and commitments on equality and non-discrimination.
4. Effective independent monitoring and supervisory mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

In summary, advancing non-discrimination and equality of treatment for all requires a deliberate strategic approach. The strategic agenda must include completing a legal and regulatory framework, developing a solid knowledge base, articulating procedures and administrative mechanisms, and having monitoring and supervisory mechanisms. The agenda must mobilise social partners and other stakeholders, with incentives for voluntary action but also through obligatory compliance with law. Implementing and sustaining this agenda will itself require building political will, which in turn requires building alliances for advocacy, public awareness and compliance. Of course, like anything that is worth pursuing this is easier "said-than-done"!



Brenda KING
Vice-President
Employers' Group

“Employment is central to everyone's participation in society, to their independence, inclusion, to identity and to dignity.

However employment remains a key terrain of the struggle for equality, for anti-discrimination and for anti-racism”

EUROPEAN RECOVERY PLAN

In the view of the Polish Confederation of Private Employers (PKPP Lewiatan), one of the main challenges currently facing the



Jacek KRAWCZYK
Vice-President
Employers' Group

European economy is increasing the flow of capital to the real economy. European banks, despite receiving additional capital from public funds, are not increasing their lending. Rather, the trend is in the opposite direction.

The problem today is not only interest rates, but above all the risk of lending, which is increasing the cost of money. In addition, unconventional measures are therefore needed to increase the creditworthiness of businesses and private households. New initiatives are also required, such as measures to counter the development of payment bottlenecks and to increase the effectiveness of instruments such as guarantees, possibly by making them available to groups of businesses working together. Member States also need to be obliged to simplify the law and reduce administrative burdens and associated costs.

Banks have already drawn up their accounts for 2008. These accounts are currently being audited, and the actual status of bank assets now needs to be determined unambiguously and finally. Reliable auditing of banks' accounts and assessment of the scale of toxic assets, in accordance with the precautionary principle, could help to re-establish confidence on the financial markets. For this to happen the knowledge of all participants in this market of the actual scale of the problem needs to be taken into account. States also need this knowledge in order to be able to take action to stabilise the situation in the banking sector.

Re-establishing confidence on the financial markets also, and above all, requires supervision of those markets and compliance with commercial agreements and contracts. The market is developing much more quickly than regulation. Market supervision has been "routine", restricted to the monitoring of regulated activities on the financial markets. In future the responsibilities of the authorities responsible for supervising the financial markets should include ongoing analysis of changes on those markets, the reasons for those changes and assessing their possible consequences, so as to be able to apply, where necessary, more formal supervision to any newly developing areas of activity. Reports on such changes should be submitted at least once a year by the institutions supervising financial markets to the central banks, governments and – in an accessible form – to the general public.

There is also a need to eliminate the disparities between the laws of the individual Member States arising from the introduction at national level of exceptions to current Union rules. More exchange of information is needed between the supervisory authorities of the individual countries, as well as joint action where the situation justifies this.

The realisation of the project to set up a European System of Financial Supervision, centralising certain competences at EU level, with a clear definition of competences which will remain within the ambit of national authorities, should begin with the definition of tasks which are to remain within the national purview; only then, as the next step, should tasks be allocated between the European and national supervisory authorities.

The European Union's position on matters relating to the financial markets and the measures already taken or planned in the near future by the European Commission with regard to regulation and supervision must be echoed by countries outside the EU. Otherwise action by the Union will not be effective.

“Re-establishing confidence on the financial markets also, and above all, requires supervision of those markets and compliance with commercial agreements and contracts”

JOINT PROGRAMMING IN RESEARCH - AN INSTRUMENT FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE APPROACH AND USE OF RESOURCES

How Europe responds to a number of major societal challenges will shape its future in the decades to come. These challenges include: sustaining Europe's prosperity in the face of increased global competition, dealing with the needs of its ageing population and the challenges of immigration, stimulating sustainable development (especially in the context of climate change), securing the supply of energy, preserving human and environmental health, ensuring food quality and availability, as well as safeguarding citizen security. At the same time, European citizens increasingly expect solutions to these challenges to be found through science and technology.

Compared to its main partners, Europe is still under-investing in research, and R&D spending – by both the public and the private sector – has generally stagnated over the past decade. To increase the societal returns and benefits from public R&D funds, Europe should reinforce its capacity to transform research results into societal and economic benefits.

Yet one of the most obvious causes of sub-optimal returns to R&D has not been addressed sufficiently: the lack of collaboration and coordination between national public R&D programmes.

Today, 85% of public R&D is programmed, financed, monitored and evaluated at national level, with too little collaboration or coordination between countries. Less than 6% of total R&D investment and only 15% of European publicly financed civil R&D (of which 10% is accounted for by intergovernmental organisations and schemes, and 5% by the Framework Programme) is financed in a cross-border collaborative manner.

The issue is that, in areas of strategic importance for the whole or a large part of Europe, the fragmentation of public research programming leads to sub-optimal returns and is costing Europe dearly, as well as preventing it from realising its societal objectives. To move forward, Europe

needs to build upon its successes in cross-border public research, but it must also recognise and address the limits of existing approaches.

However, the impact of these Community initiatives could have been larger if there had been more overall strategic focus, more high-level political commitment on the part of Member States, more transparency on the national research systems, and less instrument rigidity.

There is now a unique opportunity to make a leap forward in pan-European research cooperation which could be as important as the creation of the Framework Programmes. The Commission is seeking to facilitate the development of a solution by launching a strategic and structured process.

Joint Programming involves Member States engaging voluntarily and on a variable-geometry basis in the definition, development and implementation of common strategic research agendas based on a common vision of how to address major societal challenges. It may involve strategic collaboration between existing national programmes or jointly planning and setting up entirely new ones.

Joint planning of research to tackle Alzheimer's disease is one example. The increasing incidence of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia is perhaps one of the most worrying signs of our ageing society. This is why should welcome the spontaneous bottom-up evolution that has taken place in this area at European level. This is one of a number of examples in recent times where this approach is being used to the benefit of the EU as a whole. Another example is the SET Plan, the official pilot project for joint programming in science and research, which will be a source of valuable experience for other projects.

The EESC will follow with interest how these projects are organised and tackled and is keen to contribute to the broader promotion of this undoubtedly important strategic concept on which the fate and standing of the EU in the near future will in large measure depend.



Josef ZBOŘIL
Employers' Group Member

“Europe should reinforce its capacity to transform research results into societal and economic benefits”

EUROMED SUMMIT 2009

Following discussions, a provisional date for the summit has been set for 18 and 19 October 2009. This year's Euromed Summit will take place in Alexandria, Egypt, in the magnificent



Library of Alexandria



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surroundings of the Library of Alexandria (Bibliotheca Alexandrina).

The original library, rightly considered to be one of the most important centres of learning in the ancient world, was

founded 2200 years ago during the Ptolemaic dynasty. At its peak, the library's collection numbered some 700 thousand papyrus scrolls. The original library was destroyed as a result of fire and armed conflict in the first centuries of the modern era.

The new Library is designed to act as a bridge between the contrasting worlds of east and west. This eleven floor cylindrical building features a south-facing wall clad in Aswan granite and inscribed with the alphabets of languages from around the world. A gallery in the form of an arrow connects the library with Alexandria University. The library features separate collections for children, young people and the visually impaired and the site is also home to a science museum, museum of calligraphy and a laboratory for the restoration and preservation of old documents. The library complex also includes a planetarium, an international school of librarianship and a conference centre. Its facilities are almost beyond compare, featuring sound-absorbing oak flooring, sound-proofed walls clad in Zimbabwean granite, a reading room that can hold up to 2.000, as well as state-of-the art technical equipment. Naturally, the building is

Article written by Maria ZVOLSKÁ
Vice-President
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also in a league of its own when it comes to cost. The initial investment amounted to some 200 million dollars, while the building's annual maintenance and running costs are estimated at USD 1.6 million. The library's facilities have steadily increased since the building was completed in 1997. The primary task of the library's 600 employees is to ensure the continued growth of the library's collection, which currently numbers some 400.000 volumes, 50.000 maps, 200.000 tape recordings and 100.000 manuscripts. The library can store up to 8 million volumes.

In addition to a delegation from the EESC, the summit's organising committee includes representatives from the Library of Alexandria, the Egyptian Federation of NGOs and Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As the summit will be held in autumn 2009 during the Swedish Presidency, we have contacted the Swedish Institute in Alexandria. The European Commission's representation in Cairo will also be involved in organising the event.

CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

The main topics of discussion include:

- A report will be presented on "Effective participation of civil society in the Mediterranean Partner Countries in the context of demographic and cultural changes in the future of the Union for the Mediterranean"
- Consequences of the economic crisis in the Euromed region
- Towards an economic and employment strategy founded on a knowledge society in the Euromed region
- Climate change and the Mediterranean: environmental and energy challenges.



Outside view of the Library of Alexandria