



# Group 2 Newsletter



OCTOBER 2009

## Electronic information bulletin of the Workers Group

### EDITORIAL

It should be no cause for concern that the ratification of international treaties calls for relatively long national procedures, particularly when these involve public consultations. Ireland has finally voted "yes" to the Lisbon Treaty.

What is regrettable, without doubt, is the lack of public information and, worse still, the incorrect, misleading, false information that is spread around – sometimes no doubt mistakenly but sometimes, sadly, on purpose.

We should be concerned, however, about stalling tactics such as the deliberately late complaint filed with the Czech constitutional court by a handful of senators (17, to be precise). Even more so when the coun-

try's president decides to make last minute personal demands by telephone, while Europe's citizens have to wait a couple of days before receiving any in-depth explanations.

### The Charter

What is worrying president Klaus is [the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#), about which [the Lisbon Treaty](#) states: "The Union recognises the rights, freedoms and principles set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union of 7 December 2000, as adapted at Strasbourg, on 12 December 2007, which shall have the same legal value as the Treaties".

Indeed, this worried Poland and the UK to the extent that they have called for a "[Protocol on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union to Poland and to the United Kingdom](#)". Such individual exceptions are nothing to be proud of, but at least these two countries made their requests according to the proper procedure and in a timely fashion!

The charter's headings are certainly more likely to worry some key decision-makers than the average European citizen: human dignity, right to life, right to the integrity of the person, prohibition of torture, prohibition of slavery, and so on.

And there is even something for those citizens like us, the workers (i.e. most of the population): right of collective bargaining and action, right of access to placement services, protection in the event of unjustified dismissal, fair and just

working conditions, prohibition of child labour, etc.

What is regrettable, when one reads the text, is the fact that it comes with cautious restrictions attached, laid down in order to preserve those national legal systems that do not fully subscribe to such generosity, applied indiscriminately to all human beings.

President Klaus's problem, it would seem, stems from the fact that, after the Second World War, collective measures were taken in his country to confiscate property and innocent people may have suffered as a result. This is the type of thing that can make fundamental rights seem like a threat. However we shall not collectively condemn the Czech Republic by confusing the country with its president.

We would like the EU to be able to exert pressure on third countries by promoting fundamental rights at all times, including, of course, those which specifically concern workers.

Clearly, it would be easier to convince a third country to sign a particular convention if we did not append protocols to fundamental rights, not to mention footnotes demanded at the last minute by telephone.



**George Dassis**

President of the workers' group

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# 456<sup>th</sup> EESC plenary session (30 September and 1 October 2009)

## Guests of the Committee

At its plenary session, on 30 September 2009, the Committee was pleased to welcome:

- Ms Eva Uddén **Sonnegård**, State Secretary in the Swedish Ministry of Employment, on behalf of the [Presidency-in-Office of the Council](#),
- [Mr José Manuel Barroso](#), [President of the European Commission](#),
- Mr Bruno **Coquet**, President of the EU Employment Committee,
- Ms Aviana Maria **Bulgarelli**, Director of [CEDEFOP](#) (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training),
- Mr Jorma **Karppinen**, Director of [Eurofound](#),
- Mr John **Martin**, Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs at the [OECD](#)

## Statements by Group II members



[Gabriele Bischoff](#) noted that given the seriousness of the crisis and in order to as far as possible to limit its effects on employment, it was necessary to make optimum use of the tools available, to focus on really effective measures and to combine financing sources. In this connection she mentioned the PROGRESS programme and welcomed the Commission's initiative on microfinancing. The Committee had issued opinions on both these issues for which she had been rapporteur-general. Provided needs were well diagnosed and target groups properly identified, such initiatives were useful. Gabriele Bischoff concluded her statement by calling for civil society to be closely involved in developing the post-Lisbon strategy, which must be familiar to and appreciated by the general public.

[Valerio Salvatore](#) began by noting that there really was a social crisis. Having watched those responsible get away unpunished, we would unfortunately see innocent people suffer again this winter. Social cohesion was essential for Europe, and employment was a key aspect of this cohesion. In this connection, Mr Salvatore raised the issue of flexicurity, the subject of a Committee opinion for which he had been rapporteur. It was important to discuss this question in relation to social dialogue and within companies. Flexibility was sometimes understood to be synonymous with facilitating redundancies, but all three groups agreed that this was wrong. Lay-offs were risky, given the likelihood of a recovery. Moreover, a decrease in the amount of work was an opportunity to step up training, not to lose skills. Mr Salvatore concluded by commending Ms Sonnegård's sensitivity towards workers.



[Nicole Prud'homme](#) focused on the issue of work and poverty, the subject of a Committee own-initiative opinion for which she had been rapporteur. The phenomenon of the "working poor" must not be neglected under any circumstance, but of course it was very much aggravated by the economic crisis. It was therefore more important than ever before to make high-quality work a key European objective, for the Commission to conclude its work on this matter soon and for action to be taken at every level, not least to avert the disaster that would result from people finishing education without recognised skills. Finally, Ms Prud'homme noted that 2010 had been designated the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. This must be used as an opportunity to take concrete action.

Making  
the most  
of the tools  
available  
to us...

Flexicurity  
must be  
negotiated;  
"no" to  
redundancies

Poverty:  
take action  
now

## Guests of the Committee

At its plenary session, on 1 October 2009, the Committee was pleased to welcome:

- [Mr Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities.](#)

## Statements by Group II members

[Georges Dassis, Group II president](#), began by thanking Mr Špidla for attending and declared that workers were prepared to support the man who had, to some extent unluckily, been given responsibility for social affairs on the eve of an economic crisis. In response to Mr Špidla's mention of rivalries between countries that had prevented certain Commission proposals from being realised, Mr Dassis pointed out that "free competition" between Member States (in such areas as taxation and social services) should be condemned outright. He urged the Commissioner to take heart from Mr Barroso's recent mention of a "new social ambition" and his support of fundamental rights, and to communicate his own views openly and unwaveringly to the Commission, even if he was in a minority. Workers' representatives could also bring the opinions of stakeholders to public attention.



Take a risk,  
and we will  
help you

Mr Dassis noted that Europe was a fantastic project, bringing peace and solidarity. It was this path that must be pursued, and attempts should not be made to go back on it. It was not just a free trade area that citizens needed and they would not become enthusiastic about a Europe which was limited to that. He therefore asked Mr Špidla to accept a second term at the Commission, keeping his social affairs portfolio, and to be bold: not to listen to lobby groups, but rather to ordinary people, to do his utmost to prevent a future in which the next generation was in conflict, to keep in mind how history would one day see his work, and to endeavour to do great things.



[Leila Kurki](#), president of the SOC section, emphasised the urgency of addressing the social consequences of the crisis, taking measures to deal with unemployment and lay-offs, while also strengthening social safety nets and not abandoning the poor. Only a policy providing for a structural programme to create and support employment could avoid the loss of even more jobs in the future. A crisis exit strategy was all very well, but there was no certainty that we would recover from the crisis quickly, nor was it certain that it would automatically generate employment. In addition, people who had lost their jobs needed to be able to find other work, and employability required training. Ms Kurki concluded by pointing out that the requests made at the Prague summit had not yet been heard. Europe's workers expected concrete commitments and it was time to put words into action.

A real  
structural  
programme  
for jobs  
and training

[http://eesc.europa.eu/groups/2/index\\_en.asp?id=4005GR02EN](http://eesc.europa.eu/groups/2/index_en.asp?id=4005GR02EN)

## Four new members officially join group II

At the EESC plenary session of 30 September and 1 October 2009, the assembly officially accepted as members:



**Fotis AGADAKOS**,  
joint finance secretary of the  
Greek General Confederation of  
Labour (ΓΣΕΕ)



**Oliver RÖPKE**,  
head of the European desk of  
the Austrian Trade Union Fed-  
eration (ÖGB) in Brussels

**Claude ROLIN**,  
secretary-general of the Belgian  
Confederation of Christian  
Trade Unions (CSC)



**Sorin Cristian STAN**,  
Secretary-General of the Na-  
tional Confederation of Roma-  
nian Free Trade Unions "Frăția"  
(CNSLR - FRĂȚIA); President of  
the Federation of Local Authority  
Trade Unions "Columna"



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AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

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[Communiqué]

invitation etui.

### ETUI Monthly Forum

This month:

### Prosperity without growth?: the transition to a sustainable economy

**Date :** Thursday 29 October 2009,  
11:30 am — 1:30 pm

**Speaker :** Tess Gill, [Sustainable Develop-  
ment Commission](#), United Kingdom

**Moderator :** Philippe Pochet, General  
Director, ETUI

**Venue:** International Trade Union House  
First floor, Room B  
Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 5  
B-1210, Brussels

**Languages:** Presentation will be made in  
English. Questions in English.

**Resources:**

[Report - Prosperity without growth: the  
transition to a sustainable economy](#)

**Briefing:** The "Prosperity Without  
Growth?" report says that the current  
global recession should be the occasion  
to forge a new economic system  
equipped to avoid the shocks and nega-  
tive impacts associated with our reliance  
on growth. The report calls on leaders to  
adopt a twelve-step plan to make the  
transition to a fair, sustainable, low-  
carbon economy.

**Registration :** in order to take part in this  
event, just register by e-mail to Tristan  
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