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Public service unions

### **Forging education partnerships for better cooperation between EPSU affiliates across Europe**

***By Carola Fischbach-Pyttel, General Secretary, European Federation of Public Service Unions***

Building and supporting active education partnerships can be a good mechanism to encourage cooperation amongst affiliated unions around issues of common interest within the enlarged European Union.

Although EPSU, the European Federation of Public Service Unions ([www.epsu.org](http://www.epsu.org)), is the largest ETUC federation representing 8 million workers, our personnel resources are relatively modest with a total of 12 directly employed staff, and we cannot really afford to have an education officer within the context of limited resources. So together with the ETUI-REHS Education Department, EPSU has worked over the last decade to develop a European education strategy.

The question is therefore, how can we put an education policy into action that engages our member organisations?

#### **The EPSU Toolkit**

The EPSU Toolkit [training tool](#) ([www.epsu.org/a/913](http://www.epsu.org/a/913)) has been developed through a joint project with ETUI-REHS Education. It aims to help EPSU affiliates to understand European integration, develop social dialogue and gain more awareness of the role of trade union organisations in defending high-quality public services.

The toolkit consists of two separate parts:

- **Facts about Europe:** 20 information sheets on various aspects of European policy and the EU decision-making process. They can be used to provide members with basic information about public service issues but also as support for training and education.
- **Training activity sheets:** these cover the key issues addressed in the information sheets and are aimed at helping trade union organisations, particularly from the countries joining the EU, to understand European integration.

The EPSU Executive in November 2005 agreed a set of policy points, essentially to define the role of trade union education for EPSU, and EPSU's role in trade union education. Some of these policy points are:

- The toolkit can be instrumental in building EPSU's lobbying, campaigning and mobilising capacity. It can help to build affiliates' identification with EPSU.
- EPSU's role in trade union education is to function as a catalyst, providing the general framework for European trade union training and to kick-start initiatives. Emphasis will be put on 'training the trainers'.
- Affiliates training programmes have to apply Europe-mainstreaming, i.e. systematically integrating European policy issues into national education programmes.

The toolkit is available in many languages, including new Member States' languages, Russian and Turkish. A number of pilot projects have been developed to promote the use of the toolkit, and in particular with a view to developing trade union education partnerships.

### **On the way to European education partnerships**

With the help of ETUI-REHS Education, we had the opportunity to run a pilot seminar in the Ver.di Education Centre in Berlin. Participating unions came from Bulgaria, Romania, the UK and Germany. As well as exploring the issues of minimum wages and minimum standards, the idea of the seminar was to establish concrete plans for joint educational partnerships.

### **Why is this important for EPSU?**

When it comes to education and training, EPSU should provide the general framework, in this case the EPSU Toolkit, and then initiate, broker, organise and accompany education partnerships between interested unions, if possible over an extended period of time. With this mutual-learning approach, we take advantage of the fact that many unions are very interested in engaging in concrete partnerships for cooperation and that these partnerships are ongoing. The challenge for EPSU is to 'bundle' affiliates' interests and in some cases the will and capacity to invest resources under the EPSU umbrella within a multi-annual education programme.

The Berlin seminar was a useful platform for establishing a first set of joint education activities, which will be carried out in cooperation with ETUI-REHS Education. German and Bulgarian representatives agreed to set up a roundtable discussion in Bulgaria in October 2007 on minimum wages. Representatives from Romania, the UK and Ireland are planning to hold a steering group meeting in spring 2007 to develop plans for possible contents, materials, resources and timetables. In each instance, our aim is to promote very practical activities: activities that can at the same time feed into a longer-term EPSU policy perspective.

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