EPSU South East European waste management seminar: 27-28 January – Bucharest

(2 February 2016) Trade Unions from the south east European region face a number of challenges linked to public service privatization in the waste sector. Most of the unions in the sector organize the workforce in public entities or public companies. Even though the total workforce in the waste sector is increasing across Europe, TU membership in the sector might decreased in a near future due to these privatizations. The main purpose of the workshop was therefore to think about recruitment and organizing campaigns in private companies in the waste sector.

The seminar started with a “tour de table” where each participant was asked to present his trade union activities and membership.

The first presentation about the European waste market, including multinational companies, was given by David Hall, PSIRU. The first part of his presentation was the description of the waste management sector in Europe (companies mapping and performances, growing number of employees in the sector but employment of the most vulnerable and poorest, over pay, health and safety issues). Then, he presented the EU context. He explained that the waste industry was mainly created and shaped by EU regulations (Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC) and that these regulations have a major impact in growing the sector. He also presented the new EC circular economy package.

The second part of his presentation was about PPPs efficiency. It is often assumed that privatisation or PPPs will result in greater levels of technical efficiency. That is, the private sector can always deliver a given level of service with less input costs than the public sector. But there is now extensive experience of all forms of privatisation, and researchers have published many studies of the empirical evidence on comparative technical efficiency. The results are remarkably consistent across all sectors and all forms of privatisation and outsourcing: there is no empirical evidence that the private sector is intrinsically more efficient. The same results emerge consistently from sectors and services which are subject to outsourcing, such as waste management, and in sectors privatised by sale, such as telecoms. Following this presentation on PPPs, participants expressed there views

on PPPs and on how they are implemented in their respective countries. The European remunicipalisation trend was also addressed. Representatives from Moldova explained that the company they work for belongs to the municipality but has its own management and that the working relationship with the management are pretty good. Hungarian representatives explained that their government is creating a national holding company to hold the municipal waste management companies - the purpose is apparently to enable surpluses from urban operations to be redistributed to loss-making rural services.

After this interesting background presentation, Eddy Stam and Roger Jenkins, both professional organizers, presented to the participants concrete recruitment campaigns that took place in their respective countries after privatization of public services. They insisted on the importance of recruiting new members to make TU's voice stronger. Eddy Stam referred to a couple of figures presenting the worrying decreasing trend in membership. They drew participants attention on the necessity for TU to recruit new members.

During the afternoon session, Eddy Stam presented campaign methods and tools to recruit new members from scratch. He detailed the several steps to attract new members, from first touch-based contacts (e.g. going to the workplace and ask for phone numbers, to visit workers at their home, identify leaders and winnable fights) to the creation of new well-organised TU units within the companies.

The next day, participants were asked to identify where they have members in the "waste-sorting-recycling-incineration" chain. Most of the participants attending the seminar reported back that they are mainly present in the household waste collection (working for public entity or company). Sorting, recycling, incineration are the most profitable part of the waste chain and very often privatized. The idea was to push participants to organize workers in the parts of the chain where they are not present. Participants expressed reservations to implement such recruiting campaigns because they are not present at all in these private companies.

During the concluding session, all participants agreed with the fact that TUs need to attract potential members working in private companies in order to make unions stronger. Most participants expressed their willingness to go further and will get in touch with their leadership. Representatives from Hungary invited Eddy Stam to come to Hungary and help them to recruit new members.

The meeting took place January 27-28, 2016 in Bucharest, Romania. For EPSU

Marina Irimie, sub-regional Officer for South East Europe and Guillaume Durivaux, policy officer took part. David Hall, PSIRU, Roger Jenkins, GMB UK and Eddy Stam, FNV gave presentations and animated the discussions. About twenty participants from Bulgaria, Hungary, Moldova, Romania and Turkey attended the seminar.

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