

R.A.1. Strengthening European Public Sector Unions

Due to continuing globalisation and the European integration process, major social changes are rapidly taking hold; and these changes have repercussions on the functioning and the future of unions at national level, but ultimately also on EPSU at European level.

The most conspicuous trends that lead to changes are:

1. Increasing complexity and dynamics of society

Larger and larger differences in individual interests and desires lead to the fact that individuals are part of several groups. Groups in society become smaller, more diverse in composition and more dynamic, and are therefore more difficult to recognise and to address. This effect is reinforced by the process of free movement of persons, goods and services within the EU.

2. The interests of individuals and groups become increasingly more important

Solidarity between individuals and groups and the social collective is stronger when there is a link between the personal (group) interest and the collective.

3. Changing demand on the labour market

The development of a European knowledge-based economy leads, among other things, to an increasing demand for highly educated people, the digitalisation of simple administrative tasks and the transfer of work to low-wage countries. Because of this, the position of less educated people is put under ever increasing pressure.

4. The direct consequence of enhanced market forces and privatisation is an increasing flexibilisation of the conditions of employment at the lower end of the labour market.

5. The longer life expectancy and the ageing of society force our society to address future labour market shortages.

6. The ever-advancing digitalisation

The digitalisation of society, E-government for instance, will continue at a rapid pace, which means that work that is currently still shaped by human actions will disappear. Digitalisation also influences the patterns of communication between people. Having no access to the digital world impedes social participation.

7. Increasing importance of sustainability

Due to the diminishing availability of natural sources and to climate change, society attaches greater importance to sustainability.

8. What do these trends mean for the unions and for EPSU?

We have established that each EPSU union is dealing with floundering representativity. Membership numbers are shrinking numerically as well as in various groups and sectors. We have a great responsibility as unions and must be ready to examine ourselves and our trade union work. For union activities to be effective we will have to focus on the GROWTH of the unions, so as to keep in touch with all employees and sectors. If the unions wish to stay in touch with the employees and to stay representative for all groups and sectors, we need to make changes to be more attractive to current and potential members.

Growth, by placing issues on the agenda that really matter to the employees. These central issues must be updated and tested in different ways. There are needs of members we have not traditionally worked with.

Growth, by means of new forms of union activity geared towards the younger generations, specific groups, such as those that do not have a permanent job, and themes.

If we are to recruit more members, what we do as unions and how we work for workers needs to be clear to anyone who wants to join the union.

9. How to act?

To put flesh on this process, the congress asks the EPSU to play a stimulating and motivating part, with the focus on growth! That is why we ask the congress:

-# To let growth (of the EPSU in its entirety and of individual unions separately) be the touchstone of all choices made by the EPSU with regard to policy and advocacy.

-# To use the EPSU as a platform for best practices, new strategies and forms of renewal that lead to growth, meanwhile concentrating on mutual interchange. To flesh out this platform, we request the organisation of a conference about the theme growth, so that the foundation can be laid for the further development of this platform position. Furthermore, the subject “how to go for growth and how to strengthen one another” should be placed on the EPSU agenda.

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