

## **Social dialogue, pay rise campaign, organising discussed in Central European constituency**

(16 February 2017) What does it take to make the union stronger ? Actively addressing workers' issues, reputation and dedication of trade union shopstewards and union leadership and of course more members was the experience of a young workers' representative from the Czech Health and Social Workers Trade Union. He showed how the local union in a hospital had developed a plan to recruit more workers. The union made a detailed overview of workers per unit and per occupation to understand where members are and to be able to address their problems. Speaking with workers, learning about their workplace issues and together addressing these, the union membership increased rapidly. Small steps to a large objective of growing union power to promote and defend the interests of workers, was also the message of a presentation by a colleague from the Childcare union trade union in Hungary. The results were very positive and the union is becoming the voice for childcare workers in Hungary. Another union leader reported similar success, and what was required was a change in leadership thinking, focusing energy and resources on that what makes the union grow. All unions are doing this in complicated conditions in their countries. It was a positive feedback from the different seminars and meetings that had been organized as part of the EPSU training seminars.

The presentations were made to a meeting of the Central Europe constituency. It was opened by former colleague and now General Secretary of the Montenegrin confederation of trade unions, Dusko Zarubica. Welcoming EPSU, he spoke about the challenges for the unions. One of these is the lack of respect from the government for the social dialogue and the results of collective bargaining. Several colleagues were interviewed by national tv explaining why it is crucial for governments and employers to live up to agreements if a country wants to advance and improve conditions for the workers and people. Union leaders reported on the situation in their countries and the struggles of their members to improve pay and conditions.

The EPSU General Secretary spoke about the focus on organising and recruitment

as part of his introduction on the priorities for the work of EPSU in 2017. He addressed the positive results of the hard work of many union activists and unions in very challenging economic and political circumstances in Europe. The joint work has moved the discussions on issues such as trade, climate change and just transition, tax avoidance, whistleblowing as well as collective bargaining with a renewed demand for the need for a pay increase for Europe's public service workers. Ivana Brenkova introduced the work of the PSI Women's Committee and the EPSU gender equality work leading to a discussion on the importance of gender parity in our structures and the importance of promoting women in leadership positions and ensuring an environment that assists this.

He introduced the PSI Programme of Action *People before profits – Our time to lead* proposed for the [PSI Congress 31 October – 3 November](#), Geneva. The programme responds to the main concerns of public service workers globally. It addresses how trade unions can contribute to change, reduce inequalities and bring social justice. With a focus on the future it will give the unions the guidelines and direction for our actions for the next 5 years, when we talk with global institutions, work with NGOs and address governments. The group of unions addressed the constitutional changes proposed such as better representation of young workers and sectors. The time table for amendments was considered. Nominations for the PSI Board were proposed.

The constituency meeting further considered the EPSU financial situation, confirmed the representative for the Finance working group and discussed the requests for affiliation. Unions are encouraged to consider which other unions have membership for whom the work of EPSU/PSI can be relevant. The unions also use the occasion to express their solidarity with [sacked trade union leaders of the Liberian Health Workers Trade Union](#). Our colleagues had been standing up for decent protection for workers and volunteers during the Ebola virus outbreak crisis in 2014. Trade unions will be organising actions in support of the union leaders across the globe on 17 and 18 February.

The meeting took place in Podgorica, Montenegro, 14-15 February 2017. With close to 60 unions present it was one of the largest regional gatherings in EPSU. The regional meeting represents unions from Bosnia-Herzegovina (Federation and Entity of Republic of Srpske), Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia. The meeting was chaired by Boris Plesa, Chair of the constituency and president of the Croatian Trade union for Local and

State administration.

[For reports of the meetings](#) (members only area)

Participants were also informed about the regional trade union cooperation project of the ETUC and the confederations - "Solidarnost". The projects encourages unions to be an active player in their countries preparing for European Union membership. The experience of unions elsewhere has been that some governments use EU-integration to attack workers' and trade unions rights. The role and importance of collective bargaining and including through social dialogue is not valued by some governments. Especially unions from Croatia and Slovenia shared their experience. Organising and strengthening communication and IT skills are part of the actions as well.

More information at: [www.onthewaytoeu.net](http://www.onthewaytoeu.net)

The project was introduced by former EPSU stagiaire Miodrag Pantovic.





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