

EPSU 3rd Trade Union Journalists seminar 27 February 2008, Brussels

BRIEF REPORT

Present:

Amélie JANSSENS	ACV	Belgium
Daniele MELLI	ETUC	Belgium
Véronique VANDENABEELE	CGSP	Belgium
Darina STOEVA	CITUB	Bulgaria
Airi IMMONEN	JHJ	Finland
Vesa TURUNEN	TEHY	Finland
Hermann SCHMID	VERDI	Germany
Silvia CANDIDA	CISL FP	Italy
Natalie VAN DER LINDEN	ABVAKABO	Netherlands
Sang Ah YOO	ABVAKABO	Netherlands
Jacek CIACMA	FSAP CCOO	Spain
Manuel TAPIA	FSAP CCOO	Spain

EPSU Secretariat:

Carola FISCHBACH-PYTTEL	EPSU
Penny Clarke	EPSU
Tamara Goosens	EPSU
Nadja SALSON	EPSU

Speakers

Bernadette VERGNAUD	MEP
Thomas LJUNQVIST	DG justice, freedom and security

Apologies :

Ronald PÖTZL	GDG	Austria
Bernard HARBOR	IMPACT	Ireland

1) Introduction

This was the third journalists' seminar organised by EPSU. The aim of the seminars is to support affiliates in their understanding of key EU issues and to help them "get the message" across to individual members. As in previous occasions the seminar is linked to a particular EU event (this time the EPSU day of action on the overcrowding of prisons). Meeting documents and presentations referred to can be found www.epsu.org/a/3439.

The EPSU journalists' network also serves as a platform for affiliates to exchange information on their own communication strategies; and there is interest to develop this aspect further (see below).

There were 12 participants at the seminar from 7 countries. This is a rather modest number given the current interest of unions in internal and external communication issues.

2) Main points of discussion

EU healthcare developments

Tamara Goosens presented recent initiatives by the European Commission to apply internal market rules to healthcare (see attached ppt). The latest initiative concerns a proposed directive¹ for EPSU; however, this does not address the real problems that arise from the inequalities in healthcare, both within and between countries. Indeed, such an approach makes inequalities worse as it undermines the collective responsibility to ensure a good level of health for all. Bernadette Vergnaud, MEP echoed this point and said that Member States must not be allowed to "opt-out" of developing universal and solidarity-based healthcare systems. She said a EU legal framework on healthcare is needed to give direction to Member States and support them in developing high quality healthcare systems based on universality and equal access.

Questions in the discussion that followed focused on:

- ✓ The growing role of private healthcare providers
- ✓ Difficulties of national systems to provide good quality care
- ✓ Funding issues

EPSU prison day of action

Nadia Salson introduced the background to the day of action www.epsu.org/a/3626 and how it fitted into EPSU's action plan on prisons. The key objective for EPSU is to raise awareness of the problems caused by overcrowding, both for staff and for prisoners. She was joined in discussion by Thomas Ljungqvist, unit of criminal justice, DG Justice, Freedom and Security. He said that overcrowding in many Member States² is also a concern for the Commission. There is limited EU competence in this area but the EC are addressing certain aspects of prison rules. The EC wants to develop minimum standards on pre-trial detention and is currently carrying out a study on this. The objective is to at least allow pre-trial prisoners to go back to his/her country of origin and develop alternatives to imprisonment. There are thousands of EU prisoners waiting for trial in a country other than their own.

Points raised in discussion included:

- ✓ The link the quality of legal services, rehabilitation services, probation services etc
- ✓ The link with other services (education, mental health)
- ✓ Questions regarding trade union rights

¹ We have since heard that this directive is likely not now to be published by the Commission in the near future at least (following the protest of EPSU and many others regarding the content).

² Though the highest prison population is in the US – 751 prisoners per 100,000 people.

3) Developments in trade union communication strategies

Daniele Melli presented the ETUC press strategy and website. He stressed the value of the ETUC newsletter and the range of “packaged” information on the ETUC website on key issues in getting the ETUC’s message across. The ETUC newsletter now includes the actions of ETUC affiliates, including the federations. The ETUC is investing in building up a network of medial contacts, including in the popular press. The ETUC has established contacts in the communications departments of most of the national confederations and federations.

Daniele also presented the background to the ETUC demonstration on 5 April (see ppt) in Slovenia on fair wages.

Hermann Schmid presented the Ver.di “Strike TV” <http://www.streik.tv/> a new initiative linked to the current bargaining process and which provides information on key union issues and actions. The Strike TV, which is run by professional experts, represents a considerable investment by Ver.di to build support amongst members and the public for its bargaining demands.

Discussion points around these presentations included:

- ✓ Questions regarding the value of “communities,” forums, blogs: here the conclusion was that they can be useful if they target a specific group of people (e.g. AbvaKabo childcare workers interactive website), or focus on specific topics (but here experts need to be available to support). Ver.di is experimenting with a members' net.
- ✓ Questions of access to union websites (i.e. by members and/or delegates, public, reserved sections).
- ✓ The growing importance of electronic media for members and the public compared to printed journals etc. Here however it was stressed that there is space for both if right content (i.e. organising the relationship between factual / in-depth stories)
- ✓ Attracting new / young members through changes in communication traditions (e.g. by using the informal “du” in the Ver.di Strike TV).

Discussion also touched on the difficulties unions have in their external communication with the media and problems of union “invisibility” in the press, especially when reporting on positive stories or on public service issues.

In terms of covering EU stories, there is a general difficulty in making the link with EU (and indeed non-national issues). Political direction makes a big difference here, as does the way that unions are structured (e.g., emphasize give to sectors and the cooperation with colleagues responsible for EU /international issues).

4) EPSU Congress and next steps

We did not have time to discuss the EPSU Congress in any detail, but see attached ppt presentation on main themes and timetable.

EPSU intends to organise further meetings of the journalists’ network to coincide with the run-up to Congress. These meetings will include a training element on the use of ICT. More details on this will follow. There is also an “added-value” for affiliates to exchange information further on their communication strategies.