



‘Contribution of Union Organisations to the Evaluation of the Actions Conducted and their Impact in Terms of the European Employment Strategy’¹

Second report on the contribution of trade union organisation in:

- Slovak Republic
- Czech republic
- United Kingdom
- France
- Portugal
- Cyprus
- Malta
- Greece

Céline Lafoucriere
Independent Researcher
celinelafoucriere@yahoo.com

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Introduction

The Extraordinary Luxembourg Job Summit represents a major milestone in the history of social Europe. Derived from the latter, and launched in 1997, the European Employment Strategy (EES) inscribes itself within a European process of global reform of labour, product and capital markets as well as macro-economic coordination. Within this global reform process, today led by the Lisbon Strategy, the EES focuses on reforming European labour markets and tackling European-wide employment issues which had so far been unresolved by individual national attempts. With a view to develop the European Social Model (ESM) further the EES focuses on rebalancing regulation modes within the European Union (EU). In the late eighties and early nineties heavy government regulation proved to be inefficient in reaching viable levels of flexibility and competitiveness in the EU. Experiencing a complete revolution the changing world of labour was also in real need of customised solutions. In order to address these issues the EES, via its different guidelines, aims at redistributing regulatory roles to the different partners at different levels. For this purpose the social partners are given a key role in the dissemination, application and monitoring processes of the EES. On the eve of the mid-term review the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) initiated a project aimed at evaluating the contribution of union organisations to the evaluation of the actions conducted at national level and of their impact in terms of the EES. For this purpose a survey was elaborated and sent to the different national union organisations of the EU. The information gathered was then disseminated during the course of three decentralised seminars. This report presents the findings of the second seminar, organised in Malta, to which union representatives of the Czech Republic, Cyprus, France, Greece, Malta, Portugal, the Slovak Republic and the United Kingdom were invited. Following the structure of the initial questionnaire this report will highlight national union opinions on recent reforms of the EES in a first section, whilst the second section will be devoted to union's actions on the elaboration of National Action plans (NAPs). The third and fourth sections will concentrate on evaluating unions' actions and initiatives and the development of social dialogue in the context of the EES. A final part will render account of the different recommendations suggested by the unions for the next reform process of the EES.

1- On the reformed European Employment Strategy

The first section of the questionnaire concentrates on evaluating unions' opinions and involvement in defining and following up the EES. First of all it is highly positive to note that all the countries concerned tend to support the reformed version of the EES and its ten new guidelines. As will be the case throughout this report it is crucial to note, however, that this study has highlighted two general trends of support for the EES, across the EU. Notwithstanding specific exceptions we find a first trend in the new member states of the EU, which tend to support the EES with a view to further develop their national social dialogue structures and processes, whilst a second one is found in the initial fifteen member states.

The traditionally low impact of social dialogue in countries such as the Czech and the Slovak Republics has led these countries to welcome the EES. Although the ten guidelines of the EES can not be said to be in complete cohesion with the needs of these new developing market economies, regulatory issues seem to have superseded those of content and have found fervent supporters amongst unions representatives. It is also interesting to see that this support is further reinforced in new members such as Malta and Cyprus, which already bear strong traditions of social dialogue.

In the second trend, which regroups older member states, opinions tend to be a lot more critical towards the definition and following up processes of the EES. All countries agree on the lack of social partners' involvement in the definition and following up of the EES. In France the situation on these issues seem to be rather worrying. Two main French unions declare not to be involved at all in these processes. Although the EES seemed to have created a regain of tripartite activity in France this situation has worsened in the last two years. The French unions note a diminution of tripartite discussions in the field of the EES as well as great difficulty to reactivate bipartite activities. As a result of this the situation seems to rather negative. Social partners state not to be consulted on activities concerning the EES which leads to a total absence of the former in the monitoring process of the latter. The French representatives further explained that unions' actions reflected in the NAP are the sole reflection of what takes place at bipartite level, but in no case are they the sign of tripartite discussions on the EES. In other words the French NAP tend to reflect a rather skewed reality of social partners' involvement in defining and monitoring the EES at national level. In general it is crucial to highlight that in both trends studied here all countries call for intensified involvement of social partners in the definition and monitoring process of the EES. The lack of willingness from the employers' associations to participate in those actions is strongly highlighted by both the UK and France. A number of member states

welcome the reaffirmation of the role of social partners by the reformed version of the EES, however, they call for this participation to be further insured. Although the new guidelines have helped clarify the role of social partners they have not helped strengthening social dialogue at national level. Most countries call for a more effective way of ensuring that this situation finally occurs.

According to these initial results trade unions seems to have difficulties in assuming their position within the EES, and more specifically within the employment multi-level system. Most tend to agree on declaring that they are not satisfied with their national employment policies and the place given to the social partners at national level. The reformed EES therefore leads to a paradoxical effect whereby on the one hand it is welcomed by most unions in the hope that it might reinforce their role although on the other hand, and by creating a multi-level employment system, the EES seems to lead to a further dilution of their actions. Although the EES and its monitoring process have enabled greater transparency and information, for social partners, on national employment policy content it has also established a multi-level system in which responsibilities are further obscured. Unions therefore call for the issues of 'responsibility' to be better clarified in the guidelines. It is however crucial to note that national unions do not seem to have developed the possibilities to reflect positively on their role and responsibility towards this new multi-level system. No imaginative actions can, unfortunately, be noted at this stage in terms of national unions' appropriation of the EES.

More concretely however most national unions agree on stating that the reformed EES has created greater coherence within national employment policies. This is described differently in different member states:

Greater coherence of national employment policies

The new member states clearly identify a positive aspect in the fact that more importance has been given to **active employment policies** and better attention has been devoted to **vulnerable groups**, such as young workers, women, long-term unemployed and older workers. This has been particularly the case in the Czech and Slovak Republics.

Further to this **Malta** and **France** highlight the fact that the writing up exercise of the NAP has indeed helped develop a holistic national view of national employment policies and has led to the creation of national targets.

Cyprus reveals that a research study will be set up in 2005, by the social partners, in order to analyse possibilities for further flexibility of the market. The results of this study should enable social partners to engage in constructive dialogue with a view to elaborate a 'pilot implementation' of the proposed changes. If successful, this pilot will lead to a greater reform of national legislation.

2- National Action Plans –Strategic tools or mirrors of national policies?

When asking questions on the usefulness and suitability of the NAPs the questionnaire once again reveals the presence of two different trends across the EU.

Most old member states can be found in the first trend whereby NAPs are not considered to be strategic tools to advance national employment policies but rather as a translation tool of national policies into European employment guidelines. In the case of France and the UK we observe that the unions consider the NAP as a ‘fit’ between national policies and the guidelines. Two main reasons emerge: In the case of France union representatives highlight the fact that times and places in which national policies are decided do not correspond to those of the NAP. In the case of the UK unions representatives are quite clear on stating that the EES has a very low profile at national level, and therefore a quasi non existent impact. Furthermore unions also highlight the fact that national parliaments are often not informed on the content of the NAP. This exercise seems to be confined to certain technical branches of employment ministries. This crucially underlines that a holistic vision englobing national employment policies and the EES has not yet been developed. National governments, in the old member states, do not seem to display any willingness to develop such a strategy and tend to remain highly sovereign on strategic directions to take in the field of employment.

In the second trend, however, the situation shows quite a different picture. In the new member states governments seem to have used the ten guidelines of the EES to build their own, so far inexistent, employment policies. Although this must be noted as a positive step forward for those developing market economies the Maltese unions, however, show quite an important downfall in this strategy. Although the EES has helped to construct a more coherent and holistic national employment strategy the unions state that the EES seems to have become an end in itself, rather than a guiding process inscribed within a global national philosophy. As a result certain guidelines having been applied in they raw state have helped shifting certain unemployment paradigms. As a result of the activation guidelines the unions state that unemployment issues have been given a lower profile than before. Activation guidelines have brought about an ideological shift by which re-employment becomes the sole responsibility of the individual rather than a shared one between government and individuals. Although this criticism had already been made elsewhere, concerning the guidelines at large, it appears that this phenomena is now spreading to the new member states. As a result union representatives worry that the guidelines may give wider legitimacy to governments and employers’ associations to lead towards more liberal policies.

In general there however seem to be a consensus between the unions of all member states that not enough union actions have been elaborated to counteract these trends. The UK goes beyond this by stating that the region strongly lacks any social partnership strategy.

The main criticism highlighted by all, and further strengthened by the Portuguese respondents, is a wide lack of formal link between employment policy and economic restructuring, and therefore social partners and government common actions. The UK comforts this view by pointing at the quasi inexistent national support for job creation through active industrial policy. Change in this field seems to be given a rather low profile in most member states.

Although a social cohesion law has recently been voted in France, the unions do not detect any real strategy aimed at combining economic policies and investments together with employment policies developing competences and social guarantees. There has been no discussions between social partners and government over a possible labour market structural policy combined with a job creation strategy.

As far as implementation of the existing measures are concerned there seem to exist an even more worrying factor. Implementation of existing directives is often poor and sometimes inexistent. Although there are many reasons for this the question of 'means' tends to be recurrent in all the countries studied.

Worrying low levels of implementation

Although union representatives from new member states, such as the **Czech and Slovak Republics**, explain that it is too early to give a formal evaluation of their NAP, they both agree on stating that the permanent **lack of financial means** devoted to active employment policies, by their government budget, remains an undeniable obstacle to the implementation process.

Cyprus and Malta also insist on the poor financial means which results in a lack of staff in the Ministry of Labour. The equally small number of official labour inspectors prevent good **implementation and monitoring** processes.

2.1 Unions involvement in designing the NAPs

The issue of responsibility is one that often comes back when debating on the EES. Following the different decentralised seminars, organised for the purpose of this study, it appears that a strong confusion still revolves around these issues. Although national governments all agree on retaining full sovereignty in the field of employment, trade unions tend to expect a lot more form

the EES. It is important to remind all actors that the EES solely produces advisory guidelines which may be used, at national level, and give general strategic directions. The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) gives full responsibility, for the EES, to the national level. The EES represents an added value to existing national employment policies. It is crucial to understand that it, by no means, aims at replacing the latter. The responsibility for the EES therefore remains very strongly based at the national level, and more precisely at the social partners level. Considering that national governments fully express themselves in defining the EES, within the Council, it is the role of the social partners to follow up, implement and monitor the EES at national, sector and plant level. A lack of actions from the social partners logically incurs a lack of general advancement of employment policies at large. Alongside this we can also note that in countries where trade unions are less critical of national employment policies that the EES tends to have less impact. Trade unions, therefore, are called upon to play a lot more proactive role and thereby enable the EES to have a national impact. Responsibility should therefore be recognised as lying at all levels, within national member states. However this does not seem to be the case in most of the countries studied. French union representatives recognise that their involvement in preparing the NAP is inexistent. They highlight two main reasons for this: First of all it is crucial to understand that social partners are traditionally not consulted on issues of national employment policies. As we explained before, and since the NAP represents a translation/fit of national policies into the guidelines, social partners are therefore not consulted on the NAP either. The only discussions concerning preparations on the NAP between social partners and government take place during official conferences which do not ease informal talks on the matter.

The second reason underlined by the French unions for a lack of consultation on the NAPs is somewhat more problematic. Unions state that government uses unions' declarations, made during the course of collective bargaining exercises on specific issues, and fits them into the different guidelines as social partners' opinions. Although this does indeed give an overview of what is happening at national level, between the social partners, on specific issues of employment it does not however reflect the social partners' formal opinion on the NAP itself. This clearly indicates that some national unions, and social partners at large, do not participate in drawing up the NAP at all. In these particular cases we can wonder whether social partners are involved at all in the whole EES process.

In other cases the situation seem to be only marginally better. Some countries, such as Portugal, the UK or the Czech Republic note that they are indeed involved in their own national tripartite body which is in charge of putting proposals forward with a view to prepare the NAPs. Most

however express their doubts as to whether these opinions are truly taken into consideration when drafting the final version of the NAP.

Furthermore it is also interesting to see that in members where specific forums have been created to allow discussions, on national as well as European affairs, social partners do not always seem to be satisfied with the outcome. This is the case in Malta where trade unions express their dissatisfaction towards the Malta Council for Economic and Social Dialogue (MCESD). Although they underline the importance of such a forum to express and exchange ideas between social partners, their criticism lie on the rather weak links between this Council and official government ministries which do not allow for effective transfer of opinions.

In the case of Cyprus this tends to be rather different.

Good social partners participation in the NAP

Cyprus explains that a specific **tripartite body** has been established to ease discussions on European issues, and therefore on elaborating the NAP. Social partners are consulted, within this body, on the first and final drafts. Unions representatives explain that the Final version of the NAP fully **reflects** discussions and exchanges of ideas between the social partners.

It is crucial to highlight that union representatives declare that the **implementation** of the NAP is left to the **social partners** in Cyprus. It is considered to be their **responsibility**. This represents a highly isolated case so far within the EU.

Social partners in Cyprus are also further involved in the process by participating to regular meetings organised within the framework of the **National Employment Committee**. This produces a further opportunity for them to **assess** and **monitor** the process at large.

Aside from the Cypriot case it is unfortunate to see that no other union representatives seem to be satisfied with their involvement in the implementation phase.

2.2 Recommendations – Utopia or concrete reality?

The issue of recommendations is one which often remains uncertain. The regulatory nature of the EES does not allow for a formal evaluation of the application of recommendations to be made. The OMC, established with a view to further enhance European coordination of employment policies, leaves complete sovereignty of decisions to the national levels. European institutions, therefore, have very little power to monitor and sanction the application, or not, of their recommendations to member states. Once again the guidelines give a pivotal role to the social partners, in this field, as the only actors in a position to monitor this process. However the respondents included in this report tend to give a rather pessimistic picture of national follow up on recommendations. Quite understandably the new member states will not be included in this part of the analysis. Time has not yet allowed for them to reach the recommendations stage.

In older member states, however, the general trend seems to be one of disinterest. In the case of France union representatives explain that recommendations only find an echo if they are inscribed in an already existing national employment strategy. If this is not the case recommendations tend to remain silent and do not give way to any further discussions among social partners or in tripartite forums. The low key approach adopted by the UK towards the EES leaves the recommendations rather unheard. Respondents explain that the fact that the UK already complies with the Lisbon targets seems to give government a rather contented approach to the recommendations.

Recommendations

In the case of **Portugal** respondents identify increasing efforts, from government and social partners, to take recommendations into consideration:

In the last few years the Portuguese government has shown a will to **identify** and **document** national employment needs, in accordance with **recommendations**. Yearly **reports** have been drafted and further **targets** have also been established to respond to the recommendations' demands.

Further to this union representatives explain that talks are taking place at the moment and **discussions** might open in the course of 2005 on the subject of **recommendations**, between the different **actors**.

In general, however, the national approach to recommendations tends to remain rather low key and difficult to evaluate. Few member states have established specific spaces to discuss these recommendations and transparency on the subject remains difficult.

3- On union actions and initiatives

This part of the questionnaire focuses on evaluating national trade unions' actions with regards to the EES. On the eve of the mid-term review it is crucially important for the ETUC, which represents unions at the European level, to be able to identify whether national trade unions support the EES at national level by taking their own initiatives. As regards to what has been developed above concerning the regulatory mode of the EES, and therefore the OMC, this process is crucially important to the advancement and further development of the ESM. The EES dynamism lies in the hands of national actors. It is vital therefore that national social partners should be able to provide their own feedback. This role should indeed be considered as one the main social partners' responsibility, within the realm of the EES, to permit further enhancement of social dialogue at European level. It is a key point to make the EES more dynamic and avoid a potential *status quo*.

For this purpose it is important to insist on the need for autonomous bipartite dialogue to take place at national level. The political involvement of certain national union organisations prevents them from issuing their individual opinions on the EES and therefore does not allow for this feedback process, from the national level to the European level, to take place efficiently. To this effect the third part of the questionnaire aims at evaluating what should be established in order to ensure that the EES reinforces social dialogue and trade unions' actions at national and European level. In the light of the responses a consensus emerges on the fact that the Lisbon strategy seems to have indeed intensified or stimulated unions' actions at national level.

Stimulated social dialogue

The case of **France** is an interesting one. Respondents explain that social dialogue in France has indeed been **stimulated** by European activities. However they state that this stimulation is more the result of the **Lisbon strategy at large and the Employment Title (V) of the Maastricht Treaty** than of the EES *per se*.

The agreement of all member states on the fact that employment issues should become a 'matter of common concern', as transcribed in the Treaty, has indeed led to a **consensus** on the need for an **increased role of social partners**. Social partners, therefore, are said to have experienced **greater recognition** as a result of general European activities. Although no further influence is observed in the context of the EES

The French case is however not an isolated one. Portuguese respondents also seem to observe certain progress made in the field of social partners recognition. In their case the EES seems to be more efficient in the sense that it gives more weight to employment and training issues. This phenomena seems to have helped social dialogue play a greater role. In this case the EES is envisaged as providing an essential tool for union demands. It has been particularly useful in developing a concrete link between national and regional employment policy in Portugal.

To reinforce the existence of two different trends amongst member states, the new comers all observe that the EES has had a legitimising role for the social partners at national level.

Legitimisation of social dialogue

The **Czech** and **Slovak** respondents explain that the EES has helped **supporting unions objectives** at national level. As a result of this social partners have been able to use specific guidelines to **justify their existing demands**.

In **Cyprus** respondents agree on stating that the EES has had a highly **supportive** role on **unions actions**. In this case it has helped to **reinforce** tripartite dialogue and has stimulated work on common standards and approaches. It is regrettable however to note that the EES has so far had no detectable effect on encouraging the development of autonomous bipartite social dialogue.

In **Malta** the country's recent participation to the EES has revived the old national debate on the creation of a **unified trade union confederation**. Malta's trade unions have long been divided in a bipolar way. The General Workers' Union (GWU) and the Confederation of Malta Trade Unions (CMTU) represent the two main trade union confederations on the island. Although political divergences were originally at the heart of this division this situation has evolved greatly in the last decade.

Participation to the EES can be said to have enabled **renewed discussions** between the two confederations. A major **roundtable** was organised at the end of 2004, between the different confederations, to discuss the possibility of elaborating a **national social pact**. Although these discussions did not lead to a concrete agreement they should certainly be celebrated as the first step towards **increased coherence** between trade union organisations.

John Monks' visit to Malta in June 2004 has recently triggered thoughts, among the unions, of the possible creation of a **general trade union confederation** regrouping all national unions. Although only at an embryonic stage this process is said to be the result of participation to the EES.

3.1- Promotion of the European social partners' work programme: some national examples

Amongst the different initiatives used to describe unions actions taken to promote directives included in the European social partner's work programme, some are worth highlighting:

France

In France it is interesting to note that trade unions have been actively involved in the 2004 negotiations concerning lifelong learning and gender equality.

Both these negotiations have had positive outcomes. Their concrete realisation is currently being established.

During the course of the second negotiation process on gender equality trade unions managed to obtain that an annex should be added, to the collective agreement, clearly stating European quantitative objectives.

Within the dynamic of European discussions, between the UNICE and the ETUC, French unions have been actively involved in negotiations relating to issues of labour market reforms, by:

- promoting an employment logic
- defending management of employment planning
- proposing an individual right to training for redundant workers
- asserting that social dialogue should prime over rigid government procedures

Although this negotiation was not concluded positively some of these suggestions have been included in the new legislation, voted on 20 December 2004. These elements are:

- the need for an anticipated management of redundancies
- the need for an increased social dialogue on the issues
- the individual right to training for redundant workers

The right to individual training for redundant workers is mainly aimed at the situation of SMEs' workers. This right to training finally gives them the same rights and benefits than those of larger companies. The content and implementation of this right should be left to social partners and collective bargaining.

Portugal

During the course of 2003 and 2004 one of the main Portuguese union confederation, the Uniao Geral de Trabalhadores (UGT), took the initiative to design and establish a 'model contract' for collective bargaining activities.

The objective of this 'model contract' is to prepare trade unionists to the new collective bargaining legal context and the new labour code, introduced in the legislation in December 2003.

Along with this, the new 'model contract' also introduces innovative employment clauses enabling trade unionists to respond to different challenges such as:

- attaining the right balance between flexibility and security
- enhancing the quality of jobs
- promoting gender equality at work
- promoting work for disabled people
- promoting lifelong learning
- promoting active ageing

The 'model contract' thereby establishes a framework, based on the European social partners' work programme, for negotiators to work with.

Further to this all Portuguese social partners have also reached a bilateral agreement aimed at making collective bargaining more dynamic in Portugal.

Cyprus

The Cyprus Human Resources Development Authority (CHRDA) has recently undertaken a wide study of the national labour market.

The aim of this study is to evaluate potential flexibility of the market and further creation of jobs.

The CHRDA being a tripartite institutions all actors are involved in this research work. As explained above social partners will have a strong role to play in elaborating a 'pilot implementation' of the proposed changes. Following the results of this pilot social partners will be involved in the corresponding legislation reform.

Further to this the promotion of Turkish Cypriots' employment in the free areas of the republic has been a major concern of the trade unions. A joint attempt is underway, between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot trade unions, in order to promote the rights and interests of Turkish Cypriot workers.

4- On social dialogue

The last part of the questionnaire aims at evaluating the impact of the reformed EES on strengthening social dialogue at national level. Guidelines are quite clear on the reinforced role expected of the social partners. As mentioned before dynamism of the EES relies of dynamism of national actors, and mainly social partners. It is crucial therefore to evaluate what is needed in order for the message contained in the EES, and aimed at the local actors, to be clearer and have more impact.

In the case of France, however, very little progress can be noted. Although respondents agree on stating that the new Maastricht rules, included in title V, have indeed helped recognition of social dialogue and stimulated social partners activities, this has not change the face of social dialogue in France. Although all actors are said to be conscious of their importance and role, little concrete actions have been taken, by the government for instance, to enhance involvement of social

partners in national employment policies. Although unions' actions seem to be coherent with the European social partners' work programme little is done to enhance their actions for what is traditionally expected from them.

The situation of social dialogue in France can be described as being quite different from this of many other member states. Although trade union membership density remains low (7% in 2004) unions remain rather active. Although politically engaged they more often than not remain divided. Cohesion amongst union organisations is crucial element for the futur progress of the EES. Unions, therefore, need to develop coherent strategies in order to be able to speak in one voice and have more weight on the decision making powers.

A similar phenomena is also observed in Portugal and the UK where the EES is said to have had a rather marginal impact on developing social dialogue further, if none at all.

In the new member states, once again, the trend tends to differ and the EES is said to have had great effect on the start of a social dialogue recognition. This is mainly the case in two of the countries with the poorest record of social dialogue: the Czech and Slovak Republics. In both these countries the EES has been highly welcomed by trade unions and is expected to give new inspiration and stimulate the collective bargaining process.

In the case of Cyprus it is interesting to see that the EES has been welcomed by most actors. The reasons for this being that it seems to have helped redefined the boundaries of social dialogue. Respondents explain that the EES has been very useful in understanding social dialogue in a nationally common accepted framework. In the country like Cyprus, however, which bears a long tradition of well-functioning tripartite social dialogue the message seems to remain weak on the need to develop autonomous social dialogue. The latter being practically inexistent tripartite actions remain the main channel. This poses the obvious problems of unions political engagement and real autonomy.

In the case of Malta we have already mentioned that the EES has given renewed impetus to dialogue between union confederations. It will be interesting to see how this develops in the future and whether Maltese trade unions finally manage to organise themselves under one single umbrella organisation.

Recommendations and concluding remarks

In the light of the above findings it is undeniable that a confusion still surrounds the EES. In order to clarify this it seems crucial that European trade unions should be clearer in their message to national unions. It is important that national unions should understand the EES as an added value to the national employment policies and certainly not as a replacement of these. The ten guidelines of the new reformed strategy do not cover all the aspects of employment policy. Whether this is right is beyond the scope of this report, however, it remains crucial to highlight that these guidelines should be considered as additional measures and tools to advance national policies. Although the EES cannot represent the same advantages for all member states it certainly brings an added value to all. The identification of this added value by different levels and actors seems to remain problematic.

Although some of our respondents call for the OMC to be more engaging it must be understood that the EES does not present an obligatory character, and probably never will. The nature of the OMC leaves the responsibility for the EES to the national levels.

Within this context it is crucial therefore that social partners should find their place and role in this multi-level employment system and assume their responsibilities. The issue of responsibility is a crucial one for the creation of a dynamic EES. For this purpose therefore each level of competences should be made clearer and more transparent and unions' actions more dynamic.

So far it is unfortunate to see that we witness a rather poor organisation of the trade union movement around the EES. Although the strategy gives a historical chance to the trade union movement to ascertain its role and value no real imaginative union actions can be detected so far. Unions need to understand the NAPs as being an efficient and effective tool to create greater transparency and coherence within national employment policies. NAPs should be better utilised by union actors to reflect national conflicts at European level. Dynamism of the EES is strongly dependent of the social partners' full understanding of the NAPs.

Rather understandably, however, the above shows that it is in countries where social partners are given less importance that the EES has less impact. In cases where social partners are not traditionally consulted on national employment policies it is not difficult to understand that they have not been consulted either on strategic directions of the EES. The writing up exercise of the NAP, however, gives a crucial opportunity to highlight these problems. Unions should therefore be allowed to provide their own contributions to the NAP.

Guidelines should also be made clearer on the need to further develop bipartite autonomous social dialogue but also on the need to maintain a healthy level of tripartite negotiation. It is

crucial that unions should be involved at all levels to develop a holistic vision of the multi-level of employment system.

The relative failure of the EES so far can be attributed to two main factors:

-On the one hand, and as explained above the EES remains a compromise between the member states and the European Commission. The adoption of the OMC aimed at retaining full responsibility for employment policy at national level. Considering this, therefore, it is fairly logical to note that if national employment policies and social partners' actions remain weak at national level the EES will also tend to remain weak. The EES has shown to be a simple reflection of the national situations. It is therefore crucial that social partners should grab this opportunity to organise themselves further and utilise the EES' tools to monitor and evaluate national employment policies efficiently, as well as develop their own. It is only in this way that they will manage to have a bottom up influence on the process as a whole.

- On the other hand, and eight years into the EES, it is rather worrying to see that employment is still not understood as a socio-economic issue, both at national and European levels. Most of our respondents explain that no real strategies have yet been developed to combine effective economic and employment policies. The EES could therefore be made a little more offensive in this field and be given the means to counteract the present superiority of financial policies in the EU. In this sense it becomes crucial that trade unions should organise better around the multi-level system and allow for their national feedback to be circulated at all levels. National unions' feedback is the only existing instrument today to continue dynamising the EES. This instrument is, however, rather badly used.

The union movement is in dire need of more proactive and imaginative actions. A greater cooperation is wished for amongst social partners. The issue of political involvement of unions is also crucial. The quality and autonomy of unions' feedback very strongly depends on their own national political autonomy. Social partners should reinforce themselves to reinforce social dialogue, which remains the main vector for a successful EES.