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## Western Balkans Project

### Evaluation Seminar and Practice of Social Dialogue

**Podgorica (Montenegro), 25-26.02.2016**  
Hotel Nikić, bb Kralja Nikole, Podgorica, 81000 Montenegro

#### *Short Report*



The Western Balkans evaluation seminar took place on 25-26 February in Podgorica, Montenegro, and was attended by 48 participants from 11 countries (Montenegro, Austria, Lithuania, Macedonia, Albania, Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, Switzerland, Croatia, Belgium and Hungary).

In their greeting speeches, Bert van Caelenberg, Secretary General of Eurofedop, and Srdja Kekovic, Secretary General of the Independent Trade Union Federation of Montenegro, referred to the importance of making the points of view expressed during this seminar known to the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Speaker Pierre Jean Coulon, President of the Section TEN (Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and Information Society) of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) deplored the lack of

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interest shown by public authorities in what trade unions do and stand for and underlined the importance of the *acquis communautaire*, which sums up the rules which candidate countries have to fulfil to become members of the European Union. Chapter 2 and chapter 19 of that *acquis* are related to respectively the freedom of movement of workers and social policy and employment.

Imre Szilárd Szabó, Head of the Secretariat of the National Federation of Workers' Councils (Hungary), held a speech about the trade union situation in the region of Eastern Europe. Trade union membership is not only decreasing there, but trade union pluralism, which was a driving force for trade unions in the past, now often stands in the way of trade union successes, especially in countries with a strong central government. Labour conditions are changing with more atypical forms of employment and labour codes being rewritten, not for the benefit but to the disadvantage of workers. The speaker made a call for returning to the roots of the trade union movement and underlined that the digital revolution offers many opportunities in this respect.

An important part of the seminar was dedicated to the discussion in three different workshops, each based on one question: how can trade unions set up effective activities at the workplace, how can they achieve results through social dialogue and how can they get the official recognition from their national government.

René Fürst from the Swiss trade union Transfair held a speech about best trade union practices. The human aspect of trade union work is important, as well as the enthusiasm, self-confidence and perseverance of trade union activists, in order to make social dialogue a success.

The workshop discussions led to the following main conclusions:

Social dialogue cannot be legally enforced. Trade unions should fight for the practice of social dialogue. Governments of the region examined during the seminar do not always take trade unions seriously. Real negotiations (for example on wages) are hindered by the participation of churches, NGOs, and others in negotiations.

Trade unions have to follow closely the developments with regard to social dialogue in their home country. Trade union pluralism is good, but there is a danger in having too many trade unions. Trade unions have to go on looking for their identity.

The seminar was concluded by the President of Eurofedop, Fritz Neugebauer, who thanked the participants for their constructive cooperation during his closing speech.

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**European Commission**



**European Centre for Workers' Questions**