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content

- **Heesen: Do not economise public services to death** 3
(01.11.2011)
- **EFSF leverage: concern for employee rights** 4
(02.11.2011)
- **G20: Müllers welcomes the clear commitment to social dialogue** 5
(08.11.2011)
- **Social Cohesion: Fernández Veiguela demands stronger solidarity in Europe** 6
(10.11.2011)
- **Now it is time for the financial transaction tax** 7
(14.11.2011)
- **Strategic Priorities 2012: Fehér requires increased participation** 8
(16.11.2011)
- **Annual Programme 2012: Transnational Co-operation and Public Services** 9
(22.11.2011)
- **Stöhr: Building a more social Europe through a fairer EU budget** 10
(28.11.2011)
- **Heesen: “Present day Hungary is no longer a constitutional democracy”** 11
(01.12.2011)
- **FEMM: Televised stereotypes affect female labour market access** 12
(07.12.2011)
- **SOC: Dauderstädt on the annual review on Employment and Social Developments** 13
(20.12.2011)



Heesen: Do not economise public services to death

“Even now, we already have serious personnel shortages in many administrative areas,” CESI President Peter Heesen said on 1st November in Berlin. Heesen regards the personnel trend in broad areas of public services with concern. “This applies for virtually all EU member states.” The heavily indebted states are particularly hard hit, having been forced by the EU Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund to implement harsh austerity programmes.

“Naturally, in states such as Greece, the economy needs to perform better and, above all, savings have to be made. However, we will not solve the historical debt problem by saving ourselves into a depression and destroying public services,” Heesen says. Europe’s public services are inextricably linked with the European social model. Above all, we must not lose sight of the income side of states. “In countries such as Greece, there is obviously still a great deal of room for improvement. One element of the truth is that, if you want to dismantle debt, you need a tax administration, for example, that works,” the CESI President says.

Heesen is concerned about the long-term consequences of the austerity measures in public services. In the debt crisis, another crisis looming on the horizon disappears from view. “In many European countries, demographic change is starting to fully take hold. We have an acute problem with personnel recruitment,” the CESI President says. “Public services are competing with the economy for the best brains. The attractiveness of employment in the civil service already plays a big role here.” Governments are well advised to take into account the effects of the ageing of European society in their budgets and savings proposals. Above all, Heesen points out: “Public structures are very difficult to rebuild once they have been demolished.” Particularly in times of crisis, however, reliable public services are guarantors of social stability.



EFSF leverage: concern for employee rights

The European Union of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is watching the development of the international financial and Euro debt crisis with great concern. The general exultation over the successful summit on 26th October is mixed with scepticism. This is not only due to the announced Greek referendum but also with regard to the consequences of massive purchases of state bonds by non-European states. “We must be careful not to pawn our social model en passant,” CESI vice president Romain Wolff warns. The financial and fiscal expert from Luxemburg sees risks in a massive involvement of foreign investors in the bonds to be secured by the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF). “How high will the political price be?” Wolff asks.

In principle, investors from outside Europe are very welcome, Romain Wolff says. The economy is dependent on close integration into the global economy and the European welfare model is based on this economic linking. Direct foreign investments are therefore a mainstay of the EU domestic market. Here, existing jobs would be secured and new ones created. However, the leverage of the EFSF volume with the aid of foreign investors is quite different in terms of quality. “Direct investments in markets are one thing; multi-billion entries into state bonds of over indebted Euro states are another. The question emerges of the political and economic dependencies ultimately arising as a result,” Wolff says.

“We must look closely at who wants to invest in us,” Wolff stated. The investors concerned are largely state funds from China and the Gulf Emirates. “However, they do it neither purely out of charity nor in order to secure the European sales market.” The CESI vice president fears that state funds controlled by dictatorial regimes and with huge strength due to their financial power will sooner or later gain influence over the political orientations of the borrowers. “In the long term, I think our European social model is in danger, which – with all the differences in the detail – displays certain common elements when compared with states under authoritarian governments.” Wolff considers very specific trade union rights to be at risk. “By global comparison, we Europeans are unique with our participative management. Pluralistic and democratic employee participation is far from being the rule. We must take care that our states do not become so dependent that we gradually lose these rights and many social achievements.”



G20: Müllers welcomes the clear commitment to social dialogue

“It is a good sign when the leaders of the G20 states all speak out together in favour of social dialogue”, said the CESI General Secretary Helmut Müllers commenting on the results of the summit of the most important industrialised countries and emerging markets (G20) on 3rd and 4th November in Cannes. In the closing declaration, the Heads of State and Government also pledged to make greater efforts for social cohesion. “The crisis has hit people all over the world, including in Europe, and above all the poorest. These people must not be left to fend for themselves” stated Müllers, and urged the G20 to keep their promise.

“The declarations made at the G20 must now be followed by action,” demanded the General Secretary. We have all heard great words spoken here in the past, but unfortunately not many of them have been supported by definite actions. “It is an important milestone that the G20 have determined specific areas of activity. The successes and failures in these areas will set the bar for the G20 states”, said Müllers regarding the Heads of State and Governments’ intentions to make improvements to, among other things, the health system, the security of income for the elderly and the support for employees threatened by poverty.

According to the G20 declaration, the main focus is on strengthening the social dimension of globalisation. CESI General Secretary Müllers states: “this can only be achieved when everyone works together in this process. Cutting the rights of employees in many countries throughout the world and in individual countries within Europe is therefore completely unacceptable. The European Union has been an example to the rest of the world for many years with regard to resolving issues between employers and employees to the benefit of both parties.” This needs to remain so in the future and must not be called into question due to short-term crisis intervention measures or the bad example set by individual member states.



Social Cohesion: Fernández Veiguela demands stronger solidarity in Europe

“The trade unions in Europe play an important role in the economic and financial crisis. They are the guarantee for social equity and peace”, proclaimed CESI vice President Domingo Fernández Veiguela on 10th November in Madrid. The traces of the last few years of crisis have left their mark on the European societies, which is shown above all by the new study on social cohesion launched by the European Commission. “We must take special care to stop the societies of the European Union from drifting apart” says the CESI vice President. Solidarity in Europe has been one of the fundamentals for the economic prosperity of the previous decades.

“We must remember the European strengths,” says Fernández Veiguela. Above all, the difference between northern and southern Europe is extremely alarming. “Europe’s success has been based on an ever closer co-operation. If people in the southern countries see their situation as markedly worse than those in the northern countries, this could cause severe tension between them,” the CESI vice President warns. In order to avoid a widening gap between the European countries, more efforts to stabilize the southern economies and not only their budgets are required. “We need kind of a new *Marshall* plan for Europe.”

The European trade unions will be pivotal in this. “We as trade unions organise an important part of civil society”, says Fernández Veiguela. It is completely unacceptable that individual European governments cease the dialogue with trade unions as they have in Hungary. “The European governments must defend the principle values in Europe vis-à-vis Hungary and every other country which disregards the rights of its workers”. Fernández Veiguela demands that Europeans stand side-by-side on this. Background information: On 17th October, the Eurobarometer survey was published regarding the social climate in the European Union, commissioned by the European Commission. The complete study can be found on the website of the Commission.



Now it is time for the financial transaction tax

“Since the collapse of the Lehman Brothers we have been talking about introducing a financial transaction tax. However, talk is cheap when it comes to solving the problems of the financial markets and government debt”, said CESI President Peter Heesen on 14th November in Brussels. At its meeting today, the CESI Board made an urgent appeal to the national governments to finally introduce this tax at the European level. Earnings from this tax are to be used to reduce government debt. “In this way we can find a solution for two problems besetting us”, Heesen states. The Euro-debt crisis and its consequences for the public service sector in Europe were an important topic of the Board meeting.

“Europe’s future will be decided in the financial crisis”, presidents Fritz Neugebauer and Peter Heesen state. Worries about Italy show that there is not much more time to draw the right conclusions from the crisis. Neither a levered bailout package (EFSF) nor the planned permanent mechanism for the period after 2013 are sufficient to stabilise the currency union. “Effective financial markets regulation needs to finally be added to the decisions“, Heesen said. The steps that have been taken in the area of bank regulation up to now are far from sufficient. “The shadow markets need to be brought out into the light of an independent European banking supervisory body. In addition, a financial transaction tax needs to be charged Europe-wide, which tempers irresponsible speculative hocus pocus as well as contributing to solving the debt problem“, the CESI President states. He declared that it was incomprehensible that financial transactions could not be taxed, given that any other type of business in daily life is subject to tax.

In many states in Europe, the situation of the public sector is dramatic. The austerity measures of many governments basically affect all employees, but particularly young people and employees in the public sector. In some countries, basic union rights have been virtually crushed. The infrastructure of the public sector is being jeopardised. The salary cuts for public sector staff are part of a vicious circle which needs to be broken. “Particularly in countries such as Greece, we need investments and reforms leading to effective financial management. Simply kicking people out onto the street does not help to bring in more tax revenue nor does it reduce government spending, but only creates massive social pressure and political instability”, Heesen and Neugebauer state. The CESI-Board unanimously resolved that the member organisations of CESI are to jointly advocate a European financial transaction tax. “We want it for the entire Euro zone, preferably for the entire EU, as a permanent stabilising instrument“, the presidents said, especially in view of rejections still being upheld, by the British among others. Moreover, the independent European trade unions demand the creation of an independent European rating agency.



Strategic Priorities 2012: Fehér requires increased participation

“The European Parliament is making clear its demands to have its say,” said CESI Vice President József Fehér enthusiastically about the plenary debate for European Commission’s programme on 15th November in Strasbourg. “The MEPs are the elected representatives of Europe’s citizens. It is good that they keep an eye on the European Commission,” said Fehér. The MEPs pointed out that above all the Europe 2020 strategy needs to be implemented quickly and furthermore, as of 2014, parliament must be included in preparations for the financial framework, which stretches over several years.

Thanks to the Lisbon Treaty, parliament now has the right to discuss the following years work programme with the European Commission directly and to set out some of its own priorities. “Members of parliament are the mouthpieces of the people. It is important that they are able to directly participate in the big decisions and do more than just offer their opinion,” said the CESI Vice President. Parliament must also play a part in determining the priorities for the new budget for 2013. “The budget plays a crucial role in determining in which direction the European Union develops. In order for decisions to be accepted, it is also important that parliament is able to reach a majority vote.”

Both the European Commission and the European Parliament want to set out their priorities for the initiatives and programmes of the Europe 2020 strategy in 2012. According to Fehér, “The next months and years will be decisive in overcoming the crisis in Europe without witnessing a break-up of European social cohesion.” He also goes on to say that the “Youth on the Move” and “Agenda for New Skills and Jobs” initiatives are particularly suited to making the job market more crisis-proof. The former is intended to better prepare young people for the demands of the job market whilst the latter is meant to help restructure the job market so that it conforms to the needs of both employees and international markets. However, these goals can only be achieved with good, public infrastructure, explained the CESI Vice President. “Europe is facing some serious challenges. We need modern and well-equipped public services to achieve necessary development and to offer continued support to what has already been achieved.”



Annual Programme 2012: Transnational Co-operation and Public Services

“The European Union is more than the sum of its states. We can benefit from Europe only if we exchange experience on all levels,” Wilhelm Gloss, President of the CESI Europe Academy, said at the project planning meeting for the Academy for the coming year, on 18th November in Brussels. “We want to address how the civil service is organised locally,” Gloss said. This concerns the specific provision of services in the local authorities on the one hand and practical co-operation across state boundaries on the other. “For the citizens, Europe is experienced principally in their everyday environment,” the Academy President said.

Public services should form a particular focus in terms of content work in 2012. “The state is always experienced by the citizens if services are provided directly on location. A foundation of trust can be created here,” the Academy President said. It is therefore important, for a departure from the unbridled deregulation of recent years to become established. “Particularly during the crisis, the state must maintain sovereignty over the most important services for citizens. In the long term, deregulations frequently create more problems than they solve,” Gloss said. In future, the provision of public services will be concerned primarily with ensuring a high level of quality, security, affordability and universal access across Europe, under the conditions of globalisation.

Moreover, according to Gloss, transnational, administrative co-operation should be moved more into the focus of trade union work in the future. “As trade unions, we have known for a long time that we need to organise ourselves on a European level. On local authority and regional level, there are also good examples of how transnational co-operation can work,” Gloss emphasised. Nonetheless, there is still a great deal of potential here, which needs to be used in the coming years. “Many challenges can no longer be overcome merely nationally. We will discuss solutions for how barriers can be overcome in practical work in the communities,” the Academy President said.



Stöhr: Building a more social Europe through a fairer EU budget

“Especially in these times of crisis national budgets as well as the European multiannual financial framework must consider economic and social objectives as equally important,” said CESI board member Frank Stöhr during a debate at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on 25th November in Brussels. The vice-chairman of the dbb, who has been a member of the EESC since 2002, encouraged the commission and the council not to lose sight of social concerns during the budget negotiations for 2014 to 2020. Claiming solidarity among the EU member states Stöhr also criticized the national rebates as **“unfair special treatment for some privileged countries”**.

At the start of the meeting, Jutta Haug laid out the position of the European Parliament regarding the recommendations about the new budget, which were put forward by the European Commission. Haug is a member of the S&D faction within the European Parliament and heads the special committee on policy challenges and budget funding for a sustainable European Union after 2013 (SURE). “Europe needs to follow clear guidelines. Only in this way can the welfare of EU citizens be ensured,” said Stöhr. He went on to welcome the decision to bring the budget into line with the Europe 2020 strategy because, according to Stöhr, such a clear and dependable structure can be easily integrated in the workings of existing institutions. He also stressed that the strategy's various programmes needed to be designed to serve the Europe's citizens. “We need to strike a balance between social and economic goals,” said the dbb vice-chairman. Adding that the crisis had shown what happens when markets are allowed to operate without any limits.

“Over the past months and years, there has been much talk about solidarity within the European Union. However, solidarity is not a one way street,” said Stöhr. That's why it is unacceptable that some countries, such as the United Kingdom for example, cling to their permanent rebates and other countries pay their full share. Exceptions to the rule need to be renegotiated for every new budget so as not to give the impression that some privileged countries receive unfair, special treatment. Each member state must contribute to the budget according to its means. In other matters, Stöhr also made clear he shared the position of Jutta Haug who said that the EU budget must remain an instrument for investment. Stöhr emphasised that “Europe's exit strategy out of the crisis will have to involve more Europe not less.”



Heesen: “Present day Hungary is no longer a constitutional democracy”

“I explicitly support the protest of the German professional association for social work against the detention of Norbert Ferencz,” CESI President Peter Heesen stated on 1st December. The Hungarian social worker called for protest action against the government by social workers in Budapest and was consequently sentenced on 4th November to three years imprisonment for breach of the peace. The protest was called in the light of the Orbán government policy against homeless people, who for months have been systematically criminalised. “Hungary is departing further and further from what makes a constitutional democracy,” Heesen said. “The European Union must stop inactively accepting this state of affairs,” claimed Heesen, who is convinced that Hungary would not be accepted into the EU in its present political condition if it were still a pre-accession country.

The German professional association for social work (DBSH) is a member of the CESI through the German federation of civil servants (dbb). Even at the start of November, the expanded board of the DBSH stated the following concerning the detention of its Hungarian colleague: “Together with many other European associations, the DBSH strongly protests against the repressive measures to which colleagues in Hungary are subjected.” CESI Present Heesen addressed Hungarian premier Viktor Orbán months ago in a critical letter. Heesen has now reasserted and intensified his criticism: “For months, we have seen the situation for minorities in Hungary becoming increasingly difficult. Repressive measures are becoming greater and greater. Laws are being made, which are clearly in violation of basic and human rights. Europe must no longer turn a blind eye here. Present day Hungary is no longer a constitutional democracy. If it were not already an EU member, its acceptance today would not be permitted.”

Social worker Norbert Ferencz called Hungarian social workers to action on the street in order to protest against the government treatment of homeless people. In Hungary, action has recently been taken against rummaging through refuse for food or deposit refund bottles as a regulatory offence. The government wants to fight poverty by criminalising it. The Ferencz call to protest was directed both against this and against the increasingly difficult working conditions of Hungarian social workers.



FEMM: Televised stereotypes affect female labour market access

“The labour market is still not open enough for women,” says Kirsten Lühmann, chairwoman of the CESI committee on womens’ rights and gender equality. One important reason for this inequality is seen in the way men and women are presented in the media, in particular on TV. “Men are still shown as mechanics, lawyers and medical doctors, women are either presented in classical female roles such as nurses or hairdressers or as unrealistic superwomen,” says Lühmann. Pamela Morinière of the International Federation of Journalists who intervened as guest speaker in the committee meeting on December 7th confirms this experience. “There is certainly still progress to be made in this area.” Lühmann requires binding ethical guidelines for public and private media. “The image of women in the media must improve. The projected image of women does not correspond with today’s society’s realities,” says Lühmann announcing a CESI resolution on the subject.

“So far no binding measures to present women as equal have been introduced in the media,” says the FEMM committee’s chairwoman. Lühmann considers it a deplorable fact that women are still treated differently in the media although the media play a crucial role in the shaping of public images, ideas and ideals. “We have to stop these televised stereotypes. They have a negative effect on womens’ labour market opportunities. What is more, girls or young women don’t even dare to go for technical or classical male jobs because they lack corresponding role models,” says the chairwoman. Lühmann believes that the European trade unions have to play an active role in overcoming the inequalities this creates. The chairwoman deplores that regarding the gender issue, TV and reality do not overlap. Women are not realistically presented on TV. Lühmann believes that more young women would be interested in technical professions, if they had appropriate female role models shown on TV.

“The picture given by the media necessarily impacts the public perception,” says Lühmann. When it comes to gender equality, the ongoing General Media Monitoring Project is providing hard facts. The project analyses the role of women in media around the world every five years. The last report was surveyed in 2010 and recently published. “The results are still rather disappointing. Women are stereotyped by the media,” says Pamela Morinière. The CESI committee claims that journalists’ professional ethics need adaptation. “There have been attempts to raise the awareness of journalists, but very little has been done when it comes to schools of journalism,” says Morinière. Still, there are also good examples. The Swedish for example introduced quota for the Swedish public television news programmes. Some noteworthy efforts have also been made at the European level. “Screening Gender” and “Portraying Politics” are programmes that have been developed by European journalists’ networks to help the news journalists to draw more attention to improve gender portrayal in the media.



SOC: Dauderstädt on the annual review on Employment and Social Developments

“The developments of the past months and years are very threatening. If the gulf between the rich and the poor continues to widen, social peace will be in jeopardy”, declared the President of the CESI-Social Affairs Committee SOC Klaus Dauderstädt on December 19th in Berlin as a reaction to the European Commission’s first annual annual review on employment and social affairs. Dauderstädt warned the states against pursuing one-sided policies. “It will not be helpful should governments drive their economies too hard. A high unemployment rate will only intensify the problems still further,” Dauderstädt warned. The report had shown that, in many countries of the European Union, particularly in North and West Europe, social inequality was on the increase and only being reduced in a few countries.

On the occasion of the presentation of the report, which appeared in this form for the first time and is based on two reports on employment and the social situation, Employment Commissioner László Andor had called for an integrated approach towards economic, employment and social policy. “The states must see to it that everyone who goes to work is able to live off what he earns. The Commission is right to demand 'more and better jobs'. It is not just a matter of quantity but also one of quality“, said Dauderstädt. It would not exactly improve the social situation if an ever increasing number of jobs subject to social insurance contributions were dispensed with in favour of ones offering precarious conditions.

The European Commission is also demanding - not least in view of the extra burdens resulting from the crisis - carefully-targeted and efficient measures from its member states. “Such measures are, however, only possible if the governments continue to have the necessary leeway for taking appropriate decisions. If individual countries are condemned by the European Union and the IWF to undertake enormous endeavours to cut back on spending without a political girdle to provide those countries with support and a perspective for the future, then even the most well-intentioned advice is useless,” according to Dauderstädt. The countries in the South of Europe in particular need to be shown by the Union a path by which their debt problems may be overcome and, at the same time, a greater social balance can be created. Further information and the full report may be found on the websites of the European Commission.
