

Program: Building Consensus for European Integration

Policy notes from roundtable on social policy reforms – experiences with social dialogue in Kragujevac, Serbia

24th February 2009

Organizers: Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence and Pontis Foundation

The speakers on the roundtable were Tanja Miscevic, Associate Professor at Faculty of Political Science of Belgrade University and former director of the Serbian EU Integration Office, Daniel Csanady from College of Management from Budapest and Ondrej Krutilek from Democracy and Culture Studies Centre from Czech Republic. The round table was attended by approximately 50 participants from Serbia, most of them from local government, from the Municipality of Kragujevac and from the Serbian media.

The round table was opened by the deputy of Mayor, Nebojsa Zdravkovic, who pointed out that Kragujevac already established the Commission for the EU integration to bring EU closer to the citizens of this municipality to explain them what can Kragujevac as municipality get from EU, how to use pre-accession assistance and to answer all questions when it comes to this process.

The round table was divided in two components. In first one Ms. Miscevic explained for the participants the current intersection of Serbian EU integration process and gave prospects for Serbia on this road for 2009. The second panel was more focused on social policy reforms - experiences with social dialogue from European perspective and concrete experiences from Hungary and Czech Republic.

Background:

Kragujevac is one of the biggest Serbian industrial towns and by merging with FIAT in 2008 still is. Social dialog was always of the crucial importance for the people of Kragujevac. Through the trade unions employees and the community in Kragujevac their needs and expectations for decades were being negotiated with employers and with local public administration representatives. The town hall from this respective industrial town has cooperation with German *foundation "Fridriheberestiftung"*. This is a long term partnership when it comes to social dialogue and sharing experiences. On basis of German model in Kragujevac social-economic council was established as the first body of this kind in Serbia. Through the Serbian Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the project on how to develop the social strategies and the social security is currently implemented in 25 cities in Serbia and Kragujevac is one of them. This project started in 2006 and will last till 2009. Serbian municipalities are provided by individual mentor support and individual trainings for empowering capacities in the field of strategic planning within social policy. The project is supported by joint program for international development of the UK and The Ministry of foreign affairs of Norway. Kragujevac has around 180 000 inhabitants, 65,5 % represents working population, in October 2008 the registered unemployment rate was 20 %.

According to Ms. Miscevic Serbia needs young political leaders, who will lead Serbia to the EU. Serbia should trace the three goals in 2009: to obtain the candidate country status, to build the system for decentralization and liberalization of visa regime. During her presentation she stressed out that the process of the EU integration consists mainly from internal reforms and also that 63 % of Serbian inhabitants today are in favor of the EU integrations. She stated that Serbia has to change the laws, economy and the way of acting in parliament and society, what could potentially lead to Serbia becoming the EU candidate country - modern European country. According to her there are still too many doubts and unanswered questions about the EU. That's why it is extremely important to organize educational activities throughout entire Serbia on particular topics as social policy reforms and social dialogue.

Mr. Krutilek explained how EU social policy looks like today and its regulative role. He explained the differences between the national social policies and the EU social policy. According to him the EU regulative social policy is not always in favor of each new member country or even old member country. It is just a set of principles. He pointed out that once when that a country decides to enter the EU, it has to fulfill *Acquis communautaire*. According to him pre-conditions, values and norms, many times are not clear if those are advantages or disadvantages for member country or pre - member country. He also listed the clusters of EU social policy issues: free movement of workers, posting of workers directive, health and safety at work, optical radiation directive, redistribution on national level, working conditions, maternity leave conditions and worker consultations. At the end of his presentation he pointed out Czech experience with the social dialogue and stressed the cooperation between two organizations, which are connecting Czech Republic and the EU in the field of social policy and social dialogue: the Czech - Moravian confederation of trade unions and European Social Fund. These two channels are mostly for experts and politicians so there is no too much space for different stakeholders and public to be involved.

The last speaker was Mr. Csanady from Hungary. In his presentation he explained narrow cooperation of the trade unions, employees, employers and state representatives. He draw attention on the importance of the organization of civil society, which plays a significant role in dialogue in the communities and presented the opportunities and ways how to start such a dialogue. For a country in transition it is very important to have social dialogue. The Economy in transition, inactive unemployed people are big problems and prospects are not the best. Under Civil society organizations are listed different organizations: political parties, other non political organizations, religious societies, employee organizations, social partners, unions, economic categories of organizations etc. Social dialogue according to Mr. Csanady represents structured way of communication.

Participants were very interested in discussed topics and participated in a discussion on social policy changes and specific experiences in Czech Republic and Hungary. They were mostly interested in learning how these countries solved the problems with monopolies, how the social dialogue is going on in these countries and what is the position of the trade unions towards different stakeholders.