

# Editorial

This 2012-3 issue of the *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* focuses on 'Trade union weakness and the political role of unions in south-east Europe', with a collection of articles from the countries of the region. The articles in this issue are edited versions of papers delivered at a Belgrade conference devoted to the topic 'Trade unions and politics in south-east Europe'.

The conference was organised by the Higher Education Institution for Applied Studies for Entrepreneurship, Belgrade; the Centre for Industrial Relations, Belgrade; the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia; and the European Trade Union Institute, Brussels.

There is a growing awareness and concern that continuing erosion of trade union density and, in a broader sense, of trade union influence in central-eastern/south-east Europe can lead to a situation where unions may reach the verge of marginalisation.

The EU has also proved to be unable to set a stable foundation for industrial relations (social dialogue) on the ground in the region (no directive or significant pressure for social dialogue seems to have had a real effect on actual practice). What can be the reasons for losing ground and how can a further degradation of the situation be prevented?

The conference 'Trade unions and politics' focused on the important feature of trade union links to political parties and to the political system in general, with the question also addressed as to whether there should be a link between the two. Indeed: can the political legacy of state socialism (and the role that trade unions played in that system) and current controversial practices in the relations between trade unions and political parties be a reason for this continuing weakness? If we look at western Europe, most countries with a stable and strong trade union landscape have a strong institutional anchor guaranteed by the state (not by political parties). The relationship between trade unions and works councils and, in a broader sense, the role of trade unions in the workplace was also an important issue discussed.

The articles included in this issue related to these considerations contribute to a better understanding of trade union weakness in central and south-east Europe, and probably also help us to develop strategies for reversing the negative trends.

Among the main contributors to this issue, Ekaterina Ribarova examines the reasons for the decline in the social power of trade unions in the new market economies of central and south-eastern Europe.

Miroslav Stanojević and Živa Broder give a historical and analytical account of the development of trade unions in Slovenia, the country that was most successful in the region in maintaining, adapting and developing trade union power, putting also the question as to why this model of success might currently be at risk.

Aleksandar Chavleski and Temelko Risteski deliver a comparative analysis on the current role of trade unions in the south-eastern European region, with a focus on the Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia.

Darko Marinković and Vladimir Marinković address the crucial issue about the role of trade unions in politics, giving also an assessment of the current situation in Serbia.

They conclude that ‘the permanent union position towards all factors of political life must be that the union always acts as a critical opposition to any government’.

Oliver Momčilović and Mile Draganović provide an overview of trade union developments during the transition in Serbia.

The problems of trade union organisation in Serbia are addressed by Duško Kostić, Radoje Cvejić and Radmila Marković who argue the need for proposals for a quality shift in organisational strategies and practices.

Temelko Risteski, Vesna Sijić and Emrah Mihtaroski take a critical view of the legal framework and the reality with a view to the exercise of trade union rights in the Republic of Macedonia.

Željko Mirjanić and Jasna Čošabić look at the influence of the European Trade Union Confederation on the development of trade unions in the transition country of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Béla Galgócz**

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**Calvin Allen**