

In this Issue

The current issue of the *Warsaw Forum of Economic Sociology* is devoted to social dialogue. As we have already signaled in prior issues, this is one of the main topics on which we would like to focus the attention of ourselves and our Readers.

The chief question we address in this issue is the following: what are the actual functions that social partnership plays, not only in Central Eastern Europe (CEE), but beyond? Several Western observers (Ost, Bluhm, Meardi) have written in the past that the CEE region is a laboratory for new socio-economic experiments, which may then be transferred to the 'old' countries of the European Union. Recent developments in social dialogue can be seen through this lens of change and experiments, with implications that go beyond CEE. Clearly, social pacts today, unlike in the heyday of neo-corporatism, are no longer a vehicle to advance the interests of labour. To the extent that they are about making a country more 'competitive', they do so in a context of generalized decline. Nevertheless, social dialogue is still underway in a number of countries, allowing for the accomplishment of specific, usually rather modest goals. What are those goals, exactly? Whose interests do they serve? Do current forms of dialogue allow for their attainment? These are some of the questions we and our authors wish to explore.

In this issue, Readers will have a chance to learn of the meanderings of tripartite social dialogue in Poland in the early 2000s as seen by one of its major architects, Jerzy Hausner, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Labour (2002–2005). Professor Hausner, who resumed academic work after leaving government, tells his side of the story of Polish tripartism in recent years and shares his reflections not only on the nature of social dialogue but also on barriers for development-oriented public policy in Poland.

In the previous issue of WFES we re-printed the seminal article 'Illusory Corporatism in Eastern Europe' by David Ost, which originally appeared in 2000. In that paper, the author delivered a very critical analysis of neo-corporatist

arrangements implemented in CEE countries, calling them ‘illusory’. Ost claimed at the time that neo-corporatism remained viable in *Western* Europe, despite its limitations. A decade later, he is far more pessimistic. In his new paper, ‘Illusory corporatism’ ten years later’, Ost argues that ‘illusory corporatism’, while remaining strong in the East, has now advanced to the West. According to Ost, tripartism throughout Europe, and even where it has spread to non-core sectors of the global economy, serves nowadays as a vehicle by which austerity measures introduced by governments, in the service of capital, are socially legitimated. Social pacts today thus facilitate labour-unfriendly public policy. The author concludes that the ‘social partnership’ formula, cherished and promoted in the European Union for many years, has become an empty shell, suggesting that employee representatives need to seek new strategies towards employers and governments.

Guglielmo Meardi aims to examine the reasons for the weakness of social dialogue in the CEE countries. The chief culprit, he says, is the virtual absence of multi-employer collective bargaining. In a departure from much of the literature on Western Europe, however, he argues that the lack of multi-employer collective agreements does not result from weakness of employers’ organisations, but rather from their conscious strategies. Meardi goes on to argue that without co-ordinated social dialogue, it is becoming increasingly arduous for CEE governments to satisfy both international financial institutions and their electorates.

Charles Woolfson and Epp Kallaste also refer to the notion of ‘illusory corporatism’. The authors use the example of the Baltic states to come forward with the thesis that the phenomenon of ‘illusory corporatism’ has evolved to the point where even the small, symbolic compensation once offered to trade unions for their cooperative stance is gone. ‘Illusory Corporatism “Mark 2”’, as Woolfson and Kallaste call it, may be described as a one-way relationship, in which the unions seem ready to accept and authorise nearly any proposal devised and enforced by governments so long as they retain their official social partner role.

Victor Zhukov delivers an analysis of social dialogue and social partnership in Ukraine. The author points out obvious similarities between the political economy of Russia and Ukraine, such as bureaucratic and patrimonial capitalism or the dominance of patron-client relations. Both employers’ organisations and trade unions are subservient to the state and big business. As a result, social partnership and social dialogue are reduced to providing legitimacy for the government and its political and economic milieu. Unlike in the European Union CEE countries, tripartite institutions in Ukraine are not meant to support the neo-liberal reform but instead to help petrify a peculiar state of ‘unfinished liberalisation’, in which various rent-seeking groups

can satisfy their particularistic interests. Zhukov observes that social partnership in Ukraine has in fact become a substitute for Communist ideology and serves as an important source of legitimisation for the political and economic power resting in the hands of oligarchs.

Miroslav Stanojević brings to us an important account of evolution in the social partnership regime of Slovenia during the 1990s and 2000s. For many years Slovenia has been a leading example of a viable model of neo-corporatist model industrial relations and a coordinated market economy, unique among the post-Communist states. According to the author, that picture is no longer accurate. In the past, numerous social pacts had been signed, enhancing competitiveness of the national economy. Those pacts required concessions on the part of trade unions, but also provided many benefits for labour, just as in the classic neo-corporatist arrangements of northern Europe. By the late 2000s, however, the climate in Slovenian social dialogue had changed and room for a compromise shrunk considerably among the parties, even though the centre-left government which previously had firmly supported social dialogue returned to power.

While avoiding placing social dialogue as the central concept of her paper, Dorothee Bohle still manages to forward a number of vital questions regarding the relations linking social partners. The author investigates the process of European trade unions becoming increasingly state-dependent. Bohle notices that since the 1980s, unions have become absorbed into the essentially neoliberal project of European integration. As a consequence, they have lost much of their autonomy, as well as their capacity to effectively act upon the interests of their constituencies, especially when these contradict governments' interests. With the financial crisis of European states in full swing, unions appear to be locked between the demands of their institutional involvement and the growing pressure of their social base.

Dariusz Zalewski explores the history of Polish social dialogue and attempts to make a distinction between 'facts' and 'artifacts'. Whereas the author upholds a widespread view of tripartite social dialogue becoming increasingly ritualistic and incapable of delivering social pacts over the years, he claims that tripartism in Poland still retains the capacity to provide legitimisation to the existing political system, and as such should not be written off too quickly.

Last but not least, we announce the arrival of a new feature in our journal, namely the 'Book Reviews' section. We begin with a review of Marek Bednarski and Jerzy Wratny's edited volume, 'Trade unions and non-union forms of employee representation in the post-transformation economy' (*Związki zawodowe a niezwiązkowe przedstawicielstwa pracownicze w gospodarce posttransformacyjnej*).

We plan to maintain this section on regular basis, with the primary aim of providing an international audience with information on noteworthy publications on subjects related to our profile released in less accessible languages.

Social dialogue in Europe today is going through a phase of rapid change, with long-term effects that are difficult to predict. Nevertheless, the face of European tripartism is not likely to look the way it did prior to the eruption of the world financial and economic crisis, even if macroeconomic stability is restored. This issue of WFES is a first take at exploring possible futures of European social dialogue. We will publish more on this topic in the future, and encourage your submissions. We look forward to a vigorous debate.