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Priorities of IOE Members from Europe & Central Asia for ILO work in the region 2017-2018

Introduction

Europe & Central Asia is a very diverse region which is rapidly evolving, driven by factors such as globalisation, digitalisation, demographic changes and environmental challenges.

The way in which ILO Member States in the region have experienced and responded to the crisis varies considerably from one country to another and the respective needs and expectations in relation to ILO work, support and technical assistance are therefore very different.

Significant differences also exist in relation to the individual approaches to the future of work, given that countries in the region face different opportunities and challenges.

As reported in the document submitted to the 10th ILO European Regional Meeting, “What future for Decent Work in Europe and Central Asia – Opportunities and Challenges”, the ILO Regional Office for Europe & Central Asia has undertaken important initiatives in the region since the last ILO Regional Meeting in Oslo in 2013.

The Employers valued, in particular, the focus on employment creation and the promotion of an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises (EASE), through the [EASE tool](#) and the results achieved so far in Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, and Moldova. Also of great importance are: the capacity building programmes for employers’ organisations, through ACT/EMP, in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Montenegro, Moldova, Serbia, the FYR of Macedonia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan; the ILO support on industrial relations and labour law reforms in Greece; the continued engagement for decent work in Uzbekistan through the extension of the DWCP; and the technical assistance on OSH and youth employment in several countries, as well as many other projects and programmes.

The ILO’s work is highly appreciated, despite the fact that the Europe and Central Asia region continues to receive less funding than others. The estimates for 2018-2019 even reflect a further expenditure decrease in the ILO budget line (from 25,080,002 US Dollars spent in 2016-2017 to 24,721,334 US Dollars for 2018-2019). This forces the ILO to be even more effective and focused in organizing its activities.

Key Priorities for future ILO work in Europe & Central Asia

1. **Promotion of an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises** has been a very useful component of ILO work in Europe & Central Asia and its continuation remains of the utmost importance for the region. The Employers therefore call on the ILO to expand this work. For instance, the findings of the EASE assessments in Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan need to be translated into concrete policies and action plans and EASE work should be extended to further countries in the region.

2. **Job creation through diverse forms of employment**¹: the ongoing debate on diverse forms of employment is unduly constricted, in particular on whether the diverse forms of employment are the new “normal” or rather a limited phenomenon, or on whether they lead to insecurity and less protection. The “future of work” scenario calls for a more objective and deeper analysis, including regarding the employers’ side of the picture. It is important to understand, for instance, how well-designed and well-regulated forms of work can help enterprises increase their ability to respond and adapt to market demands, and how they can be a useful element of a strategy for retaining and recruiting workers, especially youth, women and migrant workers (see para. 2, Conclusions of the ILO Meeting of Experts on Non-Standard Forms of Employment, 2015). The ILO Office should also undertake research addressing these important aspects.
3. **Skills mismatch**: Young people in Europe & Central Asia have never been better educated and trained than today. However, employers in many countries face severe difficulties in finding the adequate skills to match their needs. One of the main challenges related to the “future of work” is the necessity to rapidly adapt skills to changing business’ needs. The Employers call upon the ILO Office to extend programmes and activities that effectively help Member States in the region to address skills mismatches and lower related costs for firms and individuals (in terms of reduced productivity, increases in the costs of hiring, and rising job dissatisfaction).
4. **Strong, active, and independent employers’ organisations**: Although tripartism is well-established in Europe & Central Asia, employers’ organisations in many countries still need capacity-building support from the ILO (especially from ACT/EMP) to become more stable and stronger. In certain cases, they also need the ILO’s assistance to defend their independence against government attempts to bring these organizations under state influence. The need to be highly representative also calls for a renewal in employers’ organisations in terms of services offered and engagement with all kind of businesses (ranging from the micro companies to new forms of entrepreneurship). In addition to the continuation of the capacity-building support, the Employers would also expect the ILO Office to engage tripartite constituents more systematically from the outset in the planning of any activities, thus ensuring transparency, tripartite governance, and ownership of results achieved. In this regard, the Employers welcome the establishment of a National Tripartite Committee for Decent Work (NTCDW) in Tajikistan and would like to see this model reproduced in other countries of the region.
5. **Sustainable social security systems**: ILO work in this field has been built around the current model of social security (a model where employees with a full time, open-ended employment relationship are adequately covered by the social security). The discussion on the future of work and the stress under which social security systems find themselves force constituents and the ILO to re-think social security systems, so that coverage actually includes workers in new forms of employment and the burden is not exclusively on employers. A pilot project on possible alternatives to the “standard social security system” could be developed in the region, in consultation with the social partners.
6. **ILO outreach to companies**: the Employers reiterate a recommendation that was already presented one year ago: the ILO outreach to companies has to be done in

¹ In the language of the ILO Office we talk of “Non-Standard Forms of Employment”. The Employers have criticised this terminology for not being able to capture today’s labour market reality (the so-called standard form of employment – that is a full time, open-ended employment relationship – covers only 20% of the working population worldwide, ILO Employment Outlook, 2015) and have proposed, as an alternative, the expression “diverse forms of employment/diverse forms of work”.

collaboration with the Secretariat of the Employers in the ILO (ACT/EMP) and the respective national employers' organisations in the region. Companies are approached by the Office without any information being given to, or any engagement with the IOE or the national employers' organisation. The companies, which are not necessarily familiar with the ILO, often do not react or indeed may reject any engagement. The national employers' organisation can serve as a valuable and effective facilitator in ensuring that companies understand and appreciate the possibilities and benefits of engagement with the ILO.

In conclusion, this outline of the Employers' priorities should only be seen as a first step in a much broader engagement with the ILO Regional Office in this regard. The Employers look forward to continuing the discussions until and beyond the IOE annual regional meeting.
