

Interview with The Director of the ILO Subregional Office for Central and Eastern Europe

Introduction

LIGA highly appreciates ILO's core activities such as promoting rights at work, encouraging decent employment opportunities, enhancing social protection and strengthening dialogue on work-related issues. Thus, it seeks to build out and maintain good working relationship with ILO, participates in its work (National ILO meetings, ILC, surveys, International Women's Day etc.) and holds dialogue with its representatives on a regular basis. On behalf of ILO, Mr. Ovidiu Jurca, Senior specialist in Workers' Activities, visited LIGA similarly to other trade unions during the previous year to discuss their experiences regarding relevant labor related issues including but not limited to the new employment code. In addition, the legal expert of LIGA signaled his intention to prepare an interview with the newly chosen director of the subregional office which was honored by ILO. Present writing is a concise summary of the interview.

1

New Director of The ILO Subregional Office for Central and Eastern Europe (hereinafter referred to as: Subregional Office)



Antonio Graziosi became the new director of the subregional office in October, 2013. He said that he sought to build out and maintain good working relationships with all actors in this field. He has been working for the ILO for approximately 28 years. He worked in Africa, Latin America, the ILO headquarters in Geneva and the ILO training centre in Turin. He is a labor economist, but has mainly worked with

the ILO in the management of technical cooperation and capacity development. The director considers this position very challenging. First, it is a very diverse region with many languages and cultures. It comprises 18 ex-socialist countries which however face some similar challenges. Those challenges include high unemployment (including youth unemployment), informality and relatively poor working conditions in some countries. The lingering economic and financial crisis is putting pressure on enterprises to reduce the level of protection at workplace and salaries as a means to survive in a very competitive global market. He emphasized that a change of attitude would be desirable because you cannot look at the workforce as a cost only, but as a resource in whose health, productivity, competency and motivation we need to invest. He pointed out however that this is much more complex issue to address than other development challenges European countries have already effectively addressed issues such as child mortality, contagious diseases, access to clean water or primary education; however, they all face a serious challenges of unemployment

and precarious employment, though the extent varies of course from country to country.

Priorities

Among priorities, social dialogue has a primary importance as a vehicle for the fulfilment of ILO objectives in relation to job creation, rights at work and social protection. The director considers anti-discrimination policies very important, as workplace discrimination is a serious concern, especially gender discrimination. This is why the subregional office [issued a statement](#) on the occasion of the International Women's Day to which many constituents joined (including LIGA). In addition, age and ethnic discrimination is also an issue in this region.

2

New Labor Code

As the legal expert of Liga pointed out, ILO looked into the new labor code in 2011 and issued a statement in which it made many recommendations. Moreover, a new, comprehensive examination of the labor code was believed to occur in 2014 to analyze the compatibility of this piece of legislation and ILO standards. The director pointed out that less than 2 years have passed thus it may be too early to assess its effect right now. Ovidiu Jurca added that the ILO made a series of recommendations, but they were not all retained by the Hungarian government. However, any ILO constituent can file a complaint to ILO and request an investigation and the issuance of a statement regarding the compatibility of any labor related laws with ILO standards. Such an opinion is of technical in nature and is not binding. ILO does not, however, initiate ex officio investigations on its own motion outside the regular standard supervisory mechanisms. Mr. Jurca also added that the new Code Civil approximates civil law and labor law. The latter is the background legislation of the sooner at this time. The effect of this approach may pose interesting issues in the long run.

Assistance of the Subregional Office

The director emphasized that ILO may provide assistance in many fields and various forms. If any constituent requests, ILO is happy to provide documentation and information regarding relevant issues. ILO is also happy to hold training sessions for trade unions. Such trainings could focus on the operation of ILO, its instruments and means that could be used by trade unions in labor disputes. It would also raise awareness in this field. It could also entail the exact type of assistance which it could offer to the trade unions when necessary.

Social Dialogue

The legal expert of LIGA pointed out that social dialogue has undergone substantive changes in Hungary lately. It is very troubling that many labor related bills do not go through tripartite forums. In addition, there are no truly

tripartite forums in Hungary any more. The director responded that countries have the sovereignty to introduce different forms of social dialogue. The Hungarian system is not unprecedented, it is called tripartite plus. He also emphasized that there are however some issues which strictly belong to the tripartite constituents to agree upon. In addition, it is crucial to maintain social dialogue in every country and to try to settle dispute there.

Finally, the director likes Hungary very much. He is looking forward to the challenges in his position and encourages trade unions to build relations with the subregional office which is always within hearing distance.

Interview prepared by: Adam Keri, Legal Expert, LIGA