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**Integrating refugees and people excluded from the labour market:  
new prospects for social dialogue in Europe.**

The GEPO colloquium on the topic “*Integrating refugees and people excluded from the labour market: new prospects for social dialogue in Europe*” was held from 4 to 8 October 2017 at the CEFOS in Remich, attended by participants from 9 countries.

The encounter reviewed the results of previous GEPO conferences held in 2010, 2012 and 2013 on the issue of migrants and social dialogue. This year’s colloquium too was designed around the logic of a lot of workers’ movements: SEE – ASSESS - ACT. The 2017 colloquium had a twofold purpose: for one thing, the focus of attention went out to the issue of an inclusive labour market which is making itself felt with the arrival of migrants/refugees in Europe, and for another to the future of and prospects for the millions of jobseekers and the numerous Europeans who are excluded from the labour market, who also expect prospects for their reintegration. All around Europe, large numbers of European workers are affected by the fear of social decline. This article is the upshot of the findings, the analysis and the choices developed through reflection. At the same time, the programme sought to transcend the national realities, as the participants’ usual reference frame. The European dimension of the issues and approaches had to come clearly to the fore.

The colloquium was prepared by the participants by way of a questionnaire which had been sent out beforehand, inviting them to adopt a position on three statements relating to the reception of refugees/migrants, “the shock” between the values of the newcomers and those held by Europeans, and the threat experienced by the latter of losing their social achievements. The participants were asked to specify the role played in this regard by the workers’ organisations as well as the impact of the measures put in place by the European Union, and to appraise the discrepancies that exist between reality and what is desirable. From the outset, the outcomes of this preparatory work were shared with the entire group, serving as the bedrock for the discussions between the various participants.

The first speaker, Mr Sylvain BESCH, who is an expert on migration/refugee matters attached to the CEFIS, presented an analysis of the situation of the refugees and the labour market in Europe. The novelty of his contribution lay in the way he sketched the wide diversity of the life situations of workers, immigrants or otherwise, in relation to each of the EU member states. Underscoring the

wide diversity of the situations of migrants, Mr BESCH sought to demonstrate the struggle to arrive at a coherent European policy in respect of refugees and migrants on the one hand, and the discrepancy between the values propounded and the values practised by Europe, on the other. The subsequent discussion brought this discrepancy into sharper focus.

This was followed by a lecture from Mr Mikaël FRANSSENS, who specialises in migration policy issues at the CIRÉ (Coordination et initiatives pour réfugiés et étrangers). Mainly working around issues in the areas of labour law and the link between migration and migration policies on the one hand, and the labour market and social laws on the other, Mr Franssens showed that the integration of refugees - or foreigners in general - is a key issue which concerns us all and goes far beyond things like language training courses, reception paths and other measures of this ilk. He showed that, as Europeans, we are facing a major moral dilemma: the fear of being overrun by migrants who are overwhelming our social structures, our culture and our way of life. The feeling of being swamped is causing policies to be put in place whose principles are contrary to several of our most elementary values. To move forward, he invited us to challenge the driving forces behind this fear and its underlying assumptions.

The initiatives of two associations who are working towards the integration of refugees in Luxembourg society - ADEM and CARITAS – were met with the participants' readiness to come up with concrete suggestions in response to the problems encountered in endeavouring to integrate migrants and refugees into the world of work with the support of larger institutions. The exchange with the group as a whole saw a lot of to-ing and fro-ing between a wide range of different experiences.

This approach was complemented by the contribution by Paul ZULEHNER, Professor Emeritus of the University of Vienna, theologian and sociologist specialising in European Christianity, on the fear of migrants. Setting out from the Austrian experience, Professor Zulehner showed that, faced with the arrival of migrants/refugees, there are two antagonistic sides: the camp of anger and the camp of hope. Refusing to distinguish between political refugees and economic migrants, he reminded those working on the ground that we are, that the major challenges are not the reception but the integration of these people in a society where fear and anxiety is created and fuelled. The key to stepping away from a society of fear and towards embracing a society of hope is solidarity. This solidarity comes from education and close-up encounters with the faces of people and our stories and backgrounds (celebrating together to get to know one another).

The colloquium's proceedings were all the more worthwhile thanks to the prior preparation of the various organisations taking part. To facilitate the take-up of the colloquium topic, the member-associations were sent three statements.

We were keen to nourish the debate between those working on the ground by asking them to react to these three assertions: 1. There is no longer enough work for everybody in our countries, so it is impossible to let in refugees; 2. We hold values which enable us to live together, whereas the refugees are threatening to call these values into question; 3. The efforts of the trade unions have

improved the living conditions of European workers, the arrival of refugees is now threatening to throw us back. The experience on the ground has shown that neither jobs nor the work available in our countries are under threat from the arrival of migrants, that their arrival in Europe enriches the European cultures, provided we move towards intercultural societies in Europe. The decline of the social *acquis* and the fact that it is under attack is nothing to do with the arrival of migrants, but is due to the neoliberal policies put in place by the EU.

The next stage got under way with the lecture by Jean-Claude BRAU, a Belgian Biblicist and exegete, and a former member of the GEPO's executive, has longstanding experience in working with the European bodies. His lecture, entitled "What does the Bible say on the encounter with and the place of strangers?", set out from our personal encounters both as strangers and with strangers, which he cross-matched with the experience of the Bible's authors. Jean-Claude showed how the Bible holds several answers to how strangers may be met (written around the same time, the Book of Ruth and the Book of Esdras offer different answers). But both put forward an invitation as their shared leitmotif: "*We are all sons and daughters of strangers*".

The group visited the Luxembourg village of Schengen, which epitomises the freedom of movement in some EU countries. Jean-Claude's contribution was singled out for praise by the group during their guided visit to the Schengen Museum. Against today's background, marked by violence and terrorist attacks in certain EU countries, sparking the temptation to want to protect European citizens, what can Schengen mean today? What do national borders and the freedom of European citizens signify today?

Before closing with concrete experiences as requested by EZA whose field of operation is the inclusion of migrants in the world of work as the cornerstone for social inclusion, and having visited the Tri-State point, the group had the opportunity to hear Roger Cayzelle, trade unionist and retired member of the CFDT (*the French Democratic Confederation of Labour*), and the chairman of CESE (*the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council*). The topic: "*Social dialogue: an issue that should transcend those who participate in the labour market. Do we need a new kind of trade unionism?*" Setting out from the experience of the CFDT trade union, Cayzelle not only recognises that the French trade unions are struggling to reach out to those who could do with being defended by the trade unions. One feels that, under the influence of the populist currents in France, of which some ideas are also endorsed by trade union members, people are avoiding to address the issue of refugees and migrants.

Lastly, in "landing" in the realities of nationwide action, the group went on to reflect on the European dimension which the GEPO is meant to uphold, in stimulating the inclusion of this dimension in the prospects for and the action of its various members.

Pontien Kabongo, 13 October 2017.