

Trade Union Practices in the EU and Latvia: Experience for Eastern Partnership Countries

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Abstract: *The article will show major dimensions in the experience of EU Member States that could be shared with the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. The framework of the study is the EU concept of trade unions in social dialogue and social partnership in the public sector. This study outlines the concept of social dialogue as a core element of industrial relations and will focus on industrial relations specifically in the public sector.*

The authors have elaborated the approach to industrial relations and social dialogue taking into account comparative approach to definitions provided by international institutions such as ILO and OECD, as well as institutions in the EU and Latvia. Latvia is also a case study for Eastern Partnership countries as these countries and their trade unions are in a transition period from socialist structures to structures that possess liberal economies. Trade unions in these countries are members of the International Trade Union Confederation. The major transformation that trade unions underwent from being part of the socialist system and becoming an independent institution since Latvia regained independence in 1991 has been studied. The paper discusses the current developments related to the position of Latvian Free Trade Union Federation in the system of decision-making process related to the public administration management. Finally, the prospective role of trade unions in the EU and in Latvia is analysed and possible revitalisation of trade union is discussed. This approach could be applied to the Eastern Partners of the EU.

Keywords: *EU Eastern Partnership, legislation, social dialogue, social partnership, trade unions*

1. Introduction

The social, economic, and political processes of the 21st century are characterised by mutual dependence and interaction (Schwab, 2012, pp. 4–12), which clearly indicates the increasing complexity of these processes as well as the links between various problems in the society. Some of the most important factors affecting the global labour market are rapid technological development, demographic trends, migration, economy measures taken by the countries as well as the trend to reduce production and labour costs (ILO, 2013, pp. 31–55). As a result of the interaction of these processes, entrepreneurs look for possibilities to shift the labour-intensive production units to more cost-effective locations. In addition, there is a never-ceasing search for new types of work organisation that would allow for even more efficiency of the labour market and rise of competitiveness of the participating parties.

According to past experience, trade unions are one of the leading actors in these consultations, as they appear to be an important partner for several governments trying to take measures necessary for regaining and strengthening the macro-economic stability while maintaining social guarantees and protection. In addition, trade unions have contributed a lot by way of collective bargaining and social dialogue, thus mitigating the consequences faced by the employees during the economic, financial and debt crisis and recession of 2008–2012. Work on the change of governance is occupying an increasingly pre-eminent position in European social dialogue.

2. The role of trade unions in the public administration decision-making process

Various political, economic, social, and legal processes have influenced the significance of trade unions in modern society and public administration decision-making process (Hyman, 2013, pp. 161–182), as well as on different aspects of trade unions' members recruitment (Turner *et al.*, 2011), on the role of labour unions in public administration (Lasierra, 2007), the perceptions of trade unions by their members (Zammit & Rizzo, 2002) as well as issues on

the increasing importance of public marketing within public administration (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009), on lifetime earnings (Dickson *et al.*, 2014). Development and institutionalisation of trade unions is studied by looking at the changes to the political, social, and economic systems of the EU Member States and other countries. The authors have also tracked the social differentiation processes that have promoted the current fragmentation in the trade unionism in Europe. States play one of the key roles in building public processes; however, also social partners, including trade unions, may have a significant influence on the public administration decision-making process. Social and economic changes in the society often depend on whether trade unions are able to protect their position and interests of employees on the national and international level. Employees and employers' unions affect decision-making processes on the international level by signing bilateral and multilateral international contracts and discussing and amending these contracts at international forums and discussions.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) could be one of the mechanisms for the cooperation with the UN, the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. In order for trade unions to function efficiently, it was important to obtain a set of rights to ensure the representation of employees' (1) rights to strike; and (2) rights to represent employees in collective bargaining procedure (Böckerman & Uusitalo, 2006, pp. 283–303). When the representation was accepted and an agreement was reached regarding collective bargaining in the largest sectors and enterprises (Przeworski, 1991, pp. 55–69), the mutual recognition process was possible. Collective bargaining is a voluntary process in which employers and representatives of employees participate and which is aimed at establishing working conditions and regulating the mutual relations between the employers and employees. The mentioned functions of trade unions are consistent basic functions of trade unions also nowadays, although their implementation depends on the role of trade unions in the society and social partnership.

In the author's opinion, trade unions are mainly collective employees' organisations whose members are employed and/or unemployed persons. Trade unions still engage many (elected) participants who do a voluntary or part-time job for the benefit of organisation. Nowadays, the legal regulations for voluntary trade union organisations in the EU Member States are more or less similar. Trade unions have to be responsible and comply with set requirements, including the provision of organisational and financial independence. The nature and actual performance of these requirements are varied, although the general EU-level framework is necessary for both the international and over-time comparison

and the implementation of bipartite and tripartite social dialogue among the European states, as it is related with the number of represented members.

Representation of trade unions and their influence on the public administration decision-making process depend on various factors, including the level of participation, that is, the number of members in absolute numbers and in relation to employment level. Also the role of the union and its manager in building the public opinion is important. Methodology, definitions, and questions for studying the activities of trade unions in various countries and regions differ. Trade unions differ by various criteria and indicators, as well as in terms of participation level depending on the state practice and its socio-economic evolution. In addition, trade unions and confederations do not communicate exact data. The scientific literature studies two models of trade unions, depending on their key objectives:

1. Business trade unions—represent the interests of the employed;
2. Welfare trade unions—perform radical social and political activities.

The authors also offer the classification of the following models:

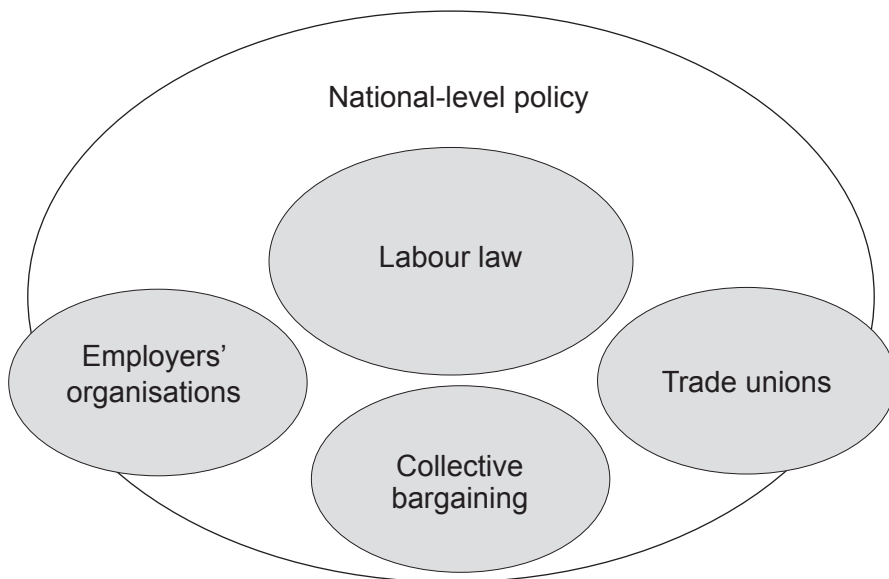
3. Social partner unions—these have been created with the aim to harmonise the opinions of the employees and social partners;
4. Trade unions that have transformed from a trade union in which a state plays a decisive role in shaping the parameters of trade union practice to a trade union that is the state's social partner.

Trade unions have been included in the political and economic system of nearly all countries, and they will retain their importance not only due to the fact that they unite and organise employers, but also because they step in for social justice and democracy. The attention of academic researchers has been paid to new challenges for the trade unions in relation to public administration decision making, such as government information networks (Janowski *et al.*, 2012), and quality management (Roper, 2000). At the same time, it should be stressed that the models of trade unions which exist in the modern market economy become less explicit and actual. The authors conclude that the modern European labour relations system and participation of trade unions in the public administration decision-making process is based on the aforementioned European traditions in building labour relations and requests of European Union institutions in democratisation of decision making in public administration by involvement of social partners, including trade unions.

According to the general practice, institutional factors (government policy, institutional structure of public administration, legislation) play an important role in the development and implementation of labour relations (see Fig. 1). In this Figure the inter-relation of institutional factors and their influence on the labour relations is demonstrated. Currently, a new trend can be observed in the labour relations in the EU: labour relations are present not only in the private sector (enterprise level), but also in the public sector (state administration). The public sector's trade unions have to accept changes in the status of employment of civil servants and remuneration system more and more often. (European Commission, 2011)

In relation to the role of trade unions in the public administration decision-making process, the authors conclude that implementation of trade union functions depends on their role in the society and the development of social dialogue and social partnership. Trade unions exist as a possibility to solve the problems of social dialogue and have a direct influence on the employment and social policy.

Figure 1. Labour relations and the institutional factors affecting them



Source: Developed by Sergejs Stacenko based on the literature gathered by the authors (ETUI, 2013; Clauwaert et al., 2008, pp. 88–103)

3. Trends in the development of social partnership and trade unionism in modern Europe

Both similarities and differences of various levels and forms can be observed in the development trends of social dialogue in various countries and regions. In order to have a better understanding of the trade union trends within the EU social dialogue, the authors have studied the development and genesis of trade unions, as well as factors affecting the role of trade unions in the public administration decision-making process. The authors conclude that the policy, labour market, society and institutions mainly establish trends of trade union operation. The success of trade unions and their capability to represent the interests of the employees depends on the number and activities of members of trade unions. Analysis of the ex-Soviet states in the Central and Eastern Europe, i.e. the Baltic States, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, allows the authors to conclude that they have experienced the largest decrease in the number of members of trade unions in Europe since 1990. The number of trade union members in the EU-15 fell from 33 per cent in 1990 to 24.4 per cent in 2008, while in the Central and Eastern Europe from 59 to 19 per cent, respectively (European Commission, 2013, p. 76). The most significant decrease in the number of trade union members was observed in Lithuania (-47.7%), Estonia (-43.6%), Slovakia (-43.4%), the Czech Republic (-27.9%), and Poland (-25.5%) (Visser, 2011). Such tendency in the Central and Eastern Europe can be explained with the lack of traditions in establishing trade unions and collective bargaining, poor activity of trade unions at the enterprise level, and increasing migration of labour force after 2004; as a result of the aforementioned, the activity of trade unions is fragmentary and the level of trust of employees in trade union activity is extremely low. According to experts, the most widespread perception in the Central and Eastern Europe (Dimitrova & Vilroks, 2005) is that employees' organisations are not good and useful (Kohl, 2008, pp. 107–130), that they are too weak, and that they are nevertheless necessary to protect the interests of employees.

According to the authors' view, such controversial situation has been created by the interaction of two parallel processes: "the socialist heritage" in the activities of trade unions and public perception, and the efforts of the Central and Eastern European countries to re-orient the activities of trade unions according to free market conditions. Such a situation does not promote the popularity of trade unions and, as a result, trade unions in the Central and Eastern European countries face distrust and low level of interest of employees in their work. In addition, the lack of traditions and poor activity of trade unions on the enterprise level

in Central and Eastern Europe prevent them to be recognised as associations. Instead, employees associate them more with management. The reason for the low popularity of trade unions could be their limited authority and influence on the public administration decision-making processes. The institutional framework of the EU provides trade unions with the possibility to participate in the public administration decision-making process and dialogue with employers' organisations; however the low percentage of employees participating in trade unions hinders the use of full potential of trade unions. As a result, the trade unions in the Central and Eastern Europe countries are weak and are not able to use the authority entrusted with them within the social dialogue.

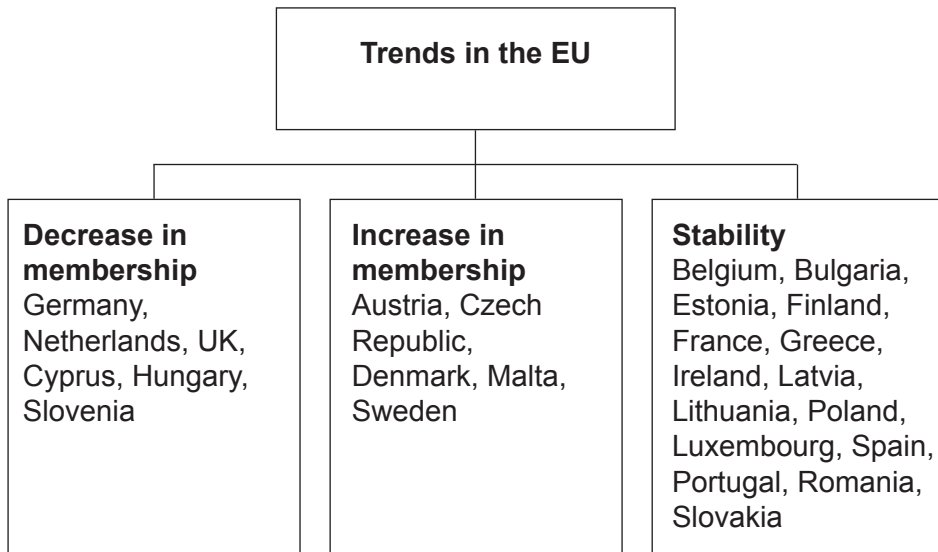
The low participation in trade unions could be explained also with the fact that it gives its members no visible benefits. The opinion of participants on the benefits and advantages offered by the union is often called the "objective value"; it includes increments and social guarantees, as well as subjective considerations on other possible advantages arising out of the employees' trust in the trade union.

The authors conclude that there are several explanations for the passivity of employees in the ex-Soviet countries; however, the opinion of individuals and the general society has crucial importance in the operation of trade unions in the Central and Eastern European countries, since trade unions are in fact established by individuals. In the authors' opinion, managers of trade unions in Central and Eastern Europe should build a constructive dialogue with the society and explain it the role and potential of trade unions in solving social and labour-related issues. Trade union managers have the possibility to convince employees on the usefulness of trade unions and gain their support; although it should be remembered that this may take time.

Further analysis of the density of trade unions allows for the conclusion that the trend of reduction in the number of trade unions continued in Germany, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Slovenia, and Cyprus in 2011, while the number of trade union participants increased in the Czech Republic, Malta, Sweden, Austria, and Denmark (see Fig. 2).

Several researchers conclude that trade unions are ageing and that they tend to represent the public sector. However, there are big differences among the EU Member States also within this general trend; for example, the share of members range from 70 per cent in Finland to 7.6 per cent in Estonia and 7.7 per cent in France (Visser, 2011). The authors think that several factors that have promoted the decrease in the number of members of trade unions in the EU Member States arise out of the changes that have taken place in the structure

Figure 2. Changes in the number of members of trade unions since 2000



Source: Developed by Sergejs Stacenko based on the data acquired from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions and summarised by the authors (Eurofound, 2012; EIRO, 2013)

of national economies over the last decades (e.g., the number of employed in the manufacturing sector has fallen as a result of technological progress, the importance of service sector has grown significantly in the labour relations, and more and more employees work at small and medium-sized enterprises.

As a result of these changes:

- There is a trend of smaller number of young people joining trade unions;
- There are difficulties in attracting and keeping members of trade unions in the services sector;
- There are problems to attract and keep members of trade unions in small enterprises;
- There are difficulties in attracting and keeping those members of trade unions who work under flexible and/or fixed-term employment contracts.

A drop in the number of employees in trade unions has a negative impact not only on the representation and influence of trade unions, but also on their capability to act. As the number of members decreases, trade unions lose the financial and also administrative and human (expertise) resources, which are

crucial for ensuring their efficient operation. Less number of participants means less financial means available to trade unions.

The authors conclude that in the EU and in the world the main trends are the reducing of density of trade unions and necessity for the renewal of trade unions and uniting of trade unions with other organisations as well as decentralisation of collective bargaining.

4. Approaches towards increasing the effectiveness of trade unions in social partnership in public administration's decision-making processes

In order to determine the role of the social partnership of trade unions in public authorities' decision making and potential directions for improvement, the authors carried out a number of empirical studies:

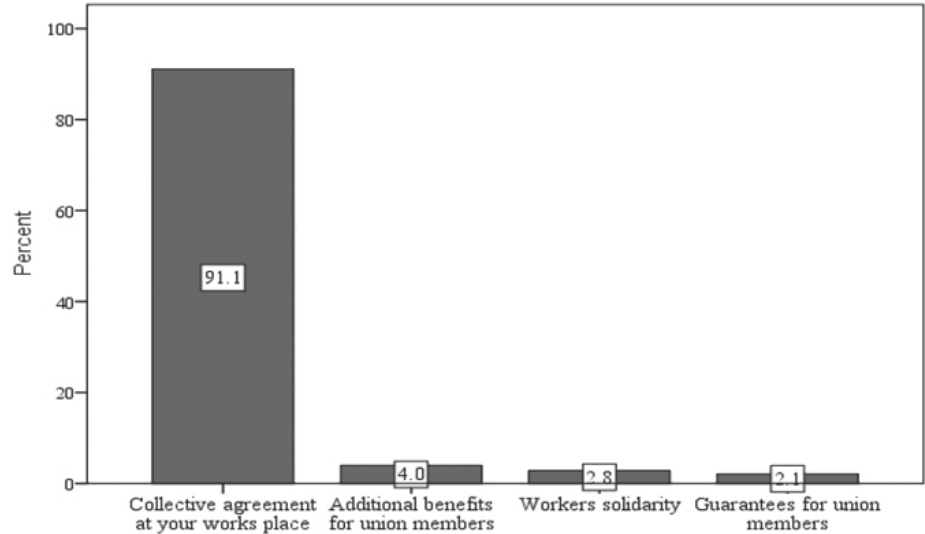
- A survey among experts knowledgeable of trade union activities and public administration process related to partnership process issues;
- A survey of trade union members in different sectors and regions;
- Latvian population's survey on the role and activities of trade unions.

The main reason why the majority of trade union members have joined trade unions was the existence of a collective agreement at their work place, this was considered significant by 91.1 per cent of respondents. This emphasises the high significance of collective agreements, which forms a basis for the regulation of many labour relations and long-term attraction of employees to a particular workplace (see Fig. 3).

Involvement of trade union members in various events organised by trade unions is very important. Most trade union members have attended meetings and other events (about 41.1%), have participated in regional meetings and activities (25.8%) and in strikes (24.3%) (see Fig. 4).

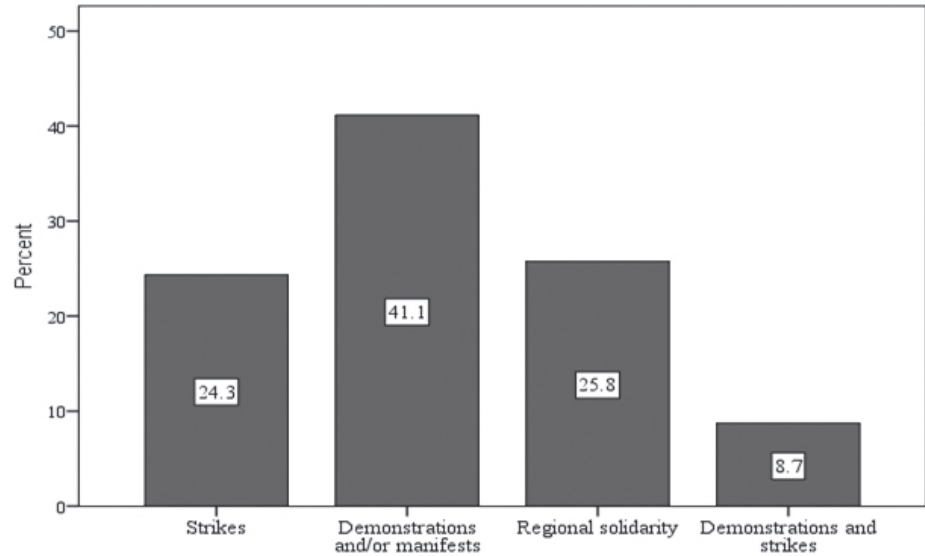
Of the trade union members, 91.7 per cent emphasised that trade unions are involved in negotiations with the management of their work place concerning the firing of employees, and only 8.3 per cent are not involved. The total of 25.6 per cent of the trade union members indicated that negotiations with the management of their work place concerning the release of employees have been successful. Experts indicated that the main priority of trade unions creating most benefits for their members is the provision of legal protection concerning issues

Figure 3. Rates for reasons to join a trade union, n=426



Source: Calculations by the authors on the basis of a 2011 survey of trade union members by Sergejs Stacenko

Figure 4. Trade union members' participation in events organised by trade unions, n=426



Source: Calculations by the authors on the basis of a 2011 survey of union members by Sergejs Stacenko

of labour law. The majority of the trade union members seeking their assistance have received it in solving labour law problems. Altogether, 92.5 per cent of the trade union members who requested the trade union's help stated that trade unions have been even very helpful.

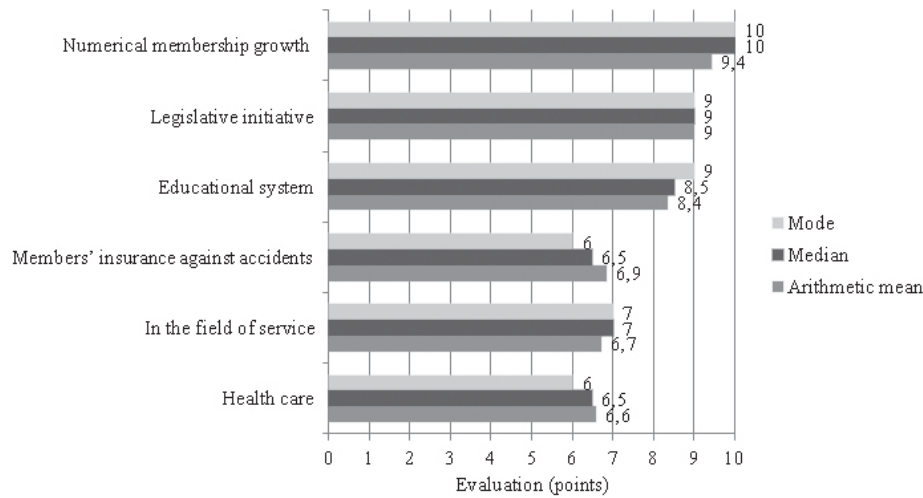
Trade unions rather seldom invite members to discussions concerning the development and implementation of the work place's operational strategy. Only about 32.6 per cent of the members of trade unions indicated that members are invited to discussions concerning the development and implementation of the organisation's operational strategy. Of the union members 28.1 per cent indicated that trade union is not invited to discussions, while 39.2 per cent are not informed whether they are being invited.

There are various views concerning the ways of strengthening the capacity of trade unions as a social partner (results of experts' survey). Experts of trade unions consider quantitative growth of the number of members of trade unions as a very important feature for the expansion of trade unions. Other important features are the legislative initiative of trade unions and the activities of trade unions in the education system. The experts assessed slightly lower the significant prospects of trade unions development, personal accident insurance of the members of trade unions, as well as perspectives in the area of services provision and also in health care. The average assessment of prospective areas for the development of trade unions given by experts is shown in Figure 5.

The results of the survey of members of trade unions indicate that trade unions mainly attract new members by offering them guarantees and health insurance; 46 per cent of the members of trade unions indicated that trade unions are attracting members by offering them guarantees, while 41.7 per cent said that members are attracted with health insurance. The members mentioned less other activities of the trade unions—health insurance and Christmas gifts, Christmas gifts to former/current members and/or children of members, guarantees to members of trade unions and Christmas gifts, professional training, lunch vouchers (see Table 1).

Trade union experts assessed highly, and considered significant, the objectives set concerning the future role of trade unions—to represent the interests of employees at all levels; to care for the provision of social guarantees; to assist in strengthening good relations between employees and employers; to take care of health and safety at work; to provide legal protection on labour law issues; to think about the creation of new services for the members; to increase the members' wages; to develop new strategies to attract new members; involvement

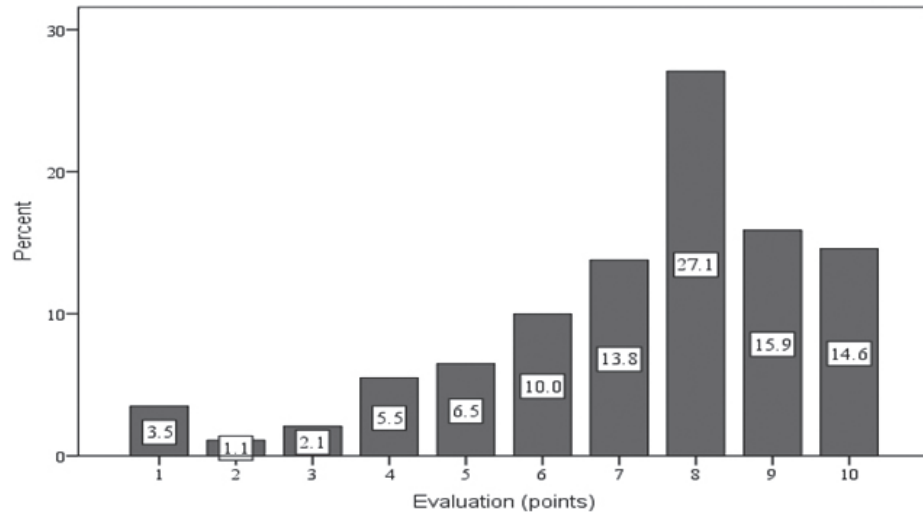
Figure 5. Average values of the trade unions' development according to perspective fields, ratings by trade unions' experts, n=14*



Source: Calculations by the authors on the basis of the 2011 union experts' survey by Sergejs Stacenko

* Ratings a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not important and 10 is very important

Figure 6. Evaluation by respondents of the Latvian population regarding the assistance of the trade unions in solving employment problems, n=1093*



Source: Calculations by authors on the basis of the 2012 survey of residents by Sergejs Stacenko

* Ratings on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1—has not helped; 10—has helped a lot

of young people in the activities of trade unions. It has to be noted that the assessment of the set objectives was rather homogenous which is evidenced by variable indicator values (standard deviation, variable volume).

Table 1. Trade unions' activities to attract new members, n=426

Trade unions' offers	Number of respondents	%
Guarantees for the members of trade union	195	46,0
Professional education	2	0.5
Health insurance	177	41.7
Lunch vouchers	1	0.2
Christmas gifts for present/former members and/or members' children	21	5.0
Guarantees and health insurance for the members of trade union	1	0.2
Guarantees and Christmas gifts for the members of trade union	5	1.2
Health insurance and Christmas gifts for the members of trade union	22	5.2
Total	424*	100

Source: Calculations by the authors on the basis of the 2011 survey of union members by Sergejs Stacenko

* *The number of respondents who answered the questions*

Results of Latvia's population survey indicated that trade unions can also act as a support for employees to preserve their jobs. Of all the country's residents, 91.7 per cent indicated that the trade union could have helped to preserve their job, when the employer wanted to terminate the working relations.

The majority of respondents highly appreciated the assistance of trade unions in solving labour law relation issues. Of them, 14.6 per cent indicated that trade unions were very helpful; 43 per cent said that the help of trade unions was very significant and only 3.5 per cent of the residents indicated that trade unions have not helped. Assessment of the responses of the Latvian population concerning the help of trade unions in solving problems with labour law are presented in Figure 6.

The assessment of the Latvian population was significantly different with very big probability depending on the area of economy that the respondent was involved in, which is evidenced by chi-square Kruskal-Wallis test ($\chi^2 = 250.089$, $p = 0.000$) results.

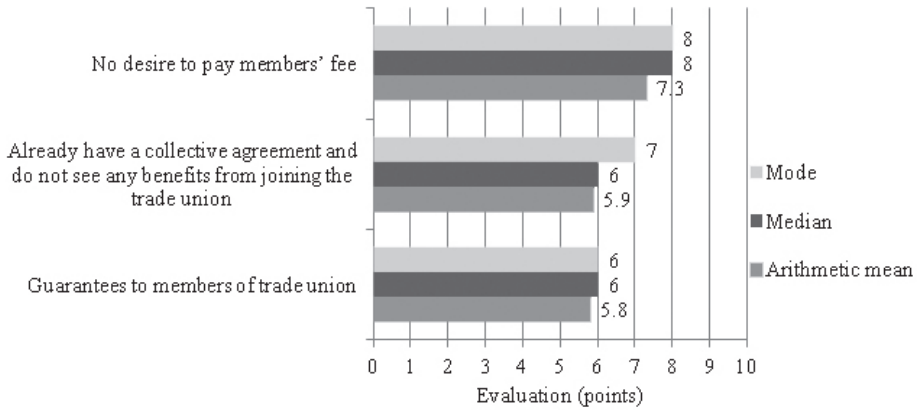
However, the majority of the Latvian population noted that they are not willing to join the trade union, mentioning reluctance to pay the membership fee as the main reason (most evaluations given on the 10 point scale were 8—characterised by mode, half of the respondents gave evaluation less than 8, half of the respondents gave evaluation bigger than 8—characterised by the median). Also, among the almost significant reasons for not joining the trade union the following were mentioned: the organisation already has a collective agreement and they do not see any benefits from joining the trade union and no guarantees to members of trade unions (see Fig. 7).

Although the evaluations of the respondents (inhabitants/residents) are relatively high, it must be noted that the assessment of the reasons behind the unwillingness of residents to join the trade unions was not homogenous, which is indicated by the variation ratios. The reason which exhibited the widest assessment variation was that the organisation already has a collective agreement and sees no benefit from joining the trade union. This is evidenced by a rather high mode (7), which means that the highest proportion of the respondents gave the evaluation 7, with rather big median (6), which means that half of respondents gave evaluation 6 and half of the respondents gave evaluation 6, average of arithmetic mean as 5.9 (in a ten-point scale evaluation) with the large variation ratios: the standard deviation of 2.253 points indicates that the mean variation of assessment by residents around the arithmetical mean was 2.253 points. As to the other reasons—guarantees to the members of trade unions and hesitation to pay the membership fee had high average evaluations with mode and median of 8, with arithmetic mean of 7.3, and with wide differences in evaluations variation, the standard deviation being 2.216 and 2.179 points, respectively.

For some respondents, the reason for not joining the trade union was that trade unions are associated with the representation of the interests of shareholders/managers, not the employees. Of the respondents 5.8 per cent did indicate with the lowest evaluations that their views of the trade unions are associated with the representation of shareholders/management but the views of the respondents are surprisingly different and cover the full scale of the possible evaluation points (see Fig. 8).

The reasons for not joining the trade unions for some respondents had to do with the attitude of management to members of trade unions and other employees at the respective institution/organisation not being members of trade unions. Of the respondents, 5.1 per cent indicated that the management's treatment of the members and non-members of trade unions is unequal. The assessment of respondents concerning equal treatment of management of the organisation concerning members of the trade unions and employees not being members

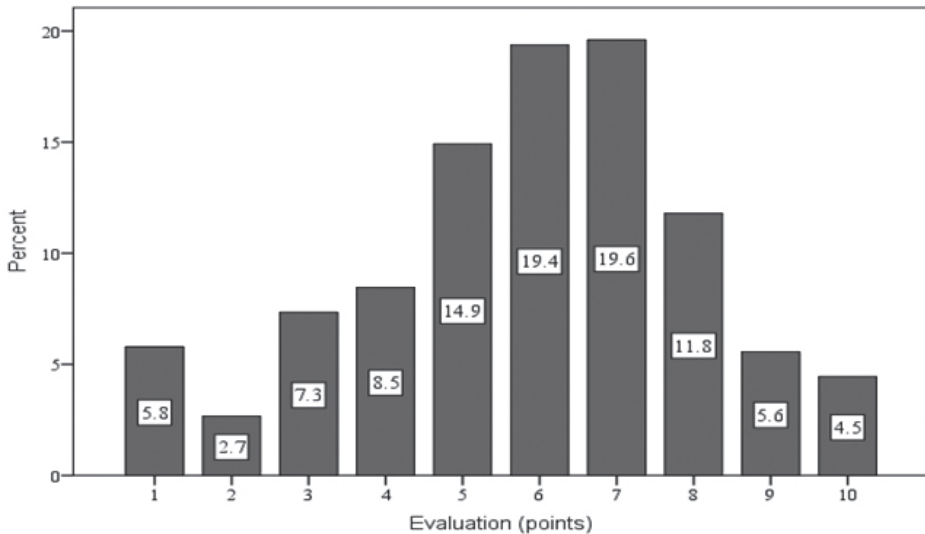
Figure 7. Average levels for the assessment of the reasons for the inhabitants not to join the trade union, n=1093*



Source: Calculations by the authors on the basis of the 2012 survey of residents by Sergejs Stacenko

* Ratings on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not important and 10 is very important

Figure 8. Assessment of the impact of reasons (trade unions associate with owners'/ management's, not the employees' representation of interests) on the population respondents' decision not to join a trade union, n=1093*



Source: Calculations by the authors on the basis of the 2012 survey of residents by Sergejs Stacenko

* Ratings on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1—association with the owners'/management's representation of interests; 10—association with the employees' representation of interests

of the trade union was statistically significantly different with high probability (0.992) depending on the economic sector in which the respondent was involved, which is evidenced by results of the chi-square Kruskal-Wallis test ($\chi^2 = 39.723$, $p = 0.008$).

Furthermore, the trust of the population respondents in trade unions was statistically significantly different with high probability, depending on the economic sector in which the respondent was involved, which is evidenced by results of the chi-square Kruskal-Wallis test ($\chi^2 = 35.176$, $p = 0.027$).

Many of the surveyed inhabitants/residents/respondents (31.3%) had not even received an invitation to join the trade union. The least share of persons invited was within the age group of 21 to 35 years, more than 64 per cent were in the age groups with higher than 46 invitations to join the trade unions, with the highest invited share in the age group of 56 to 65. The distribution of respondents by an offer to join a trade union division in age groups is represented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Distribution of respondents by an offer to join a union division in age groups, n=1093*

Age (in years)	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Below 20	1	20.0	4	80.0	5	100
21–35	23	18.1	104	81.9	127	100
36–45	46	37.1	78	62.9	124	100
46–55	100	64.5	55	35.5	155	100
56–65	500	89.3	60	10.7	560	100
Above 66	18	66.7	9	33.3	27	100
Total	688	68.9	310	31.1	998	100

Source: Calculations by the authors on the basis of the 2012 residents' survey

While the activities of the trade unions, for example, invitations to various activities, have been mentioned by most of the respondents, they are usually not involved in these activities. The trade unions were least likely to invite to discussions young people aged from 21 to 35 years and also those from 36 to 45 years.

It must be noted that in the population survey the respondents indicated that main reason for not joining the trade union is the reluctance to pay the membership fee. However, 91 per cent of the members of trade unions would not be willing

to change their status as members of the trade unions, if their salary would be increased and therefore also the contributions to the trade unions would increase, while only 9 per cent of respondents indicated that they would leave the trade unions if the contributions to the trade unions would increase.

The results of empirical research indicate the significance of trade unions activities and their future development potential as a social partner and influence the decision-making process in the public administration in Latvia.

5. Conclusions

Having analysed the definitions of ‘trade union’ provided by various authors in scientific literature, the authors conclude that these definitions vary considerably from country to country and from region to region. While the definitions reflect the socio-economic situation of a particular society’s development stage and the social model of the particular country, they do not provide for a sufficient characterisation of trade unions as a social partner in the public administration decision-making process.

Documents of international organisations and the EU include definitions describing trade unions as a social partner in the social dialogue. These definitions reflect the relations of trade unions with governments, employers, political parties, and non-governmental organisations.

The EU Eastern Partnership countries are experiencing development trends in trade union practices that are similar to all former socialist countries that are now Member States in the EU and which structure remains the same than the former Soviet trade union structures.

Nowadays, there are two conflicting trends observed of trade unions and social partnership in most of the new EU Member States. The first one suggests the decreasing numbers of members and organisations of trade unions. The second trend shows that the role of a trade union as a social partner has been strengthened along with Latvia joining international and EU structures and ratifying the ILO international conventions (ILO convention 98 and ILO 151) on labour relations and social dialogue. Trade unions of the Eastern Partnership countries are members of the International Trade Union Confederation and experience two similarly conflicting trends pointed in the conclusion above.

According to the results of surveys, employees who do not intend to participate

in trade unions do not use the possibility to gain authority within an enterprise/organisation where they work and at the same time such employees do not participate actively in the bipartite and later also tripartite social discussion. Employees do not see trade unions as a tool for representing their interests and affecting the decision-making process. Such a situation has emerged in Latvia owing to the fact that many employees are not aware of their rights and thus do not use their possibilities to participate in bipartite or tripartite social discussion.

The low participation in trade unions and their fragmentary activities are one of the reasons why there are no strong collective strategies of trade unions in Latvia and why the trade unions in Latvia are often disregarded as an equal partner; this matches the conclusions regarding the factors affecting the operation of trade unions drawn by the authors in the research.

The Latvian experience could be a model for the Eastern Partnership countries in the field of trade union developments, involvement of trade unions in decision making for public administrations and their influence on the social life of the countries' population.

Biruta Sloka is professor at the University of Latvia (UL). Since 2000, Biruta Sloka has been involved in the process of launching and teaching courses in European Studies master's programme at the UL; she was vice-director of EuroFaculty and leader of the EuroFaculty Riga Centre from 2000 to 2005. Her research focuses on issues related to European integration and the transformation process of former socialist countries. Since 2000, Biruta Sloka is involved in the research activities of the Centre for European and Transition Studies, she is chairperson of the Baltic Studies programme Council at the UL, President of the Latvian Statisticians Association, board member of Professors Association of Latvia, and a member of the Association of Econometrists of Latvia. She has been involved in EU, the World Bank, and UNDP research projects.

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