

Wages and salary levels will determine the future of Europe

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, November 29, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The long-term survival of the European Union depends on eradicating the current wage gap between eastern and western member states – according to leading speakers at a conference in Brussels on Monday.

The international conference, entitled "Equal pay for equal work", was opened by Mr. Zoltán Balczó, MEP and main patron of the event, who said:

"Distinguished economists, business leaders and labour representatives discussed the causes and consequences of the enormous wage differences between the member states today. We believe the current situation is unsustainable, counter to the long-term interests of all countries within the EU and ultimately a threat to the very survival of the Union."

Those addressing the conference included: Péter Róna (fellow, Oxford University), Monika Ladmanova (senior adviser to the European Commission), Frédéric Petit (French MP), Paolo Marcos (Independent Trade Union Confederation), Liene Dobeles (EY), Tamás Meszerics (MEP, European Greens) and Przemysław Worek (Polish Solidarity Federation).

Participants said the huge difference in wage levels between the Western and Eastern countries of the Union is the primary cause of mass migration to the richer, Western EU countries. This loss of human resources – or 'brain drain' – is a serious impediment to the future development of the eastern states, which is causing long-term damage to these countries that would eventually provoke political instability.

With this in mind, the conference declared that wage equalisation must become one of the fundamental objectives of the European community, to be realised according to a realistic time framework.

"This is nothing less than adhering to the EU's most basic reason for existence, namely the creation of a legal union to build a safe, secure and prosperous future for the peoples of Europe. If wage differences continue unchanged at current levels, the European Union will simply lose its legitimacy in the eyes of the public. The real measure of prosperity and public satisfaction is not the growth of GDP, but of real wages. If the EU fails to fulfil such basic needs, peace between nations and social strata will come under threat, with the risk of open conflict. Indeed, signs of such discontent can already be perceived," said Péter Róna.

The European Citizens' Initiative "WageUnion" was launched in March 2017 by individuals with a view to the European Commission taking the necessary steps to incorporate the issue of wage consolidation of the newly acceded member states into the statutes of the European Union.

Several European countries have joined the initiative - Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Poland, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia - and set up an eight-member Citizens' Committee to issue a motion to the European Commission. The Commission endorsed the WageUnion initiative in May 2017, meaning the next step requires a minimum of one million EU citizens signing up to support the initiative in at least seven EU member states.

On completion of the signature collection, the Commission will put the matter on the agenda and the organizers will be given the opportunity to present their initiative in a public hearing at the European Parliament.

The European Union can and should clearly be a partner in the creation of a project to establish wage parity, as evidenced by the annual evaluation of the Union by Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, last September. As the president said, "East to West: Europe must breathe

with both lungs. Otherwise our continent will struggle for air. In a Union of equals, there can be no second-class citizens." Mr Juncker advocated the establishment of a labour market supervisory body to ensure compliance with regulations within the Union.

Already, the EU proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, adopted on 17 November in Gothenburg, details twenty key principles for fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems within the EU member states. These include equal access to work, decent working conditions and wages, as well as rights of social protection, unemployment benefits and training. This and the "Europe of Equals" action-plan, issued on November 20, upholds the principle of equal pay for equal work regardless of gender. However, neither of these raises the challenges posed by geographical wage differentials - the issue directly addressed by the WageUnion initiative.

"We have launched a European Citizens' Initiative with the aim of catching up on the wage levels of our region which has support so far in eight Central and Eastern European countries. This initiative is the result of a decade-long omission. We are merely facing up to the fact that these wage differentials have resulted in damaging mass migration from each of our countries. As a result, we have decided to confront Europe with this issue, to ensure our rights are given due consideration under EU law," Márton Gyöngyösi, president of WageUnion, the European Citizens' Initiative, told the conference.

"We are not asking for any privileges or special deals. We are merely stating the truth about our everyday reality. We are asking only for just and equal treatment within the EU common market, that is, equal wages for equal work. We look forward to gathering one million signatures in support, and in welcoming the European Commission as a partner in solving this problem," Mr Gyöngyösi, added.

ENDS

Zsafia Lakatos
Emerald PR Kft
+36309289647
email us here

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