

We present your delegate from Slovakia!

Details

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The ESSDE delegate from Slovakia is Juraj Stodolovsky, Chief of Staff and Foreign Affairs Secretary of OZPŠaV (Trade Union of Workers in Education & Science).

Please, tell us about yourself and describe what a typical work day looks like for you!

Four years ago, I started to work in the trade union movement after completing my law studies successfully. As I did not find myself as a typical lawyer, I started to look for some other career opportunities which would provide me with the possibility to stay updated in public life, to meet new interesting people and to develop my professional skills.

My parents are both trade unionists and my mother is a teacher. Eventually, I appeared in an interview for a new position as Chief of Staff and Foreign Affairs Secretary at our trade union of workers in education and science of Slovakia. Having passed the interview successfully, I started to experience a totally new working life and environment.

My typical day at work is usually very diverse. After a quick session with my president and vice-presidents I go through my e-mails, reply to most urgent requests and try to

push forward long-term issues. I prepare meetings for our president and the statutory bodies. Often, I assist our leadership at various negotiations with state administration bodies and social partners. I also advise our president on current political and social issues, communicate with media, help to organize members regarding trade union events. I draft policy papers, write articles and announcements. Being in charge of international relations, I also communicate with ETUCE or EI, help to fill in surveys and organize foreign business trips for our trade union representatives.

For how long have you been involved in social dialogue both at national and at European level?

I have been involved in social dialogue at national level since the beginning of my work for our trade union. I often do join various meeting with our social partners as a reporter. Reports of all meetings regarding social dialogue are then published at our website to inform our members. At European level I have been the ESSDE delegate for the Slovak Republic for almost three years. Through this engagement, I was a member of the advisory group in the recent ESSDE project on social dialogue capacity building conducted by ETUCE, too.

What is the current situation with regard to the education social dialogue in your country?

Social dialogue in the education sector in Slovakia is quite stable.

However, during the last years we did not get around industrial actions to meet our requirements. In autumn 2012, having passed negotiations with the Ministry of Education and government without any success, we organized the biggest strike of pedagogical, vocational and non-pedagogical workers at all levels of education. Almost 80% school and university workers participated in the first strike days. Unfortunately, the number of demonstrators dropped rapidly as people were worried about their salaries. After three days of action we did not have any other chance but to suspend the strike and try resume negotiations with the government.

We must admit that our requirements were not fully met. However, that strike sparked a process of a rather significant increase of salaries in the education sector. Moreover, the whole society got interested in the quality of education and the working conditions at schools. Thereafter, our president organized regular meetings with the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finances. Traditionally, we work together on amendments of the legislation and we discuss also the possibilities to increase the education sector's budget.

A huge problem for Slovakia's education sector is the high turnover of Education Ministers. During the twenty three years since the independence of our country, we had eighteen ministers sharing different values, visions and approaches. It is very difficult to work on reforms in such a complicated environment and to develop good relations with the social partner who changes almost every year. Our trade union though keeps high communication standards and enjoys the respect of each new minister. Also, we do believe that usually negotiations and cooperation can be more fruitful than threats and quarrels.

Recently, we submitted to our government a declaration prepared together with our partner organizations including the main common requirements for system changes in pre-primary to university level education based on an adequate increase of financial support from the state budget. In order to highlight the unsatisfactory state of education in Slovakia and the insufficient guarantees in the new government manifesto, we just organized a protest gathering more than 8 000 participants.

What are the main issues at stake for your organization?

The main issues, which our trade union deals with, are collective bargaining, social dialogue, trainings for our members, dissemination of information, legal advice, activities.

We continue with our efforts to increase the social and economic status of teachers and also other employees in education.

Another challenge that we tackle is the reintegration of all employees in public education under the Ministry of Education. For this aim, we drew up a petition and got about 90 000 signatures. We believe that better salaries and a more pleasant school environment can attract better students for pedagogy studies. Furthermore, it helps children to enjoy the learning process and thus improve the results in worldwide testing of quality education in Slovakia.

What opportunities does your engagement in the ESSDE possibly open up for your work at home and vice versa?

The links between the national and the European sectoral social dialogue in education strengthens significantly. Despite education policy lies within the competence and responsibility of the EU Member States, we - through our ESSDE representative – can still make an impact on the development of the European sectoral social dialogue. Through this work we can also keep our work at national level updated with regards to the work at European level.

With regards to the very new ESSDE work program 2016-17, what topic lies at the heart of the concerns of your members and why?

Our members highlight some important topics in the current ESSDE work program 2016-17 regarding the Slovak education system.

These days, the topic „Making the teaching profession more attractive“ is more than relevant as we can see a declining interest among the best students when it comes to a possible career in the education sector. Then, „Vocational education and training and Apprenticeship“ is also connected to our recent situation in Slovakia since the new law on dual education and training has just come into force. „Continuous professional development“ and „Open and innovative education and training“ may also be valuable topics in the educational activities of our members.

In a nutshell: What makes a good dialogue?

Good social dialogue is mainly based on mutual respect and the understanding of each other's possibilities and needs. It is important that the Ministry of Education communicates with the trade unions and that coordinates its legal actions. It must also cooperate on changes in the education system. A fair, open and common approach in implementing system changes can result in satisfaction at the workers' side and thus lead to a higher level of quality education.