

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING NEWSLETTER



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This newsletter presents up-to-date information on collective bargaining developments across Europe. It aims to facilitate information exchange between trade unions and to support the work of the ETUC's collective bargaining committee.

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AUSTRIA

Substantial pay rise for public servants

January 29, 2008

The Austrian government has largely given in to the demands of the two unions involved, the Gewerkschaft Öffentlicher Dienst (GÖD) and the Gewerkschaft der Gemeindebediensteten (GdG) of the ÖGB confederation, and agreed on a one-year wage agreement for 2008, covering public servants of the state, federal states (Länder) and municipalities. On average, their incomes will increase by 3.3% on January 1, 2008: through compensations by 2.7%, with on top a non-recurrent allowance for everybody of Euro 175 in May 2008. The agreement implies the highest wage increases since years. Moreover, it has equalizing effects: those with the lowest incomes will receive a 3.8% wage increase, and those with the highest incomes 2.7%.

Other recent pay settlements in Austria include 3.3% pay rises for 70,000 employees of banks and financial institutions, and a 3.4% increase for private-sector bus drivers.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/r/163>; Watson Wyatt Data Services, *New Industrial Relations Europe*, 1/2008;

German: <http://www.goed.at/13891.html> and <http://www.gdg.at>)

BELGIUM

Pension rise requested

December 17, 2007

On December 17, trade unions and employers have unanimously requested the (future) government to increase the minimum pensions and the pensions entering over four years ago by 2% per January 1, 2008. The union confederations, ABVV and ACV, urge a new government to quickly implement this advice, as with rising consumer prices for food and energy the financial situation of many pensioners is growingly untenable.

(Dutch: http://www.abvv.be/code/nl/PersBerichten/2007/c04_07e36.HTM)

New 'bridge pensions' agreements signed

December 20, 2007

In the National Labour Council three important collective agreements have been signed, regarding:

'Bridge pension' from the age of 56 on, after a career of 40 years

Medical 'bridge pension' from the age of 58 on, after a career of 35 years (including handicapped persons, workers exposed to asbestos before 1993, and workers with recognized severe physical problems)

Prolongation of the 'bridge pension' from the age of 56 on, after 20 years in night shift in industries without functioning union representation

The ACV union confederation comments that, compared to earlier negotiations, a number of improvements have been reached, especially for workers that started working at a very young age.

(Dutch: <http://www.acv-online.be>)

Union confederations urge interim government

December 21, 2007

The Belgian union confederations, ABVV and ACV, have urgently asked the new interim government (Verhofstadt III) to maintain purchasing power and solidarity. According to the confederations, the new government should show three priorities: support the development of purchasing power; carrying out plans in the social field that have been waiting for quite some time; and strengthening solidarity and communication between the Belgian communities (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels). Concerning purchasing power, the union movement states that the intentions of lowering tax burdens for notably employers are clear, in contrast with to those concerning the indexation of pensions and wages. Taxes on wages should be lowered. The government is urged to put the brakes on the rise of energy prices and to enable energy saving for every citizen.

(Dutch: http://www.abvv.be/code/nl/c04_0000.HTM)

BULGARIA

Unions oppose arbitration plan

January 8, 2008

Bulgarian trade unions threatened to call a general strike in spring if the country's parliament passes a controversial amendment bill that would severely curtail the unions' rights to strike. The threat came from the chairman of KNSB, one of Bulgaria's two union confederations after a meeting with labour ministry officials and representatives of the Socialist party, the senior partner in the ruling coalition, and was supported by the chairman of the other major confederation, Podkrepa.

The amendments, authored by four Socialist MPs, would severely curtail unions' power to call strikes, requiring all labour disputes to go through an arbitration court with the labour ministry. The two confederations are demanding new legislation to establish the right to bargain collectively and to go on strike in compliance to international labour standards.

(English: Watson Wyatt Data Services, *New Industrial Relations Europe*, 1/2008;

http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=89185)

ESTONIA

New official minimum wage agreed

November 22, 2007

The Estonian Confederation of Trade Unions (EAKL) and the Estonian Employers' Confederation (ETTK) agreed on an official minimum monthly wage of EEK (kroons) 4,350 (Euro 278) for 2008. Compared with 2007, this represents an almost 21% increase in the minimum wage. Thus, the agreement paved the way for the biggest minimum wage increase in recent years. Nonetheless, this minimum still only represents 33% of the national average wage.

EAKL's chairman, Harri Taliga, stated that the offer of 4,200 kroons per month with which the employers came up earlier was disappointing, as the confederation had understood from media reports that the employers were ready to conclude the agreement at 4,500 kroons. Considering the large public interest of the outcome of the negotiations, the unions saw it as irresponsible to delay the accord for one more month. The official minimum wage in Estonia in 2007 was EEK 3,600 per month.

(English: <http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/19353>;

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2007/12/articles/ee0712019i.htm>)

FINLAND

Nurses' industrial action threat successful

November 26, 2007

On November 19, the Executive Council of TEHY, the nurses' and healthcare professionals' union, approved a negotiated pay deal by a mediation board in which negotiation parties were represented. A week later, the main negotiating parties in the municipal sector agreed too. The agreement meant that the industrial action was avoided: coordinated by TEHY, in October about 12,000 nurses and other health care professionals threatened to start a nationwide resignation campaign. Before it came to that, many nurses had already taken action by banning overtime. Their position was supported earlier in November, when researcher Kimmo Kevätsalo presented his findings based on *WageIndicator* outcomes for a TEHY audience, proving that the wages of Finnish nurses in international perspective were quite low.

The four-year contract gives TEHY's members pay increases of 22-28%. Job-related pay will be increased between Euro 350-650 per month, but members will also get a Christmas bonus of Euro 270 in December. Altogether, in the first two years the agreement will mean that TEHY members' wage increases will be 3-5% higher than those agreed for the other municipal workers. This means a further contribution to the catching up of the development of wages in female-dominated fields with those of others.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/r/173>; <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2007/11/articles/fi0711019i.htm>; <http://www.jhl.fi>; report of Kevätsalo in Finnish accessible via: http://www.wageindicator.org/main/publications/publicationsfolder_2007)

FRANCE

Widespread strikes and demonstrations in public sector

January 25, 2008

In a joint declaration as of January 25, public service federations (CGT – FO – FSU – CFDT – CFTC – UNSA – Solidaires) stated to be delighted by the level of support across the country for strikes and demonstrations over pay and collective bargaining of the day before. They emphasized that hundreds of thousands expressed their dissatisfaction over wages and employment in the public sector. In response the government has offered to meet for talks on 18 February. Yet, unions are also concerned that at the same time the government is talking about restricting the right to strike in the education sector. They want proper negotiations to begin in the first week of February and are calling on members to maintain pressure on the government through local actions and in particular during the “week for public services” organized by the government between 1 and 8 February.

(English: http://www.epsu.org/spip/cob.php3?id_mot=245; French: <http://www.spterritoriaux.cgt.fr/spip.php?article2144>)

Supermarket strikes puts pressure on negotiations

February 1, 2008

The three major union confederations organizing staff in large-scale retail (FO, CGT and CFDT) expressed their satisfaction with the strike actions as of 1 February. The unions claimed 80% observance in hypermarkets, 65% in supermarkets, 50% in logistics, and 20% in the smaller chains. The strike was organized to put pressure on management in view of negotiations in February on wages and working conditions. As union officials observe, the broad response on the unions' call may well reflect growing concerns over rising prices and falling household spending power, but also over employment perspectives and working conditions in retail.

(English: Via <http://www.laborstart.org/europe>,

to a.o. <http://www.reuters.com/article/rbssConsumerGoodsAndRetailNews/idUSL0127934820080201>;

French: http://fr.news.yahoo.com/afp/20080201/tfr-distribution-social-salaires-dimanch-b7b6525_3.html)

GERMANY

Union rejects employers' pay offer in local and central government

January 24, 2008

In December 2007, the bargaining committee of services union ver.di voted to submit an 8% pay claim in the negotiations with employers in local and central government, covering in total over 1.3 million employees. The union argues that the pay of public sector workers has been eroded by inflation, particularly higher prices for energy, housing and food and this has hit lower paid workers above all. The union is also claiming a minimum Euro 200 increase. Ver.di wants the pay agreement to run for 12 months. The last agreement ran 27 months, from October 2005 to December 2007.

Following a second round of pay negotiations, ver.di has rejected the government employers' latest offer. The employers claim the deal is the equivalent of a 5% increase on pay, but ver.di argues that in fact by the end of 2009 workers would be worse off than they are today. The employers want a two-year deal with increases of 2.5% from 1 February 2008, 1.0% from 1 October 2008 and 0.5% from 1 March 2009. A further 0.5% in each year would be performance-related and so not available to all workers. The union also criticizes the offer because employers are demanding an increase in working hours to 39.5 a week from 1 July 2008 and then to 40 hours a week from 1 January 2009. In that way, ver.di argues, the workers are effectively financing the deal.

(English: http://www.epsu.org/spip/cob.php3?id_mot=244; http://www.epsu.org/spip/cob.php3?id_mot=245;

German: www.verdi.de/nachrichten)

HUNGARY

Agreement at Hungarian Post averts planned strike

December 13, 2007

An agreement on wage developments for 2008 between the biggest state-owned company, Hungarian Post (Magyar Posta, MP), and the unions was finalised the day before strike action was due to take place. The government used the agreement reached at Hungarian Post to facilitate consensus among social partners at the National Interest Reconciliation Council on recommendations for annual wage increases; it also served as a benchmark for national-level negotiations.

On 13 December 2007, the 2008 wage agreement for postal workers was concluded as a result of the National Property Management Council, a public body exercising ownership rights over MP, accepting the company's business plan for 2008. The deal provided for an average pay rise of 7.5% in 2008. It will result in a higher percentage of pay for low-paid workers – a 10% pay rise for the two lowest earning groups – and a smaller (5%) rise for the highest earning group. The agreement was signed by seven out of nine trade unions representing workers at MP, including the two main unions, affiliated to MSZOSZ and MOSZ.

(English: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2008/01/articles/hu0801049i.htm>)

ITALY

Public sector unions demonstrate over 2006-2007 pay awards

January 25, 2008

Public service unions have been forced to mobilise their members once again in order to secure the pay increases they negotiated for their members for the years 2006-2007. The public sector pay agreements are re-negotiated every two years, although often with long delays. The various agreements on pay for 2006-2007 for public sector workers for were finally signed in May 2007 but have still not been implemented. A national mobilisation campaign of workers in local and regional government was called for 28 January, while health workers will demonstrate on 4 February.

(English: http://www.epsu.org/spip/cob.php3?id_mot=245;

Italian: <http://www.fpcgil.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/5381> and <http://www.fpcgil.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/5400>)

LITHUANIA

National demonstration over pay

November 24, 2007 / January 3, 2008

On November 24 the three Lithuanian union confederations ((Lithuanian Labour Federation, Trade Union Confederation Solidarumas, and Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation) together with non-governmental organisations organized a major demonstration over pay and against the increasing consumer prices. The demonstration called for a significant increase in the national minimum wage (NMW) and for the government to adopt a target for the NMW to be increased to the equivalent of 60% of national average wages. It also called on the parliament of Lithuania to pass the law on wages indexation. Some of the main mottos for the action were: „European prices – European wages“ „We do not want to beg, we want to have European wages“.

Obviously the union pressure has had its impact. Following a recommendation from the Labour Ministry, the government has implemented a 14.3% increase in the national minimum monthly wage from 1 January 2008, three months earlier than originally scheduled and six months earlier than normal. The new monthly rate is LTL 800 (Euro 232).

(English: http://www.epsu.org/spip/cob.php3?id_mot=244; www.idf.lt/index.php?cid=935; Watson Wyatt Data Services, *New Industrial Relations Europe*, 1/2008)

NETHERLANDS

Negotiations finalized concerning general banks agreement

December 4, 2007

In early December, a negotiation result was reached concerning the collective agreement for the general banks, for 2008 and the first quarter of 2009. This CLA covers those banks in the Netherlands, mostly small, that do not have a company CLA. The largest union involved, FNV Bondgenoten, advises the members to agree upon this result. The agreements

provides in structural wage increases of 3% per March 1, 2008, and 1% per March 2009, and a lump sum of 0.5% per September 1, 2008. Two studies will be undertaken: one concerning employability and one concerning the functioning of the BASYS job ranking system. Moreover, the CLA has been made much more accessible and readable.

(Dutch: http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/branches_bedrijven)

Dutch Railways accepts responsibility for wages of cleaners

December 11, 2007

Through a number of actions of cleaners, the FNV Bondgenoten has successfully put pressure on Dutch Railways (NS) to accept responsibility for wages and working conditions of the cleaners working (via subcontractors) for NS. After having received the 'Golden Turd' for 'cheapest employer', a NS Board member let the negotiators of the employers' association in cleaning know 'that the cleaners should have good wages and working conditions, as to improve their future'. Indirectly, NS is the largest employer of cleaners in the Netherlands.

(Dutch: <http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/nieuws/actueel/627591>)

Union members agree with agreement for nursing homes, mobile care

November 30, 2007

The members of the largest union involved, ABVAKABO FNV, as well as the constituency of the employers' negotiators, have agreed upon the basic agreement underlying a new, integrated collective agreement for nursing and residential homes and mobile care. The agreement will be in force from January 1, 2008, till March 1, 2010. The agreement provides pay increases of 3.25% from January 1, 2008, and a further 3.0% from March 1, 2009, which partly compensation for the lagging behind of wages in this sector in recent years. Jointly, nursing and residential homes and mobile care in the Netherlands employ about 360,000 workers.

(English: http://www.epsu.org/spip/cob.php3?id_mot=244; Dutch: <http://www.abvakabofnv.nl/cao/bericht>)

Basic agreement reached in ICT

January 23, 2008

The three unions affiliated with the major confederations, FNV Bondgenoten, CNV Dienstenbond and De Unie, and the employers' association 'ICT' have agreed upon a basic agreement in information, communication and office technology. The agreement will be in force from January 1, 2008, till January 1, 2010. The agreement provides pay increases of twice 3%. Remarkable is the fact that the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment is not willing to declare this collective agreement mandatory extended, as he judges the employers' association not fully representative.

(Dutch: www.ictoffice.nl/index.html; www.computable.nl/news)

POLAND

Demand for higher pay in public sector

January 8 / February 4, 2008

Federations covering all main sectors within the Solidarnosc confederation came together to demand higher pay for public sector workers. With food and energy price rises exceeding pay increases for many public sector workers, Solidarnosc chairman Janusz Sniadek emphasized the importance of solidarity to support the protests of individual groups of workers for higher pay. The representatives of nine branches signed a declaration claiming that that government and the local government are responsible for protecting the society against the threats which may make the access to the public service more difficult. Later in January, industrial unrest in the public sector growingly came to the surface. Miners, doctors and nurses, teachers, railway workers, judges and, most recently, customs officers have all threatened to hold or have already staged strikes.

(English: http://www.epsu.org/spip/cob.php3?id_mot=245; http://www.solidarnosc.org.pl/en/archives/2008/jan/jan_08.htm; via <http://www.laborstart.org/europe> to <http://www.wbj.pl/?command=article&id=39874>)

SPAIN

National demonstration over partial and early retirement

December 19, 2007

The three main public sector union federations - FSAP-CCOO, FSP-UGT and CSI-CSIF - organized a national demonstration on 19 December in Madrid to push the government to implement new rules on partial and early retirement. Over 7,000 braved the rain and cold weather to join the march. The unions argue that this is the best way for public services to renew their human resources while still retaining the skills and knowledge of experienced workers.

(English: http://www.epsu.org/spip/cob.php3?id_mot=244;

Spanish: <http://www.fsap.ccoo.es/webfsap/menu.do?Actualidad:Sindical:Actualidad:12959>)

Public sector unions secure Euro 1,000 minimum salary

January 25, 2008

The FSP-UGT and FSAP-CCOO public service federations have secured a minimum Euro 1,000-a-month salary for workers on pay band 5 in the general state administration. The lowest annual salary (14 monthly payments) will now be Euro 14,000, an increase of 13.8% and significantly higher than the 5.41% and 6.30% increases for workers on the higher scales 1, 2, 3 and 4.

(English: http://www.epsu.org/spip/cob.php3?id_mot=245;

Spanish: <http://www.fsap.ccoo.es/webfsap/menu.do?Actualidad:Sindical:Actualidad:16787>;

<http://www.fspugt.es/index.php/mod.noticias/mem.detalle/idnoticia.2880/idimagen.913/relcategoria.7>)

UNITED KINGDOM

Unions start co-ordinated public-sector pay campaign

December 18, 2007 / January 28, 2008

The 26 public service unions in the TUC confederation have joint forces to oppose the government's demands to keep public sector pay below 2% in the coming year. The TUC has produced a report, Six million pay cuts, to counter some of the government's claims about public sector pay increases fuelling inflation and warning of the anger generated in 2007 when health service pay awards were staged rather than paid in full in April.

On December 18, 2007, the TUC and its 26 member unions launched the Speak Up for Public Services Campaign. General secretary Dave Prentis of the major UNISON union stated: "A 2% pay limit, for each of the next three years, will mean a pay cut for the UK's six million public-sector workers. It represents a real cut in living standards and could cause long-term damage to industrial relations, recruitment, retention and morale." "The government must remember what a demoralised, under-resourced public sector it inherited from the Tories," Mr Prentis warned. "We cannot go back to those days." On January 23, eight TUC leaders met Alistair Darling, finance minister (chancellor) of the Labour government. The TUC team pressed the Chancellor that public service negotiators need greater flexibility in their negotiations with unions, including scope to address long term problems in pay structures and low pay.

(English: http://www.epsu.org/spip/cob.php3?id_mot=244; http://www.unison.org.uk/news/news_view.asp?did=3915;

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/publicsector/tuc-14102-f0.cfm>; <http://www.tuc.org.uk/publicsector/tuc-14222-f0.cfm>)

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