

This information bulletin featuring Europe was derived from six national versions, all of which are available on our website, Syndex.eu. Some of the articles and interviews have been translated into several languages. If you wish to subscribe, please contact us at the following email address: f.warneck@syndex.eu

Its aim is to be a source of reference for trades union organisations and employee representatives in Europe

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As a pioneer in producing reports for representatives of personnel groups in France since 1971, Syndex chose, by establishing itself in a number of other countries in the European Union, to become a European player. It now has a presence in Poland, Romania, Spain, the United Kingdom and Belgium, and has forged partnerships in Germany and Italy.

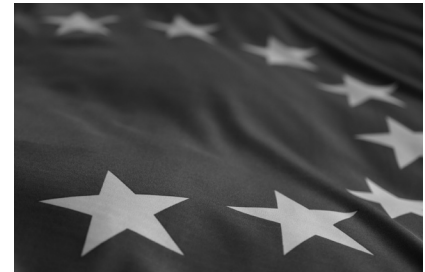
High quality social dialogue is a product of the broadest possible development of the right of workers to be informed and to consult. Independent economic reports are an indispensable tool in ensuring this right is exercised, in that they not only provide access to the information needed to understand a company's strategic challenges but also decode it.

Our project aims, in partnership with both the European and other trades union organisations, to build capacity for economic and social analysis and to put it at the service of workers and their representatives. Syndex has been working for several years now with the European Trades Union Confederation, IndustriAll, EPSU, UNI Europa and their affiliates. Our aim here is to be able to adopt a multinational approach with our reports intended for national or European works councils, taking account of the specific nature of social dialogue in each country and based on detailed knowledge of local situations (social policies, investment, current restructuring activity, etc.).

Syndex's 350 experts cover all fields within the various sectors and possess competences in the fields of economics and finance, strategic analysis, health in the workplace, social science and sustainable development. In the last few years we have enhanced our capabilities, both in the analysis of policy on CSR (corporate social responsibility) and in ensuring that collective competences in the management of restructuring are taken into account.

As a cooperative society, Syndex is a player in the social and solidarity economy that is owned entirely by its employees and expends all its energy and resources on supporting and assisting its trades union partners.

Jean-François Poupard, Managing Director



The European Union - a sustainable power?

Almost with one voice, political commentators are predicting victory for retreat - and national interests - in the May 2014 European elections. However, the rush to deny responsibility for the failures of national policies does seem to be receding somewhat. Currently in fashion, therefore, is the REFIT (Regulatory Fitness and Performance Programme), i.e. the ultra-simplification of EU legislation which, with a few salient exceptions, calls into question health and safety protection in the workplace. The last few years, since the start of the financial crisis, have also been characterised by a lack of political vision, with policies of patching up (banking sector) and bloodletting (austerity for the countries in difficulty) making the reason for being together less credible. Also, a lack of knowledge on the part of the economic players: representatives from the small and medium-sized enterprises have been loudly denouncing this deregulation which, in the name of free competition and higher employment, is destabilising labour-intensive sectors in particular.

The trades union organisations, whose militant bases have increasingly been calling into question the European project in its present form, have made some concrete proposals for a Europe that is not only social but also productive - and competitive on the world stage. This is the choice for a Europe of solidarity, both economic and social. The difficulty derives both from the absence of any political initiative on the part of European institutions and national governments with

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regard to social issues and the absence of a European social dialogue, which is at a standstill. Unlike in many of the countries that go to make up the EU, there is no obligation to negotiate at a European level. The recent sectorial agreements between the social partners were frozen by European governments and institutions preferring a more laissez-faire approach.

The following are some examples of proposals showing how the trades unions have got back into the centre of the debate: EPSU (the European Federation of Public Service Unions) collected almost 2 million signatures in a (quasi-legislative) citizens' initiative demanding that water remain a public good; the UNI Europa federation, which has published its manifesto "Quality Jobs for Quality Services", is gambling on knowledge and regulation providing the best services in retailing and distribution, banking, postal services and new technologies. IndustriALL's manifesto "Put Industry Back to Work" calls on the entire political and

economic world to set out a more modern, innovation-oriented European industrial policy that makes environmental targets a motor for economic growth. And then, of course, there's the European Trades Union Confederation's investment plan, inspired by the Confederation of German Trades Unions, which called it a Marshall plan, for a stimulation programme to the tune of 2% of EU GDP, a European fiscal policy that would make companies pay rather than workers and which would involve the creation of sustainable financial products, reforming the European Investment Bank and public services into attractive networks for investors.

The trades union candidates in the European elections are numerous and will, we hope, form a united group through a shared ambition: to reconcile social and environmental progress with the modernisation of the European production apparatus, including via qualifications: Edouard Martin, the French CFDT trades unionist who became known at the time of

the social conflict at ArcelorMittal, Judith Kirton-Darling, former Secretary of the European Trades Union Confederation, for the United Kingdom; Evelyn Regner, former head of the Austrian trades union, the OEGB, who is likely to be re-elected; Claude Rolin, Secretary General of the Christian trades union in Belgium, has left office for the elections; Sergio Cofferratti, former Secretary General of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL); Daniel Vandoel, former Secretary of Belgium's FGTB.

Without a doubt, the entry into politics of the trades unionists means that grass roots knowledge will ensure there is a concrete debate on Europe as a sustainable economic power. But it is also imperative, despite the European Parliament's not having the right to initiate legislation, that the future European Commission plays to the full its role as policy driver. This is what's at stake in the European elections in May, and it will determine the colour of the European executive.



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INTERVIEW : Judith Kirton-Darling



Judith Kirton-Darling is standing as MEP candidate for the north-east region in England, after spending 15 years working for the European labour and trade union movement and most recently as a Confederal Secretary with the ETUC. At the ETUC Judith covered the areas of energy, industrial policy and the environment, and all three are key issues for the Europe. In addition to her extensive knowledge of the region, her constituents will also benefit from her personal energy and drive.

If elected on 22nd May, Judith's immediate priorities will be to tackle youth unemployment; climate and energy; and reconnecting European politicians to their constituents.

Tackling youth unemployment

The North-East of England has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the UK and qualifies for the Youth Guarantee, along with four other regions. However, the current UK government has not applied for the £81 million, for which the region is eligible, due to the threat of UKIP. According to Judith, the Conservative government cannot be seen to take this money from Europe and then to criticise the social aspect of the UK's membership. For this she is highly critical of the UK government for pursuing "political ideology over people's future"

As her top priority, Judith wants to mobilise the youth across the north-east to lobby Westminster and then the Commission to make sure the region benefits from this offer to help regenerate and re-launch the local economy.

Climate and Energy

This autumn, the Commission will publish its Climate and Energy priorities to 2030.

NE leading the way on renewables, new technologies, CCS etc., and Judith thinks the publication will provide certainty and drive investment. At the present time no one knows for sure the likely future policies and therefore inertia.

The package from the Commission has huge implications for the NE economy, and incredible opportunities but there is a danger that if applied in the wrong way, this could spell bad news for the region.

Reconnecting citizens and European politicians

MEPs are too distant from their constituents and Judith wants to bridge this gap. Despite a rebuff from the Conservative MEP candidate, Judith wants to be radical and get out to each of the 500 Council wards in the region, at least once, before

the next election. I ask her about the sheer effort this would entail, to which she replies, "it is just a matter of committing the time and I'm determined to do this. European politicians need to do this". Judith has calculated that she and her election team have knocked on over 100,000 doors since the start of the year and Judith personally spends an average of 5 hours a day visiting residents and explaining why it is important to vote in the European elections and how the decisions within the European institutions influence their lives. Responding to the criticism from her Conservative rival, Judith remarks, "it is the responsibility of every MEP to reach out".

Naturally the political make-up of the European institutions influences the importance given to social dialogue. Judith thinks that over the past few years, the Commission has stepped away from promoting social dialogue. She describes Business Europe as "the cat that got the cream", pointing out the current political landscape and weak support for bi-partite or tri-partite dialogue and suggests that employers at the European level only act if they are pressured to do so." She adds that, "things will not improve without the support for social dialogue from our politicians – the good employers will continue to see the benefits of social dialogue and negotiation, while the vast majority will do nothing". Judith is optimistic that if the political make-up of the European Parliament shifts at the election, this will alter the attitude of the Commission and then the Troika. This change of politics, Judith hopes, will create an approach that sees social dialogue as a key component of democracy and for creating a stronger economy.

Her position on the role of the European institutions in relation to industrial and services policies is very clear and optimistic. "Putting in place the right legal framework is essential and these areas

of policy can provide good opportunities for the UK, but we must compete on added-value not cost. We will never beat the likes of China and India on costs, but we can do on quality and this is where the UK government must focus."

UNI Europa, IndustriAll have both published policies in this area, and the European Parliamentary Labour Party has signed up to UNI Europa's proposals. Judith thinks that the manufacturing and service sectors are vital to re-launch the British and European economies.

Judith wants to see more emphasis on sectoral action plans, involving trade unions, employers and the institutions of government and says, "we see this approach in France and something similar in Germany, so there is no reason why we cannot take this approach in the UK". She points out that this approach may require a review of the State Aid and Competition rules but this should not be a barrier to reform.

Asked about the provision of state welfare Judith is adamant that to accept the argument that welfare provision hinders competition is to accept the logic of neo-liberalism. "If you look at the research by the WTO, UNCTAD or the IMF, five of the Top 10 globally competitive economies are within the European Union. And these five all have very good welfare provision". Judith argues that the infrastructure and social cohesion provided by a decent welfare system drives productivity, aspiration and competitiveness. In the UK, she says, workers work very long hours and are poorly managed – "what we need is free, but fair trade".

Finally, when asked if European politicians consider workers enough, Judith provides an inspiring response – "Before 22nd May, workers are not considered enough by politicians, but after 22nd May they will be!"