

# Luc Van den Brande – Speech GA EZA – Bucharest – 24.11.2018

## 1. Words of gratitude and workers' accents

Thank you for the confidence: to all of you, participants from so many countries.

I was running all over 33 years as a candidate in elections but this time I wasn't running the same way. I was asked to commit my self at the service of EZA, a very important European network, more than an organisation but also a movement of committed people, acting for the better of the workers' position in our continent.

I'm happy to come home again in a network where worker's questions are core: I tried already this morning to give you an insight on my inspiration, belief and conviction as a christian- democrat. As a christian, the Evangile is for me a permanent source of inspiration for action, with a personalist vision: " all different, all equal", all unique in an inclusive society. Like we are saying it about religion: " Religion without acts is nil", it's the same for a societal engagement. I tried to make it tangeable in my political life at different levels, as MP, federal minister of Labour and Employment, as Minister- president of Flanders. Always also connected with the challenges, expectations, fears of the workers. As a democrat we have to deal with an open pluralist society where the "Gesinnungsethik" and "Verantwortingsethik" are challeging each other. My permanent involvement and connection and cooperation with the Christian Workers Movement, at local, regional, national and European level lead to decision making, safeguarding the rights and perspectives of the workers. But also leading to concrete projects with ACW, ACV, CM. Just to give a few examples: an action plan to combat fiscal fraude, improving capacity building and social dialogue in the frame of the Europa Fund for Central and Eastern Europe I launched, introducing the mutuality concept, development of new instruments for job creation, making social dialogue instrumental in Flanders, organising common training programmes e.o. We were, for sure, not always achieving but my compass remained always directed towards our common social engagement.

This is wat I want to continue in the frame of EZA, thankful to all of you for the achievements over the past years. I want to express especially my warm gratitude towards Bartho Pronk as a pillar of EZA over the years. His experience will be still precious in the upcoming period.

## 2. Challenges for Europe

We are experiencing extraordinary times: how to explain what the EU can tangibly do to improve citizens' life, how to better understand that the EU affects our daily lifes, how to do they feel that they are fully part of the Unions' project ?

It all has to see with the quality of democratic life at every level, whereas citizens feel a lack of control and social insecurity and leads to a loss of confidence and it thus questions the legitimacy of the EU.

A new focus has to be put on effective cooperation among the EU institutions, the member states, regions and local communities together with the actors in our society: this is the concept of MLG and MLA, I'm working on since many years, based on the two dimensions of subsidiarity, the vertical and horizontal one ; participation and cooperation are core for the future, based on a " disempowered dialogue between equal partners" ( Habermas) and this makes social dialogue at new really menaingful.

Our Union, as a community of purpose, destiny, responsibility for peace, freedom, security, Rule of Law, Democracy and Human Rights, has to be a human centric one, based on common values for a common space of welfare and wellbeing.

Growing complexity and interconnection in a globalised world between and inside member states with multiple identities is also part of growing populisme, extremism and egocentrism: education in a multicultural context and education to inetrcultural dialogue has to be our answer to respond – to the challenges of globalisation and complexity and for a life in dialogue in respect for everyone

The next year already will bring huge differences for Europe and within Europe:

The Juncker Commission will come to an end. A Commission that delivered well on social Europe matters.

It is anything but self-evident that the social deliveries of the Juncker Commission will be repeated or enforced by the next European Commission. To highlight the most important: the Posting of Workers' directive, the European Pillar of Social rights, the European Skills Agenda, the European Labour Authority, the Disability Act, the Fairness Package. There's no doubt that social Europe has delivered with this Commission.

The 2019 EU-elections announce themselves more difficult and create fear for a more neoliberal focus. But at the same time the delivered Triple A work of Juncker and Commissioner Thyssen offers opportunities for further implementation on social matters: the first birthday of the European Pillar of Social Rights a few days ago, showed room and willingness for enforcement by a wide range of policy makers and stakeholders.

The Brexit consequences risks to bring the EU in a modus of even more but at the same time it offers opportunities to progress in the diverse opt-outs that the UK obstructed the last decades.

Rising populism translated in anti-European and anti-democratic governances in Europe and the wider world, obstruct improving the European democratic project. We need to be very vigilant for this developments and germinate a spirit of hope that arises from citizens and social movements building up positive joint projects.

The next EU Multi—annual Financial Framework as well as the restructuring of the Social Funds and the Social Fund+ will emphasize on efficiency, impact and modernisation. That shouldn't frighten us but, on the contrary, make us even more alert to prepare ourselves and be ready for the future.

### **3. Challenges for EZA**

I would like to use this challenges to make the bridge for the next years of EZA presidency.

The EZA network that has invested huge efforts the last years to enlarge its network resulting in 73 member organisations that are now part of our network. This needs to be consolidated in quality, organisationally as well as financially. We will work out together with you a dynamic strategy for the coming period.

Today a time for deepening has come.

A cross-sectoral and capacity building approach will be vital and part of our substantive project.

We will focus on an improvement of EZA's interinstitutional and societal impact and delivery. The strength of quality will be at EZA's core: quality of seminar results, quality of overall analysis, quality of study- work within EZA seminars and within the EZA secretariat in Königswinter and in the Brussels office: all impact and outcome oriented, with a clear distinction between means/instruments and goals/objectives, the one being instrumental for the other.

This impact and outcome oriented approach will enforce the EZA work in EU policies and politics. Which brings me by a second main pillar for this forthcoming EZA presidency period: deepening of EZA's policy, political and interinstitutional networks will be one of my first tasks and priorities. Being convinced of the need for a broad vision on solidarity, we will go beyond an institutional approach and we will not limit ourselves to a vertical exchange amongst insiders but with a spirit outreaching to the citizens and to (social) and deliberative movements and open our window to them.

We have to be present and take position when events occur and be on the scene.

We have to connect with the local, the most tangible and nearest circle of belonging, where people are socially connected, culturally active and confronted the first with the daily challenges.

We have to focus on the young generation as they are more Euro- critical than Eurosceptic: like the report "Generation What" is showing: we have to give them a perspective; especially in the Southern Europe, to be fully part of the future in their own country.

We have to use new communication methods for the outreach of our activities, as dialogue is largely embedded in our digital society; citizens are no longer passive recipients but also active producers of information, taking in account the plurality of social realities.

We have to detect the opportunities for clustering our activities with other organisations as the Council of Europe, the international Labour Organisation, with other training centers like the European Training Foundation and the ILO training Center of Torino.

Not least: for EZA's financial structure, in the wake of the new Multi—annual Financial Framework, we will further build a vision that is future and security based.

In one word: consolidating and continuing the exceptional work fulfilled in the past, improve it where possible and complement and widen it where needed. In other words, to make EZA really relevant.

#### **4. A joint project for a strong social Europe**

Let me stress this: tackling these challenges will be a joint work: together with co-president Piergiorgio Sciacqua, Norbert Schnedl as Treasurer, Bartho Pronk as honorary president, Secretary General Sigrid Schraml and the EZA secretariat, but above all with you, the EZA member organisations from different European regions, East and West, South and North.

Having had already talks with them and also with some founding fathers of EZA, I'm convinced that EZA – as a centre of expertise and excellence - will remain an essential and active partner towards a strong social agenda, decent work for all and continuous capacity building, based on the human capital of all workers and their organisations, constituent for the social capital of our society.

And, more than ever: Europe shall be also social or shall not be.