Europe is in its fifth year of crisis with no signs of any improvement. Rising and persistent unemployment across Europe in the wake of the banking and sovereign debt crises have been further aggravated by the choice of a therapy based on austerity. Over recent months the policies have been challenged by public demonstrations and have led to extreme elections results. Leading figures from the EU and international agencies have expressed deep concern over the direction the European economies have taken. Publications from the IMF have revised estimates of the negative impact of cuts in public spending and European Commission President Barroso has spoken of austerity policies reaching ‘their limits’. So far, the only medicine on offer is a continuation of austerity alongside measures aimed at reducing wages and security of those in employment. This conference will bring together researchers and practitioners to discuss the effects of past policies, the changes taking place in labour markets and the alternatives to current policies.

**Draft agenda**

9.15-9.30 Welcome

9.30-11.00 Session 1: Failing austerity and beyond

Austerity policies have not led to economic recovery. Nor have they solved the debt crisis in Europe. They have led rather to widening divergences between countries with deep depression in the so-called periphery. The need for alternatives is clear and is receiving recognition across much of the policy community.

Key questions to be addressed:
- Can we break out from current policies?
- What has been done, and what can be done, by international agencies?
- Is there a new way forward with the ILO and/or IMF?
- Is there really a way to combine growth with austerity?
- What can be learnt from experiences of a ‘periphery’ country?

Speakers:
- Maria Helena Andre (Director of ACTRAV, Bureau of Workers’ Action, ILO, Geneva, former Minister of Labour, Portugal)
- Nikos Christodoulakis (Professor, Athens University of Economics and Business, former Minister for Economy and Finance, Greece)
- Cinzia Alcidi (Head of Economic Policy Unit, Centre for European Policy Studies)

11.00-11.30 Coffee break
Labour-market deregulation is often viewed as a panacea for the catastrophic employment situation in Europe. However, the experiences of EU member states that have gone particularly far in dismantling labour market protections and promoting flexibility show that such policies need not translate into employment gains and improved job quality.

Key questions to be addressed:
- Does labour market deregulation help to create jobs?
- What have been the experiences after past labour market reforms in Germany and what are the prospects after the German elections?
- How has employment developed in countries with growing numbers of precarious jobs, such as Poland?
- What has been the effect on the quality of jobs?

Speakers:
- Klaus Dörre (Professor, Friedrich Schiller University, Jena, author of books and articles on the effects of the Hartz Reforms in Germany, recently Bewährungsproben für die Unterschicht?: Soziale Folgen aktivierender Arbeitsmarktpolitik)
- Adam Mrozowicki (University of Wrocław, author of books and articles on precarious work and trade unions in Poland and Eastern Europe)
- Agnieszka Piasna (ETUI)

13.00-14.00 Buffet lunch

14.00-15.30 Session 3: Collective bargaining in the crisis and the real way forward

The austerity policies currently pursued by European policymakers and national governments had dramatic implications in the field of collective bargaining – both in terms of falling real wages and in terms of decentralizing existing wage-setting mechanism. The objective of this session is to review current developments in national collective bargaining systems and to discuss alternative approaches to stop the austerity-induced downward wage competition.

Key questions to be addressed:
- How have collective bargaining outcomes and processes changed through the economic crisis, particularly in countries of the European periphery?
- To what extent can the European coordination of collective bargaining prevent downward wage competition?
- What are the effects of setting minimum wages by statute or by collective bargaining and what does this mean for the development of a European minimum wage policy?

Speakers:
- Magdalena Bernaciak and Torsten Müller (ETUI, leading projects comparing changes in collective bargaining across Europe)
- Vera Glassner (Johannes Kepler University of Linz, Austria, author of articles on transnational collective bargaining)
- Andrea Garnero (Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium, joint author of Minimum wages in Europe: does the diversity of systems lead to a diversity of outcomes? ETUI Report 128)

15.30-16.00 Coffee break
16.00-17.20 Session 4: The alternatives

High-level panel discussion addressing the following questions:

- What are the alternatives on the table?
- Are they politically feasible and affordable?
- Do we need an investment and recovery plan?
- Do we need to reform labour markets?
- Do we need to resolve problems in banking and in state debt?
- How do we get a major change in policy direction across Europe?

A journalist-style panel discussion with invited speakers (max 5 minute statements, reactions to each other and ample time for debate with the audience)

Speakers:
- Bernadette Ségol (General Secretary ETUC)
- Mehrdad Payandeh (DGB, Head of Department for Economic, Financial and Fiscal Policy)
- Guillaume Duval (editor in chief Alternatives économiques, author of Made in Germany: Le modèle allemand au-delà des mythes)
- Gerhard Huemer (European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises)

Moderator:
Willy De Backer (ETUI)

17.20-17.30 Closing remarks

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